



Vyjayanthi Shankar
Archana Dwivedi

World over education policies almost always recognise the value of co-scholastic areas, such as arts and sports, in providing quality education to students. But what constitutes good education and a quality learning environment? One view focuses on the marks achieved in the core subjects and other immediately measurable outcomes. The other view is the 'ability' of the school to create a good educational experience.

Quality education frameworks put forward by international organisations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Asian Development Bank, usually refer to a more holistic definition of quality education encompassing scholastic, co-scholastic and affective (values and attitudes) outcomes for students. India's National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasises art, health, physical education and peace education apart from cognitive learning outcomes (for eg. math, science, language). It draws attention to the factors or parameters that contribute to schooling outcomes (e.g. infrastructure, libraries and other media, school organisation and culture) and also emphasises the importance of learning experiences beyond outcomes. So what constitutes good education?

Wipro and Educational Initiatives (EI) jointly conceptualised the Quality Education Study (QES) which has been planned as a multi-year study to expand the meaning of 'quality' in education to include educational outcomes beyond student performance in subjects; and study the attributes of different learning environments (schools) which are considered as good.

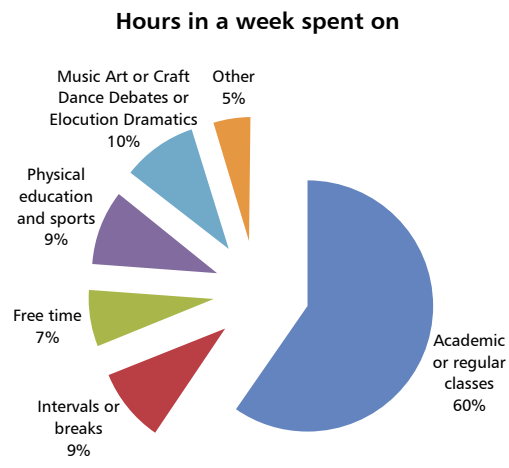
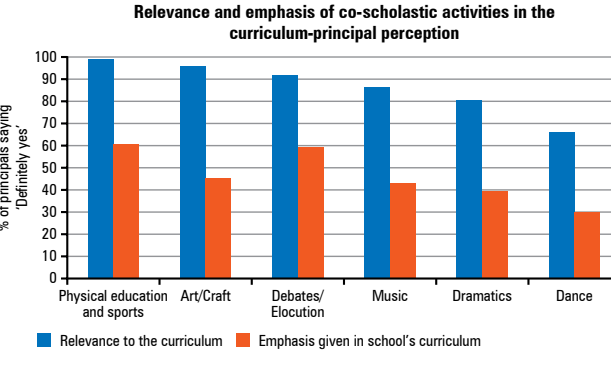
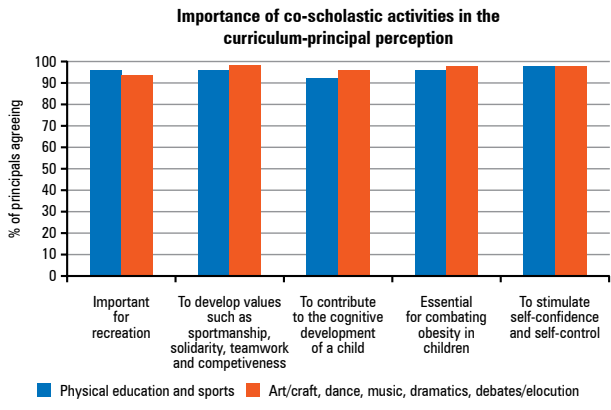
The first year study was carried out in a few 'top' English medium schools in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. The grading was done on the basis of a public opinion survey. Six schools - not restricted to these five metro cities - recommended by experts as schools providing different learning environments were also included in the study. Overall the study covered 23,000 students, 790 teachers and 54 principals from 89 schools. Students of classes 4, 6 and 8 were assessed through a test which consisted of objective, multiple-choice questions in English, Mathematics, Environmental Science and Social Studies. The questions tested conceptual understanding and acquisition of higher order skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and application. Background questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews with principals helped in collecting information on various factors related to learning environments, values and attitudes of students.

Here are some interesting findings from the study:

Principals' Perception on Co-scholastic Skills and Curriculum

More than 70% of principals said that co-scholastic areas were very relevant to curriculum and for building students' self-confidence, self-control, sportsmanship, solidarity, teamwork, competitiveness, health, etc. However, less than half among them mentioned that their school placed major emphasis on curriculum for these areas, indicating that what was being said was not often practiced. This was also corroborated by the

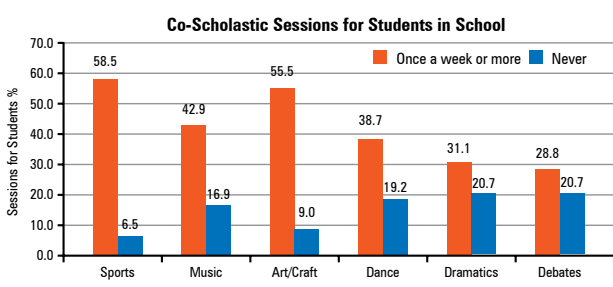
fact that nearly 30% of students who answered the student questionnaire said that there were hardly any sports sessions; similar was the case for music (45%), art (30%), dance (50%) and drama 57%) and debates (60%).



School Time and Frequency of Co-Scholastic Activity in School

Schools on an average in a week spent 9% of their

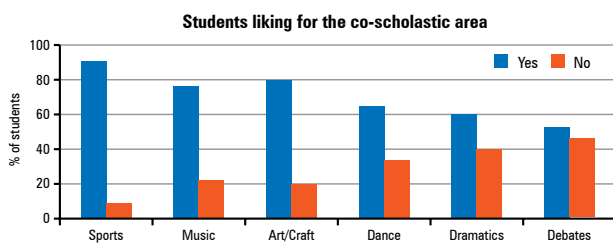
time on physical education/sports, 10% collectively on co-scholastic activities like music/art/dance/ elocution/dramatics, and 60% on learning academic subjects. While 40-60% of students reported having sessions in school for sports, art/craft and music once a week or more, 16-20% of students said that they never got a chance to practice dramatics, dance, debate or music; 6.5% never practiced art/craft and 9.0% never practiced sports.



School Resources for Co-Scholastic Activities

The responses of principals on the quality of service in terms of equipment, ground/room, instructor/ coach and competitions for co-scholastic activities showed that:

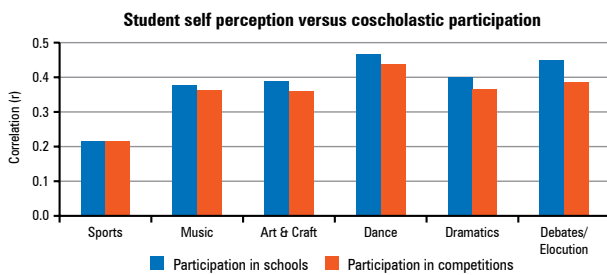
- Almost all the schools tested rated themselves as good or excellent (*average scale score of 4 or above out of 5*) in the quality of the services (instrument/ material, room/auditorium, and availability of instructor) in the co-scholastic areas.
- Dance, sport, debates and art had slightly higher facilities than dramatics or music.
- Students were also participating slightly more in inter-school competitions than intra-school competitions.



Student's Liking, Perception about their Abilities and Participation

Less than 20% of students said that they did not like co-scholastic activities such as sports, art and music, while dance, dramatics and debates were disliked by 35-47% of students.

Data was also collected to check whether the self-concept students have about co-scholastic abilities translates into their participation in the same.

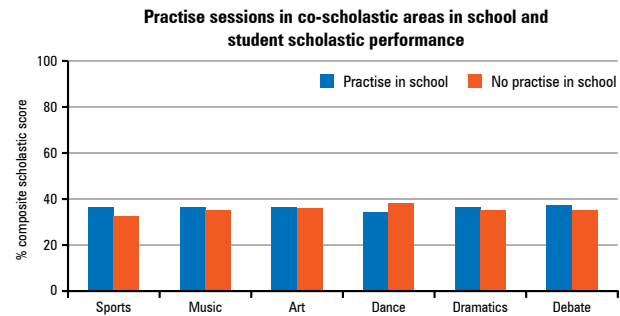
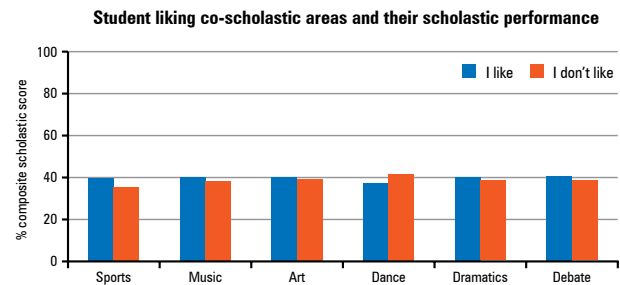


While students' perception of their own co-scholastic abilities and their participation was moderately correlated in dance, debates, dramatics, art and music, there was comparatively low correlation between students' perception about their ability in sports and their actual participation in sports ($r = 0.2$).

Relationship between Co-Scholastic and Scholastic Performance

The study did not reveal any major significant differences in scholastic performance of students liking co-scholastic areas and those who did not, although students who liked sports did better in their subject tests too than those who said they did not like sports [difference statistically significant, but the magnitude meaningfully small (Cohen's d)]. Similarly, there were no significant differences observed in scholastic performance of students who said that they practiced co-scholastic areas in schools and those who did not.

While majority of schools and classrooms studied contributed to the above scenario, a few atypical schools were found giving equal importance



to co-scholastic skills. In one school, students reported that they spent equal time learning arts, pottery, music etc., in an environment more close to nature where they also fed birds, went for nature walk, climbed trees which helped them to relax and experience things. The students of another school enjoyed coming to school most of the times. They prefer alternative professions. They also liked extra-curricular classes which were 2-3 sessions a week. Both the schools cited here were among the best performers in scholastic areas in the study.

Discussion: Research points out that students who proceed through schools that have a higher focus on arts have better scholastic performance and also do well in acquisition of social values and attitudes (Catteral, UCLA). Involvement in arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skills. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork and can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing, forging social bonds and community cohesion (Rand Corporation, 2005).



The QES study did not find conclusive relationships between co-scholastic curriculum and the scholastic performance of students. The reasons could be that our schools are doing so little in the co-scholastic area - less than 10% of total class time is devoted to equipping our children in all of arts, music, dance, dramatics and debates - that one cannot expect any relationship with scholastic performance. It also brings to question whether all education must be justified for their usefulness in transfer, taking place to doing math or other subjects well. Art education should be considered for its own merit and should be taught for art sake and not be justified on the basis of any transfer.

Arts is an important part of any culture, and our children, if they do not acquire ability in some art form or the other, cannot be considered as ones who have had all-rounded and quality education. Most principals interviewed said that education quality was about providing holistic education to students and various co-scholastic areas were critical for this. This, however, did not translate into emphasis or actual transactions in the school curriculum.

The focus group discussions with students and teachers revealed that most of the younger kids aspire to be in arts or sports, while the older ones wanted to be in business or technical jobs like engineers. Schools also refer to arts or sports when they refer to co-curricular activity (CCA). No teacher, student, principal said that they lacked CCA but there were no examples of anyone being given sufficient exposure in school to excel in these areas. The pressures for a utilitarian education over the years and the need for doing well economically in life has conditioned our society to provide for education that is either devoid of arts or has so little of it, that it as well be considered nonexistent.

Society should take cognisance of the fact that we are depriving our children from acquiring unique ways of expression that can bring beauty, sweetness and enjoyment to their lives. Cultures which have ignored arts have nurtured an impoverished society and we are well on the way to becoming one if we do not do something about this in our schools.

References:

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4. Rand Corporation, 2005, "A Portrait in Visual Arts, Meeting the Challenges of a New Era".

VYJAYANTHI SANKAR currently leads the Strategic Relations and Business Development for the Large Scale Assessment Division (LSA) of Educational Initiatives (EI). Having had experience in the field of education for 24+ years, she specialises in the various issues of psychometrics, including test construction in multiple languages and advance methods of analysis such as the modern item response theory (IRT), which is used for test construction and analysis of large scale test data. She can be reached at vs@ei-india.com

ARCHANA DWIVEDI is a research fellow in the large scale assessment division of EI. She has been with EI the past 5 years and has experience in project management, test construction and data analysis. She can be reached at darchana@ei-india.com