

Fostering Values and Inner Peace in Prospective Teachers through Nature Drawing

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 lays a lot of emphasis on the inclusion of art and its integration in the school curriculum. While art is considered a 'not so important subject' in the schools. Either there are no art teachers or there are very few. Most of the faculty and the administrators do not have much art experience, which gives rise to misconceptions and undermines the true significance of art. It is important to bring about a change in the teachers' attitude towards it as part of their training in the teacher preparation programme. To achieve this, I designed and conducted a nature drawing workshop, a creative pedagogy for non-art-specialised prospective teachers to develop an understanding of the true purpose of art and the significance of nature appreciation. For this, 35 non-art-specialised prospective teachers were drawn from a teacher training institute as participants, where most of them had limited

art experience in schools till 8th grade. The workshop consisted of four phases: developing understanding of art, demonstration of window frame technique, exploring and drawing the selected location, and concluding with reflection and experiential writing based on their experience they went through during and after the nature drawing process. The written experiences, or the reflections, were collected as data and thematically analysed. Nature drawings were also collected and analysed as part of the data. Analysis revealed development of appreciation of nature and art; and feelings towards art elements like line, form, colour, texture and tones. The participants' written responses and drawings also reflected originality, freedom of expression and joy; reflective thinking and introspection; and mindfulness and a calming experience. The drawings reflected keen observation of the details in nature; hard work, patience and perseverance; and originality in shading, selection of location, and creation of symbolic forms. It was also found that participants were able to draw unhesitatingly and fearlessly and made independent decisions regarding all aspects of drawing, driven by their own feelings and breaking the conventions. They were also able to sense the feeling of going beyond themselves and identifying with nature. It can be concluded that the creative pedagogy in the workshop helped in fostering human values, peace and the development of

feelings and relation with nature, thereby fulfilling the sustainable developmental goals.

Keywords: Human values, art appreciation, observation, identification with nature, reflection and introspection, creative pedagogy.

Fostering Values and Inner Peace in Prospective Teachers through Nature Drawing

Why are art and nature important? Borah, N. (2020, p. 23), citing Rabindranath Tagore, states that art and nature are true teachers. He further adds that nature provides a better environment to earn knowledge and makes moral and spiritual development possible. In the context of contributions of nature Keniger et al. (2013) in his review study suggests that there are a lot of studies which highlight the benefits of nature engagement. Benefits such as psychological, cognitive and physiological are more studied than the social, spiritual and tangible benefits which need to be researched more. Pretty (2004) also emphasized that different kind of engagements with nature including virtual involvement benefits mental and physical health. Art helps with personality development (Meena & Monika 2023, p.14), and engagement with nature and artistic expression have shown benefits for stress reduction (Schenk & Stuckey, 2018, p.9). Art-based learning experiences are essential components of the overall development of students, allowing them to express imagination, emotional involvement, and aesthetic awareness through personal and professional settings. Arts should be at the roots of education (Prasad,1998) but sadly taken as a fringe subject in the school curriculum, and it is limited to impressing the administrators during the school inspection (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). Most teachers in schools are non-artists, often harboring numerous misconceptions and viewing art as a peripheral subject. Similarly, administrators majorly belong to core subjects' specialization, especially in Indian context. Their

sensitivity towards art and art education remains often underdeveloped. This could potentially hinder teachers' ability to integrate art into the teaching of their respective subjects, thereby limiting the creative aspect of the teaching-learning experience.

However, creative pedagogy as an approach can integrate skills with a focus on rationality, context, and an ethic of care (Rutten, 2024, p.4). Creative pedagogical practices have potential in exploring ideas, emphasizing autonomy and agency, joyfulness (Cremin & Chappell, 2019), collaboration and creativity (Halverson & Sawyer, 2022, p.2). Hence, Creative pedagogy can be beneficial for non-art-specialized student teachers (Harris, 1960) as they will be in various positions—such as teachers, administrators, and policy makers, that will allow them to leverage opportunities where arts can be integrated into the education. Still, there is a limited body of literature on non-art-specialized student teachers' experiences participating in art-based workshops, primarily those emphasizing nature-inspired art. This study fills that gap in part by evaluating the influences of a five-day art workshop on prospective teachers, recognizing the critical need for creative pedagogy that encourages an appreciation for art and nature through workshops' art sessions. This would facilitate their growth while also cultivating an environment in their future schools that values both art and nature. Towards this, consequently, I developed a workshop focused on 'nature drawing'.

Objectives

To design a workshop to develop an understanding of 'significance and appreciation of art and nature' in non-art-specialized prospective teachers. It also presents an analysis of their experiences and nature drawings.

Method

The study is purely qualitative in nature and adopts case study as a method. For the study, a workshop on nature drawing was designed for non-art-specialized prospective teachers belonging to teacher education (2-year bachelor's in education) programme in a central university of India. Research suggests that nature drawing can improve observation skills and connection to nature (Kim & Lee, 2018). Additionally, it can reduce stress and improve mood in college students (Sullivan & Larson, 2020). The workshop was open for all, where 35 non-art-specialized prospective teachers with art experience only until 8th grade or less had joined the session. The workshop took place (in-person) in the campus of the Department of Education which has ample open green space adorned with trees, shrubs, bushes and lawns. It continued for 5 weeks with each week having one session lasting two

hours. The study included four phases. In the beginning, it was observed that participants exhibited reluctance to attend the workshop because of their fear of art. To alleviate the participants' apprehension and insecurity around sketching, and also to make them focus on the process rather than the product, it was shared in the beginning that anonymity would be maintained throughout both tasks (in phases 3 and 4) of the study. This made them comfortable and motivated. Participants were instructed to make their submission anonymous (regarding their written experiences about the workshop, or their nature drawings) to remove any apprehension of judgment or participants's performance anxiety and encourage free expression. The participants' nature drawings were photographed and were collected (without their names on them) with their consent for use in this research as data for analysis. Data was collected then common themes and patterns were identified. Thematic Qualitative Analysis was employed.

Phases of the Workshop: The workshop consists of four phases, figure 1 describes all the phases with specific focus on each stage.

| Phase | Focus area |
|--|---|
| 1. Understanding Art | The first phase focuses on understanding art through discussions and slide shows, emphasizing originality and fearless expression. |
| 2. Demonstrating Window Frame Technique | The second phase introduces the window frame technique, allowing participants to draw a 4"x3" rectangle and use it to select a location on campus. |
| 3. Exploring and Drawing the Selected Location | The third phase involves exploring the campus area, selecting an inspired spot, and using the window frame. |
| 4. Reflection and experiential Writing | The fourth phase encourages participants to write about their experiences, promoting honesty and maintaining anonymity to alleviate fear of judgment. |

Fig. 1- Phases and focus areas in the workshop

Further figure 2 describes each phase with the given instructions of each objective.

PHASES OF THE WORKSHOP

ORIENTATION ON UNDERSTANDING ART

Participants engage in a discussion exploring the significance of art, with a focus on originality and fearless self-expression

PHASE
1

DEMONSTRATION – WINDOW FRAME TECHNIQUE

A demonstration introduces the 'window frame' method and different pencil shades, encouraging participants to experiment and explore their own techniques

PHASE
2

EXPLORING AND DRAWING

Participants explore the campus to find an inspiring location, using the window frame tool to focus and capture their chosen visual in a sketch

PHASE
3

REFLECTION AND EXPERIENTIAL WRITING

After completing their drawings, participants write anonymous reflections on their creative process and experiences, fostering honest and open expression

PHASE
4

Fig 2. Phases of the workshop

Analysis and Discussion

In this section participants' artwork and their experiences are analyzed and discussed. It is done in two sections:

Part 1: Results, Analysis, and Discussion of Participants' Experiences.

Part 2: Results, Analysis, And Discussion of Participants' Drawings.

PART-1

This section of the paper presents major findings and analysis of participants' experiences. Themes emerged from the responses are further discussed below.

1.1 Appreciation of Nature and Sensitivity Towards Art Elements

Nature and art are great teachers. Participants appreciated the process and nature's details, and art elements such as contrast, line, form, colour and texture. The process also made them feel the principals of art such as movement, rhythm, symmetry and so on. They also explored pencil renderings. Participants got the opportunity to delve into the process and freely discover, observe and enjoy the details in nature which never caught their attention, as stated by participant 1 (P1 in fig. 3). He added that he never noticed the tree trunk, especially its rough layer; it had always been invisible to him. He also observed the contrast in bushes and shrubs' unpredictable flexibility and man-made buildings' rigidity. The participants were also able to go beyond the observation of trees and foliage sharing observation of different small lives in the form of ants having their own world in the soil and around the plants. The whole process made them develop an appreciation for artists and the art process, as reflected by participant 2 (P2 in fig. 3). The findings support Bensussen (2020) citing Brew, Fava, and Kantrowitz (2012) that drawing promotes concentration, and curiosity, thereby helping to see more clearly, and minutely, collecting nuances that might otherwise go overlooked.

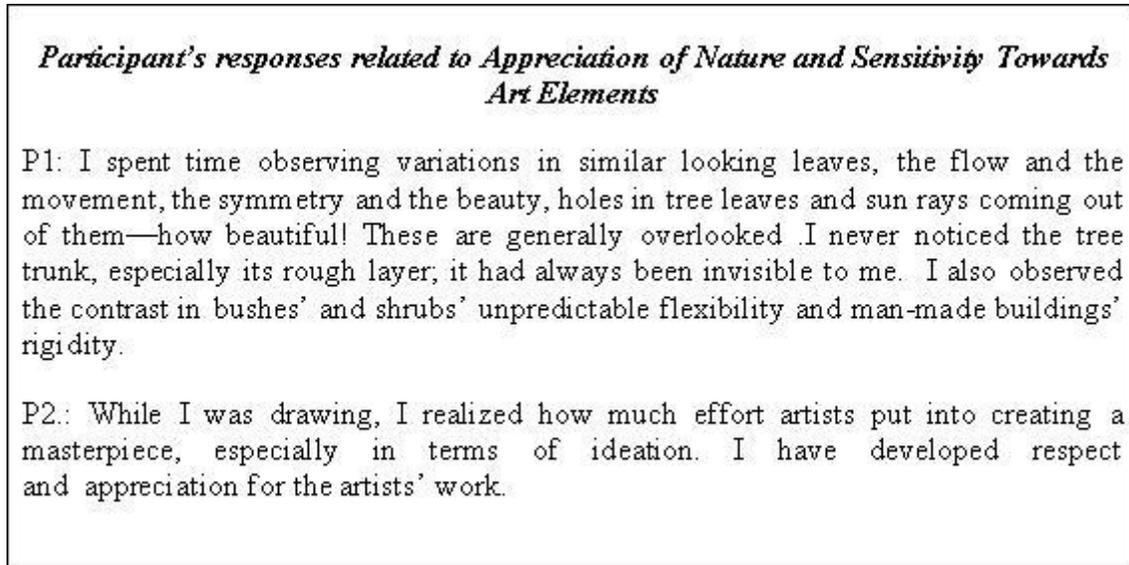


Fig. 3 - Participant's responses related to Appreciation of Nature and Sensitivity Towards Art Elements

1.2 Originality, Freedom of Expression and Joy

The participants felt the session was unique as it was their first experience to do live direct nature drawing, unlike copying nature' and with no pressure of product, says P3 (P3,11 and 23 in fig. 4). The process also made the participants freely create their own symbols for the forms of nature mentioned by P11. The creation of symbols to express oneself reflects that the individual has delved within and communed with self, thought independently, and brought out the subjective experience in the form of the symbol. The participants also developed self-confidence, courage and a stand-alone spirit, and appreciated their own work for the value of originality and hard work. Their responses reveal that they felt a sense of satisfaction, realized their potential, and valued their honest effort, as also indicated in the response of P23.

Paintner (2007) emphasizes, "The focus in the expressive arts is on the process of artmaking rather than the art product itself. In this way, artmaking becomes accessible to anyone, because the creative process is central to the journey of discovery, rather than what the final product will look like".

Participant's responses related to Originality, Freedom of Expression and Joy

P3: Freedom from copying pictures and outlining, (which I previously did) instead drawing from live observation of nature was overwhelming. I followed my own instincts and desires, it was a life-long experience.

P11: I found it easier to sketch shrubs by scribbling the alphabet V, W, M shapes for the leaves. If I looked closer, I could see these as scribbles, but as I walked away, they became leaves and the drawing improved, which I enjoyed'.

P23: I had put in all my efforts, although it may not be so beautiful from others' perspective, but I liked my work because this was my first drawing which I made myself without copying.

Fig. 4- Participant's responses related to Originality, Freedom of Expression and Joy

1.3 Promoting Reflective Thinking and Introspection

The process of drawing nature promoted reflective thinking as evident in the excerpts of P14 (P14,18, and 20 in fig.5). The creative process gave a platform to develop perseverance; this is observable in the excerpt by P18, where one continued drawing, keeping hope even though it didn't seem that work would turn out well. It also shows that the participant kept hope and persevered even when during the process one felt it was not coming out well. The participants while writing about their experiences went into introspection of the process, found evident by P18 and P20. It is analyzed that the process involved 'reflection and introspection', 'seeing through', examining it in the social context; and the importance of looking without preconceptions. Bajaj (2015) reviewing Edward Brantmeier's (2011) writes peace education includes envisioning nonviolent solutions, encouraging reflection and fostering transformative actions. Further, Graham, M. A. (2007) believes that observational drawing can go beyond self-expression and foster thoughtful thinking about society, fostering transformative learning. The above research correlate with the findings extracted from participants' reflections.

Participant's responses related to Promoting Reflective Thinking and Introspection

P14: My initial confidence was low, hastily started and I realized the tree didn't fit, so started a new. I doubted its completion, but I calmed down and sped up. I am glad that I didn't lose hope and maintained confidence. I continued and on completion I liked my work.

P18: During the process I naturally got into talking about life while drawing, and listening to music with my friend, it was great. We were sometimes quiet and absorbed. Later, we shared with each other our observations of beautiful details.

P20: In daily life, many things go unnoticed, like a tree trunk's rough texture was always invisible to me. Our eyes deceive us. I realized there is a need to look at the truth keenly, at times our senses are blurred by societal conventions to see the truth. We even segregate colours by faith. Religious conflict forbids colour use.

Fig. 5 - Participant's responses related to Promoting Reflective Thinking and Introspection

1.4 Mindfulness and Calming Experience

It is analyzed that participants also realized a solution to their stress in being one with nature through art as expressed in excerpts P31 and P38. It is important to note that the participants' experience of being one with nature extends beyond 'self' or 'I', allowing them to identify with something external, such as nature, even if it's only for a short period. The practice of constant identification can help promote a sense of empathy (Keiler, 1961, p. 24). This may further extend to developing empathy in an individual towards their surroundings, encompassing both living and non-living entities. Participants said it was a unique experience, and they were lost during the creation as reflected in the excerpt of P17 and P22. It also shows that they sensed transcendence as they experienced the joy of going beyond the limits of the self (even though for the short while). Participants' experiences included calmness, contentment, joy, liberation, oneness with the environment, and forgetfulness supporting the idea of Williams & Harvey (2001) on art as liberation.

Nature has inherent principles of art including rhythm and harmony which makes us feel calm within. It is analyzed that the participants were feeling the same as expressed in the excerpt of P 22 (P31,17, and 22 in fig.6). Bohra (2020) citing Tagore says that nature impacts the human soul by bringing its inherent vastness

seen outside in the vastness of the soul within. The experiences reflect that initially the participants felt confused and fearful, but gradually, in the process, they started feeling the outer nature's impact within. They were able to enjoy the chirping of birds, jumping squirrels, the aroma of nature, and the feel of a vast sky. Nature benefits not only our eyes but also our senses of smell, touch, air, and taste (Franco, Shanahan, & Fuller, 2017). It was a holistic experience involving all the senses that transformed fear into joy for participants (though one cannot claim the complete transformation). Paintner (2007) states that the arts celebrate mystery and meaning making as spiritual disciplines. Self-awareness and spiritual growth can result from watching the art-making process, reveal inner emotions like resistance, insight, joy, and despair.

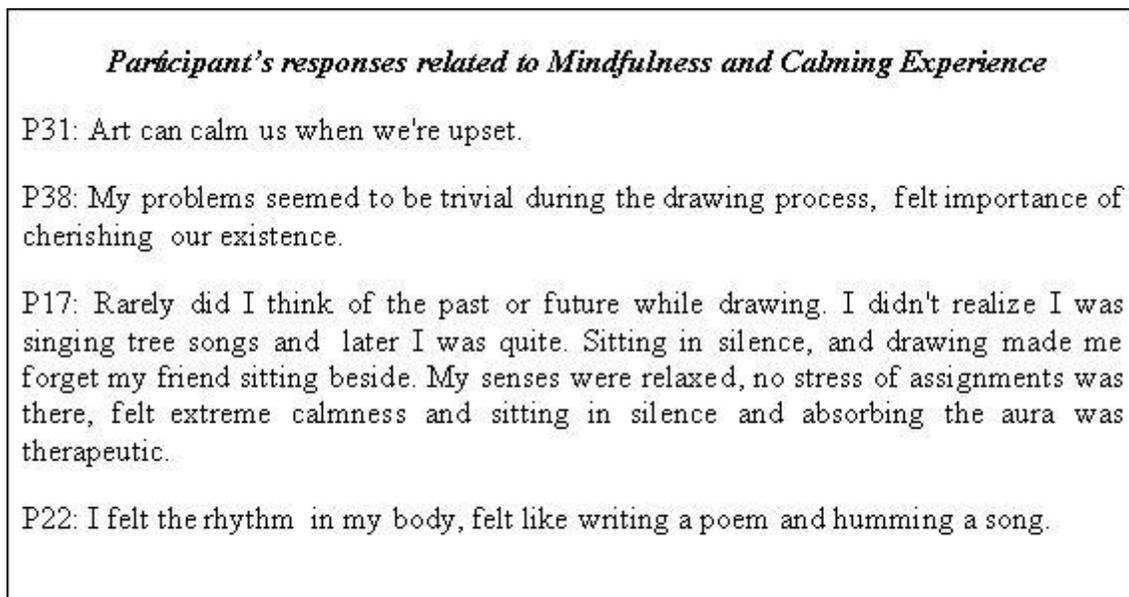


Fig. 6 - Participant's responses related to Mindfulness and Calming Experience

PART-2

Few of the samples of participants' drawings:

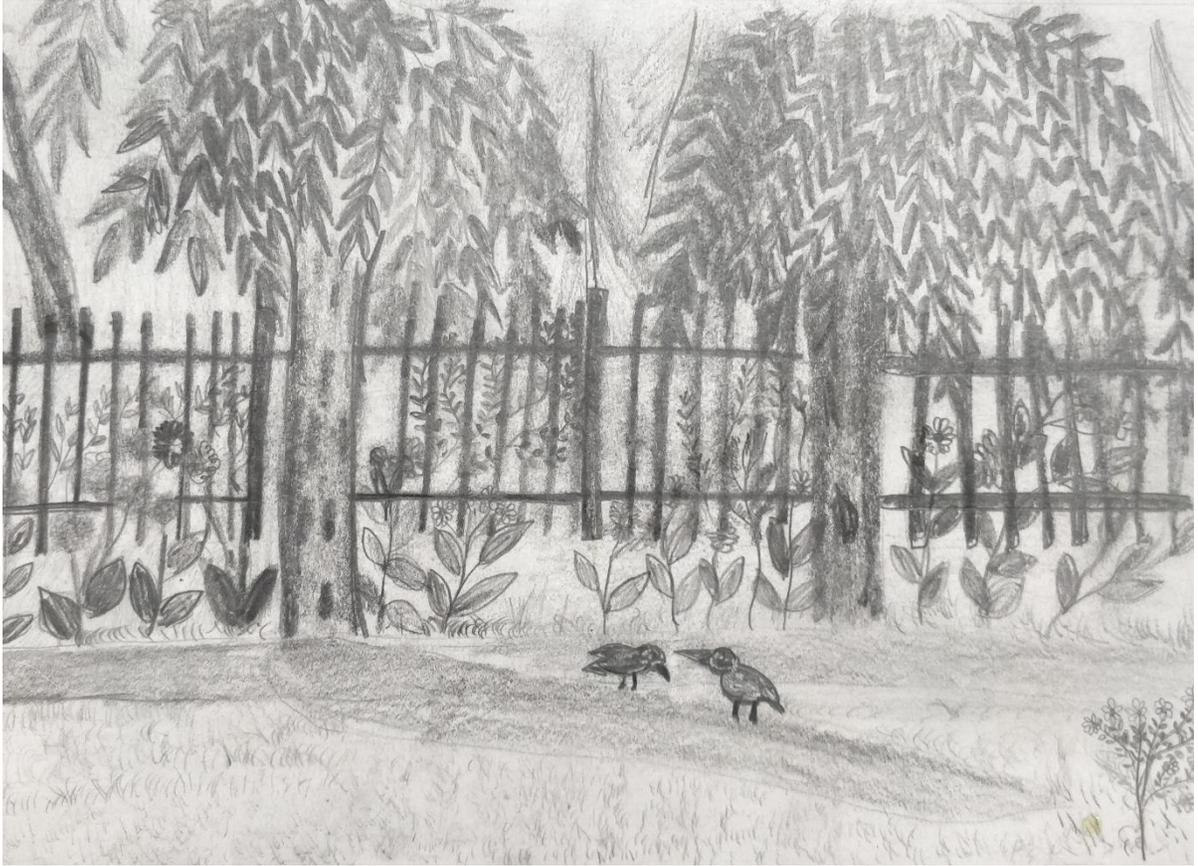


Figure A - Dialogue



Figure B - Nature's Voice

All the figures reflect keen observation, patience in bringing out the details on paper, hard work and perseverance. It reflects sensitivity towards size, shape, form, tones and pattern reflecting harmony and rhythm. Originality in composition, and style of shading is also observed. Titles also reflect calmness and nature connectedness. It is observed that the analysis of the experiences and the drawings converge.

Conclusion

Using creative pedagogy in the art workshop, participants developed an appreciation for art and nature. The process of capturing nature through direct observation, developed feelings, sensitivity and awareness towards art elements and principles. It encouraged subjective feeling-based experiences, fostering reflective thoughts and

introspections. This led me to create an all-senses methodology transforming fear of creating artwork to joy to an extent. Participants' artwork reflected deep observation, originality, courage to create, independent decision-making based on feelings, and self-created symbols. The process fostered self-realization, i.e., knowing about the inner self, the desires, feelings, and potentials within; patience to observe; and empathy through sensitively identifying with the outside nature. It gave them the opportunity to connect with the inner core, transcend the self, feel the stillness of mind and oneness of self and nature, and further experience the inner joy and calmness. I stress that it is for this reason, art and nature augment value towards education for life. However, I believe that this workshop is not solely sufficient to promote such values in a limited period. Lasting transformation requires ongoing engagement and practice and allowing participants to continue exploring by providing unique platforms such as this workshop. In this case, I find that the workshop fostered human values, inner peace and appreciation of art and nature in non-art-specialized prospective teachers' there by contributing to quality education and peace, the sustainable developmental goals. I further conclude that art and nature are the true teachers and have the potential to humanise education.

Implications

As non-art-specialized teachers make up most of the teaching staff, so their experience with art is significant. We can incorporate this workshop into the curriculum of teacher education programs, especially for non-art-specialized prospective teachers (and for in-service teachers), to remove misconceptions and fear of art. This can further help self-development, contribute to art-integrated teaching thereby enriching teaching learning experience, and create an art-appreciative environment in their respective schools after their training.

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Bio-note

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