FICA WORKSHOP | ART CATALYSTS

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Every year, thousands of visual arts graduates and post-graduates take their degrees from their colleges and universities to enter the job market. Many of them opt for jobs as art and craft teachers in schools, usually as a means to sustain their own art practice. There is a noticeable disconnect between the artistic aspirations of these young, energetic and creative people and what they end up doing as art teachers in schools.

Despite the recent importance given to art and craft in central and state board curricula, this disconnect remains unaddressed. IGCSE and IB schools fare a little better, as do individual schools here and there which manage to retain a wider vision of ‘curriculum’. However, the almost universal role of the art teacher in India is a marginal one in the larger context. Her services become necessary for painting backdrops, sets and costumes for school annual days, putting up something on the noticeboard for every festival, decorating the stage or the façade of the school for functions and so on. Although these artists’ craft skills and visual sense are utilized in a limited and somewhat disrespectful way, their creativity and other artistic sensibilities atrophy and eventually perish in this kind of atmosphere. A valuable resource, frittered away because we don’t know how to use it.

 This FICA workshop is specifically targeted at art educators working as art and craft teachers in schools as well as in more informal settings such as child welfare NGOs, adult education centres, etc. The emphasis is on harnessing and channelling the remarkable creativity of this very special group of educators, for whom creating something wonderful out of nothing is a routine procedure. In an unusual kind of experiment, the teachers will be tasked with planning and executing creative interventions in the specific contexts that they work in. School teachers, for example, will pick up a maths or a science text at the middle school level and see how best they can develop a participatory performance or an interactive installation around the core concepts of a lesson. In the case of a teacher working in a women’s shelter, she might look for a way to create a performance around individual women’s dream career aspirations.

A programme for August 15th in any of these contexts can go beyond patriotic songs and fancy dress competitions as freedom fighters to delve into personal understandings of Independence and the idea of a nation. World Environment Day can go beyond painting competitions to ‘Save the Tiger’ and become an immersive exercise documenting the micro-level biodiversity on the school grounds – not tigers and king cobras but moss and fungus, grasshoppers, spider-webs and ant movement.

These experiments will encourage art and craft teachers to think on their feet, constantly out of the box, constantly interact with subject teachers and ultimately, to integrate their work with the larger objectives of the school. Such exercises utilize not only their skills and knowledge of processes and materials but also that completely unrecognized resource, their enormous fund of creativity.