

03 Learning in Joy



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Celebrating the joy of being alive, a calf executes a series of sudden exuberant leaps, its limbs trembling with life force. A sudden sunburst after a sharp shower lights up a washed and scented earth. The blue flash of a kingfisher's wing; the sharp tut tut of a startled squirrel darting away with fluffed tail upraised; sal flowers floating down like a soft blessing; the sweet scent of far away jasmine carried on the cool night breeze; morning dew, grey on the green grass; the laughter of children out in the rain. Nature and Man participating in the cycle of life – feeling and being in joy.

Bright, happy faces and animated chatter fill the Patha Bhavana campus as children move from one tree-shaded class to another, the rays of the sun weaving changing patterns. Surrounded by the open beauty of the sky, the different seasons revolving before the eyes in all the magnificence of their colour, Nature is the greatest of all teachers.

The children come restless and eager with their senses fully alert. They do not ask: 'What shall I draw?' They just start making lines and images on the paper. At an early age, the child is guided mainly by impressions, he recognizes and is curious. This arouses in him a sense of wonder. In his pictures, objects are simply put together and their relative sizes are determined by the strength of impressions these objects have on his mind. A flower may be larger than a tree or a house. The ears, nose and hair are not immediately important, and so are often omitted. The known reality can become more important than the seen reality. Thus, while the four wheels of a cart/ car may be drawn, in actuality, only two or three are seen. To correct a child at this point is to destroy the

truth of his impression. Both viewpoints are equally valid and must be respected.

At times, a child may make the same image over and over again. This could be due to too much praise, or a sense of comfort in repeating a familiar image. (Many established artists also do this !) When this happens, a teacher can gently guide the child by suggestions, but not by impositions.

From placing random objects together, the child can be led slowly towards the idea of relationships between objects, their placement and relative sizes. In a child's drawing there may be a house, a fish, a tree, a bird, a figure. The child is encouraged to think about where each can be found i.e. fish in water, bird in sky or tree. "How will this figure enter the door of the house?" This question quickly resolves the problem of the size of the door and the house in relation to the figure, making the learning of proportion very simple, natural and logical.

Each child is unique, his observation and responses will not be the same as another child's. His ability to handle the pencil or colours will differ. Comparisons and judgments harm the natural rhythm of a child's work. He may start to feel inferior and unsure of himself and may start to copy others. Fear of not being good enough may destroy the child's spontaneous expression and take away the joy from art activities. A capable teacher of art is one who can enter the child's mind with sympathy and understanding. One who can see with the child's eyes, and help the child to see.

As a child grows older, he feels a need to capture his impressions more accurately and precisely, he wants



to depict objects as he observes them to be. Now he needs some technical knowledge, which should be given to him in a planned manner, keeping in mind his individual needs and aptitudes so that his innate creative impulse is not lost. This caring for the individual needs is essential if an art teacher wants to keep the sense of joy alive in a child.

There is joy in variety and children must be encouraged to use all the different materials available; chalk, pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolours and collage. Each medium has its own qualities and differences. A pencil line is thin, precise and sharp; oil pastel is thick and flowing; watercolour is more fluid, expressing mass and form rather than outline. Filling in of pencil drawing by colouring is a limiting exercise. Mixing of mediums helps in developing a better understanding of each medium – its possibilities and limitations. Use of collage develops a deeper sense of form. New ways of expression can make the work more interesting and attractive.

Changing the size, shape and orientation [horizontal/vertical] of paper can change the whole way of seeing. The use of scale/ ruler is discouraged, as the aim is not precise architectural drawing but an expression of the gist of the object drawn. The non-reliance on mechanical instruments increases the steadiness of the hand and develops a sharper observation prac-

tice. Later, when the child moves into senior classes, any mechanical instrument may be used without losing the freedom and spontaneous practice of earlier years.

When the children are actively involved in selecting the medium in which they want to work, they have a sense of freedom from stress and invariably find something they are good at, and thus are happy about the outcome. The same is also true about the subject matter.

I feel working together is a very important part of class activities. Ideas are shared and planned, leading to mutual agreements or disagreements: the whole group being responsible for the work. The group could be horizontal or vertical. All start learning from each other; sharing, respecting the other's viewpoints, building up confidence collectively. These works could be small, two pages of an art copy or large, ten full imperial sheets put together to form one work. The child progresses from the former to the latter, building up confidence and learning to work in mutual cooperation, resolving differences. This activity generates a lot of joy and enthusiasm, energy, vitality and excitement in class.

Joy and excitement are essential in class activities. Joy can only be if the child is unafraid and confi-



Collective work, Class IV-X, watercolour and gel pen on paper 120" x 44", Patha Bhavanam Shanthiniketan



Poulami Ghosh, Class V, Water Colour, 10" x 8",
Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan

dent. A child can be afraid due to too much criticism and directed action; fear of not doing the right thing; of failure. It is important to have a positive attitude and appreciate the work of each and every student. This is easy when each student's work is displayed and something positive is said about it. The child is encouraged to complete the work using the medium he has brought to class and also to talk about his work. These methods/ devices help in removing the 'threat' feeling and the child starts to relax and enjoy his work. He starts to realize that Art is not so difficult and that by trying, most things are possible.

It is my firm belief that art activities in schools should involve no gains or stress in terms of marks.

There should be no competition. The whole concept of judging one work 'best' out of many can only be a subjective exercise. It does no good - only harm.

When there is no stress of marks or competition, a profound sense of freedom is experienced. A feeling of dignity regarding each individual's ability and understanding of differences of ability helps to develop a realization that each one has something to contribute. This fosters confidence, and an attitude of sharing, learning, cooperation, exchange and therefore free self-expression and joy.

Learning being part of life's natural growth was always the objective in Santiniketan. So, education must be for life and not merely for knowledge and livelihood. The way the surroundings are kept, the way of dressing, of conducting oneself all help to develop a sense of beauty and aesthetics leading to a life of harmony with all existence.



Amrita Chattopadhyay, Class X, Oil Pastel, 22" x 15",
Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan

I have taken help from the following articles,

1. Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School'
2. Rabindranath Tagore, 'A Poet's School'
3. Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Educational Mission'

And the following from Kshitis Roy [Ed.], The Visva Bharati Quarterly, Education Number. 1947, Santiniketan,

1. Binodebehari Mukherji, 'Teaching of Art to Children'
2. Nandalal Bose, 'A Primer for Art Education'
3. Jnanendranath Chattopadhyay, 'Rabindranath and his Asrama School'

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