

Retaining Effective Processes from Community Classes

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During the last two years of school closures, many of us teachers have tried to maintain one or the other form of contact with our students, mainly through small group classes in the community. The two significant learnings that emerged from this were, firstly, children could express themselves through art in the form of a variety of activities that I devised for them, and this helped them to continue learning something new. Secondly, we realised that we must continue to do something like this in normal school days also and incorporate local resources into our teaching so that children can work with ease.

I talked to the children about folk songs and asked them to find out if their parents knew songs that are sung at weddings and other festivals. I asked them to learn these from their parents and sing a few lines in the group. This activity was very helpful in making the children comfortable and happy. We sang and listened to each other's songs. I sang a Marathi and a Bundelkhandi song. When the children started singing, there was a flurry of Marwari and local songs. But we could not write them down. We plan to do this activity properly when school resumes.

Art involves a highly diverse range of human activities and abilities which is why it helped the children cope with the anxiety and effects of the pandemic. Children engaged in art that generated positive energy. Parents also understood that art is a part of our teaching and education.

We mainly worked on writing songs, composing tunes and singing them. A couple of awareness songs were composed by the children. We used them in the Corona *Pheri*. With this, the children's creativity got a new direction, something that was different from the normal school days. In the beginning, there was a lot of talk about how to compose the tune for the song. We heard a lot of songs. Everyone in the group shared their experiences of listening to the songs at home with

greater attention and what they had understood. The children of classes V-VIII composed a few songs. We worked on composing music, writing songs, making instruments using locally available tools, etc. The children just needed a few clues and a push. As a teacher, I learnt that this kind of work, which enhances the creativity of children, should be continued even in normal times. In upper primary classes, children should be taught a brief theory of music. There is a need to work further on the new ideas of teaching music using local resources.

Very little work has been done on *taal* (beats) and *sur* (melody) in the classroom in the past. We need to work more on these. Listening to folk music and light music on a good sound system would help. During this time, we provided children with more viewing and listening opportunities. This has enhanced their experience and the learning is reflected in their presentations as well.

Working with musical instruments has a different kind of role in a music class. Children feel comfortable with musical instruments and their proficiencies also increase. The experience of working in the community has taught us that we can also do a creative job of making instruments. We could see how well children can present the songs they have heard in a new way with the instruments that they have improvised. We need to do this in the classroom in a well-planned manner and monitor how the children react after listening to music for a reasonable period of time. Do all children have the ability to create rhythm? Do the children we have worked with do it differently from those that we have not worked with? What different patterns do we see when a new child works with us? Do the children, after spending a certain amount of time with the music, understand musical patterns in nature and use these in their presentations? These questions need to be answered systematically while working with children. This should also be documented to help others who want to work further in this area. What follows is our strategy for working with children in the coming days.

Next steps

We did some very effective activities in the community school which will help children feel comfortable when they go back to school. One of these was writing about their experiences, which the children did with a lot of passion. These were also discussed at length in the class, for example, a child shared his experience regarding cleanliness and the other children also added their views.

I see this possibility in music too. We can ask children to write about their experiences after listening to music. This will give us an insight into how they feel while listening to a certain kind of music. What children think about music at a particular age may be documented as well, which can help us improve the teaching-learning process. Writing about an activity and expressing one's thoughts freely is also the objective of language learning, so both can go together. Now the question is what should be the duration of such an activity? If a child independently narrates their experiences in a music class, then how should it be seen in relation to other academic subjects, such as language?

Use of local resources

All of us know that using local language and context helps children understand a subject better. There are several different methods that can be used to teach by picking examples from our surroundings. In the case of music, we must include local songs in class and write these down to have a good compilation of folk songs. There can also be discussions around which folk songs are sung when, what the various types of instruments used in the songs are and how songs are classified in classical music, etc. We can also think of doing this as part of project work. This activity can be done with children of classes V – VII. In the higher classes, this is likely to be done in a more integrated manner with other subjects, for example, in social studies, exploring an ancient local building, temple, stepwell, the culture of a nomadic community, etc.

Understanding sound in music, the internal and external structure of instruments and methods of their sound production etc., can be explored. For example, empty canisters, tin cans, cardboard, rubber, plastic bottles, metal and stone pieces etc., can be given to the children to improvise with, so that they do not get bored and will participate

actively and innovatively.

There can be many other categories of resources:

Category 1: Resources available in the school, such as arts and crafts and music teachers.

Category 2: Resources available outside the school, such as local artists, potters, farmers, bamboo workers or any other person in the community who has knowledge about arts; unused items in the house.

Category 3: Resources in the natural environment, such as the sound of a river, trees, leaves, etc., and finding ways to use these in music.

Integration with academic subjects

Where there is a possibility to integrate music with other subjects, the possibility should be explored with fellow teachers. For example, in making a musical instrument from waste or unused items, a session with a science teacher can be planned to understand the reasons behind sound production. What should be the structure of the instrument? Can all sounds be used in music? A music teacher can also do a lot of work with children about what kind of sound is useful for music and this can be planned according to the level of the class.

Currently, we are working with classes I - III for one-and-a-half hours along with the other subject teachers. Teachers are making use of the opportunity of better integration of different subjects, which is also helping me to understand their work.

On-the-ground activities

I start the session with meditation. We play soft *tanpura* music on the mobile phone, listen to it for a couple of minutes and the children follow my instructions on how to breathe while listening to the music. After that, we start with the songs. Children act and sing, and teachers also join in. Children sing in large and small groups.

Then, the teacher asks the children to pick any five words from a song and writes these on a small card. Now it is time for children to participate. She divides them into two groups and showing them the card, asks them to read out the words. Children try to read, while also helping each other. The second group observes and when it is their turn, they do not make the mistakes that the first group made in pronouncing the words. Later, the children are asked about the problems they faced in recognising the words and the strategy adopted by the other group. In another activity, a character

from the song is picked and the children were given homework based on that. So, music and language are being taught easily. I also observe children's performances, the tune of their songs, acting skills, self-confidence, solo and duet singing. The various aspects of language learning, such as listening, memory, singing with emotion and writing could also be covered. We can also use this activity while teaching English rhymes.

There are children who are quiet in class and do not actively participate in activities. We can provide them with more opportunities through music to increase their participation and help them express themselves in ways that they are comfortable with. Music and art can provide more opportunities for joyful learning. Teachers must observe and assess how our efforts are helping a shy child, or whether we need to change our strategies.

Time vs impact

All these activities require time. How should we

plan our time? How should the individual adjust to the school or school group so that research in music can be undertaken? There is a lot of potential for thinking and working in new ways, one of which is to teach music with a lot of practice from the very beginning. This would require us to deliberate on how we view music teaching in school and how it should be implemented.

'Melody, the beauty of musical sounds, are all important means of moral and intellectual development' (*The Depths of the Child's Heart*, Vasily Sukhomlinsky). Teaching music does not mean making children musical artistes. Just as academic subjects lead to the mental development of children, similarly, music education also leads to self-education. Teaching music will also help in making children better human beings and keeping the world beautiful, which is also a primary aim of education. The teaching of music must be ensured in all schools, in a systematic manner, even if not as a core subject.



Endnotes

- i Similar to the *Prabhat Pheri* (literally, morning round), which is a procession of people singing religious hymns, the *Corona Pheri* is meant to spread awareness messages on COVID-19 within a locality.



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