

Arts Education as a Strategy for Eradicating Violent Behavior among University Students: A Novel Proposition

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Abstract

Globally we are living in difficult times when peace and human security have become big challenges that could have negative implications if not addressed properly. University students –the future leaders are also the victims of such threats and some of them involve themselves in violence by exerting violent behaviors. Therefore, it is the prime responsibility of universities to address these issues properly. The universities may take several measures to eliminate violence and promote socially accepted behaviors among students. However, amongst others, art education seems a novel and feasible strategy for eradicating violent behavior from amongst students. This article reviews different studies and art projects, their effects and benefits to articulate implications in tertiary education.

Keywords: arts education; violent behavior; tertiary education; creativity; psychological harm; progressive mindset; self-expression.

1. Introduction

Generally, in Pakistan universities are considered to be the hubs of research for spurring out knowledge for building communities and developing economies of the country. Universities are the places where students –the future leaders learn the art of leading their nation(s) to right direction with futuristic vision and progressive approach. They come to seek knowledge and acquire skills of living and letting others live peacefully in the society. They are provided with opportunities of developing progressive mindset, enlightened thoughts and cherished character. They are desired to groom their personalities, and develop mental faculties to become intellectuals of society. They are

also expected to assume a nucleus role for bringing about social change to survive with dignity in the community of nations.

However, university students come of different geo-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and form a multicultural community. They have different beliefs and experiences of and about life and thereof, interact with each other accordingly. They learn etiquettes, social skills and moral values from one another. But all students cannot be assumed behaving appreciably alike and a tendency towards virtuous works; rather some would be coming with undesired social behaviors and/ or such tendencies to flourish in free environment of universities. These behaviors are antagonistic to social norms and values of the society; and therefore, are considered detrimental to societal subsistence and image building in contemporary societies. These are termed as negative social behaviors and include aggression creating violence and nuisance among students and their groups, destruction (of property, self and others), threatening and bullying which not only effect on personality of the victims but their fellows and academic environment of the university as well.

Naturally, here may arise two questions, “How such behaviors are developed among university students?”, and “Which factors contribute to these behaviors?”. In searching answers to these two questions one may come across different factors and reasons which can be accounted for development and promotion of negative social behaviors including violence among university students. These factors along with others primarily consist of brought up and parenting styles of university students, their respective socio-economic backgrounds and life styles or standards, tolerance level of family and the community they belong to. They may belong to bad company and friendship, involvement of outer negative social agents, active external politics and students’ unions. However, different factors individually or in combination of others may be working simultaneously for destroying the peace of a university and career of students. But whatsoever the reason may be behind any of the negative social behaviors; surely they have a detrimental impact upon university’s academic environment, create a nuisance among students and their groups, and have negative effect upon learning of students individually or university as a whole.

Again one may ask questions, “Can these behaviors of university students be eliminated or transformed into positive and/ or accepted social behaviors?”, and “Which activities can be offered to university students to divert their focus towards positive actions?” The assenting response of academia to these questions would lead towards constructive efforts; resulting in enhancing academic achievement of students and connecting their experiences to the world around them. An alternative approach to divert their focus would be useful to overcome behavioral issues of university students.

Therefore, universities can design and offer to students different activities for modifying their behaviors and transform them as a reflection of desires of their community –become intellectual of society. They can be involved in various curricular and co-curricular activities in classroom, department and university. Their participation in experiential learning, community based projects; volunteer works and self-expressive activities like arts should be encouraged with special care of their psychological traits. Among others, arts and art-related activities can divert thoughts of university students towards constructive actions and help them become productive members of society contributing to national development through education.

2. Violence and Violent Behavior –A Social Dilemma

Violence is manifold phenomenon which is linked with thoughts of individuals, their attitudes, & behaviors. Several factors can influence violence occurrence, including biological, psychological, social, cultural, economic, and political factors (Hurrelmann and Richter 2006; Rappaport and Thomas 2004). Generally, violence is viewed as a mean to exerting power or dominance over others in different ways creating difficulties in maintaining relationships with peers, teachers & educators, and even family members (Finley 2006). Its usual articulations include physical attack and injury, verbal, emotional, and psychological aggression (Bonomi, Allen, & Holt, 2006; Liang, Flisher, & Lombard, 2007). It is a forceful and detrimental behavior resulting in some kind of harm including psychological pains. The definition of violence “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” promoted by World Health Organization (WHO 1996) is broader in terms of its meaning and scope.

Violence as a state of aggression is one of the anti-social behaviors commonly found in deprived, frustrated and hopeless individuals. It is reaction to some social injustice with the victim. There are different forms of violence including physical violence consisting of pushing, shoving, spitting, kicking, hitting, defacing property, locking in closed or confined space, threatening with a weapon, or inflicting bodily harm; and verbal violence can be given dirty looks, teasing about appearance, verbal threats of aggression against property or possessions, or verbal threats of violence or bodily harm (Ashbury College, 2010). Violence is harmful to society and particularly academic environment of universities.

Violence and its related behaviors have multiple effects on victims. According to Lee, Chen, Lee and Kaur (2007) violence-related behaviors such as fighting and weapon carrying may lead to serious physical and psychosocial consequences for adolescents. There are different reasons behind violence and violent behaviors developed among university students. The results of the studies conducted by Okour & Hijazi (2009); Farrington (1998); Bell and Jenkins (1993) affirmed the poor parental supervision, family dissolution, negative peer influence, and poverty to be associated with violence among university students. The effects of parental physical and verbal violence were also confirmed by results of the study of Okour & Hijazi (2009) and associated significantly with its occurrences among students.

Ames, Powell, Crouch, and Tse, (2007) classified different challenging issues associated with violent behaviour –ranging “from environment-related concerns of rubbish and litter lying around and abandoned or burnt out cars, through to vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage, people being drunk or rowdy, people using or dealing drugs, teenagers hanging around on the streets and noisy neighbours or loud parties” (p.3). Violent behavior seems to be directly related with aggression which according to Zahn, Brownstein, and Jackson, (2004) takes six different forms according to their level of intensity: level of action of behavior (individual, interpersonal, collective); nature and degree of force; outcomes including extent of injury; type of injury (e.g. physical harm, emotional degradation, interpersonal dominance); nature and significance of target(s), and whether or not the actions intentional.

3. Reducing Violence through Art Education

Arts as symbolic representation of ideas and feelings are soft mode of catharsis of one's reactions to social happenings for attracting attention of concerned quarters. They are reflected in different art forms and work as expressions of feelings, imagination and creative works of individuals. Arts works are appreciated throughout the world and people attend such events for recreational purpose (<http://www.visual-art-cork.com>). According to Bennett (1986) arts are elements of education as essential as reading, writing, and arithmetic; and keys to unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment. Therefore, inclusion of arts' concepts and offering academic programs in arts education at university level may decrease violent behavior among students. It would promote a healthy environment in the campus by involving students actively in different arts related activities –diverting their attention towards constructive activities.

Different legends of the history beautifully commented on arts and embraced for creating peace and tolerance in self and surroundings. Aristotle stated that, “the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance”. Similarly, there is a famous quote associated with Pablo Picasso that, “art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life” (<http://www.thereadheadriter.com/2012/02/pablo-picasso-49-interesting-facts/>). Art promotes aesthetic sense among university students for transforming their behaviors. Therefore, it can be used as a means to coping with different psychological states including anxiety & stress, trauma and unhappiness.

4. What is Art?

A human being is a combination of concrete and abstract components. Physique and physical body including all organs compose concrete components; whereas soul, thinking and feelings & emotions are abstract phenomena. Healthy presence of both of the components of human being is a vital sign of life. Physique is concrete component and gives look of body to outer world; whereas soul and feelings are abstract and delicate in nature and effect on personality development of individuals; and in the same way these are affected by outer world in surroundings. However, all human beings have feelings & emotions and they need to be expressed in some way. The expression of fine sentiments and emotions in a novel and fascinating way is called an art and the process of learning how to present or express feelings; is termed as art education. Art is a creative activity to present inner feelings to the outer world in an artistic way.

Art is appreciated worldwide and recognized as an independent discipline encompassing and relying on different forms and formats –arts consisting of fine arts, liberal arts, visual arts, decorative arts, applied arts, design, crafts, performing arts, and so on. Arts are regarded as languages of artists for reflecting their understanding and interpretation of the world. Emotions and feelings of artists are presented in different way and therefore, are categorized into visual and fine arts (drawings, paintings, calligraphy, photography and sculpture), applied arts (architecture, fashion design, jewelry design, wood craft, and interior design etc.) and performing arts (dance, music and singing, film and theater, operas, carnivals, and concerts etc.). These are meaningful socio-cultural and intellectual representations for developing knowledge and understanding and to promoting sensitivity and imagination of their meanings among masses. Apparently, meaningful representations have positively significant effect on mind habits and attitudes of

individuals. Therefore, Brouillette (2010) viewed arts as useful experiences contributing towards moral and emotional development of individuals.

5. Arts Education

Arts education is a process of equipping individuals with artistic skills –making them capable of representing their feelings and imagination in an exciting way. It is a creative process and makes a significant difference between a common individual and an artist. Inclusion of arts concepts and skills in curricula, and instructional process is first step towards arts education. Generally, arts stem in culture and embrace innovations; and arts activities are socio-cultural representations. Therefore, the assertion of Throsby (2003) that activities related with arts education involve some form of creativity in their production; that they are associated with generation and communication of symbolic meaning; and their output embodies, at least potentially, some form of intellectual property; reflects functional value of arts education in society. Likewise, Noon (2012) associated art education with learning of any of the fine or applied arts for acquiring creative experiences. Arts education encompasses and relies on knowledge, experiences & practices for artistic creation. It appears to play a significant role in almost all forms and at all levels of education. It facilitates learners to understand some phenomenon for interpretation and reflection through creativity –in a soft way so as to make others feel in real way and perceive the effect/ message properly.

Arts education is an intellectual as well as social activity which develops peace of mind and confidence among learners –the artists. Nonetheless, individuals enjoying peace of mind can work for development of a peaceful society. Establishment of a peaceful and self-reliant society is need of 21st century and big challenge for social reformers. Therefore, keeping in view creative nature and socio-intellectual aspects of arts education, Matarasso (1997) believed in its potential to contributing towards establishment of “a stable, confident and creative society” because of inherent “creativity, openness and elasticity” of arts education. Catterall (2002) affirmed that high-quality arts lessons were inspiring to learners by enhancing their interactions among peers, promoting conflict resolution and interpersonal skills, and improving problem solving dispositions having an effect on their character building, understanding and comprehension.

6. Why Arts Education?

Art is an artistic activity, and arts education is a dynamic endeavor aiming at inculcating creativity & innovative skills among learners. Art’s students when provided opportunities of doing some artistic task independently, take initiative and involve themselves in free-flowing art activities fostering creativity and creative skills which help them in developing imagination and decision-making with confidence.

There are numerous reasons to including arts in education particularly, in higher education. It is general observation that students inclined towards arts and/or involved in such activities; develop an understanding for better performance in other subjects including languages, geography and even applied & medical sciences and engineering (Noon, 2012).

There are different studies which have substantiated achievement of average higher scores in standardized tests of students who were engaged in any of creative expressions like music, painting, and /or drama. The exposure of students towards arts appeared to have effects on their retention significantly in the schools. The findings of the study of

(Shaheen, 2012) affirmed it by signifying that students engaged in arts programs were much more likely to retain in school than their counterparts –who were not involved into any such creative activity. Arts education develops certain skills and capacities among learners to live peacefully and create a society based on mutual cooperation and respect. The results of Shaheen’s (2012) study further reported that arts education promotes life skills among students engaged in artistic activities. These skills include creativity, interpretation, and critical thinking, and communication, interpersonal and observational skills for personality development and curiosity. Inclusion of arts education at higher education level and involving students in arts & alike co-curricular activities; provide them opportunities of diverting their aggressive feelings and emotions into soft representations. It can help university students become academically productive and socially interactive contributing to societal stability and vitality.

According to Eisner (2002) arts education seems to be developing cognitive skills and competencies among students. Nonetheless, perception of relationships; skills in finding multiple solutions to problems; attention to nuance; adaptability; decision-making skills; and visualization of goals and outcomes were identified as key competencies of cognitive development by the Eisner. These skills help students in preparing them for a dynamic future life. The educational programs integrating arts education appear to be equipping students with life skills necessary for living a productive life in 21st century economy. The findings of the US President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the Arts Education Partnership (1999) reported arts education developing many skills among learners applicable to the “real world” environment around them. The arts contributed significantly in creating flexible and adaptable knowledge force to meet the demands of businesses and competing in today’s economy.

In US the National Endowment for the Arts (May 2001) suggested to market the arts competencies in media careers including television and film production, advertising and web designing. Arts education inculcates professional as well as technical skills among learners which help them in selecting arts as profession. It develops self-reliance and self-sufficiency among such professionals by promoting opportunities of self-employment, stability and positivity, and reducing unemployment from the country. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported more than two million full-time workers associated with the profession of arts/ artist in the year 2000. The outcomes of the Arts Program for Incarcerated Youth, the Washington State Historical Society’s Capital Museum revealed that students in the experimental gallery overcome their behavioral problems by 75% and are 50% were less likely to commit another crime (www.cominguptaller.org/profile/pr202multi.htm). Most of the studies have been conducted on arts education in schools, particularly in primary and elementary schools. However, some studies were conducted on juvenile delinquents and/ or students. Therefore, the existing literature describes arts and arts education in school settings.

7. Effects of Arts Education on Youth

As arts education is a dynamic process, and according to Edward (1999) it can help students enhance their academic achievements, bring academically marginalized students into main educational stream, create conducive to learning environment, and connect learners’ experiences to the world outside of educational institutions. Likewise, results of the study conducted by Heath (1998) affirmed significant impact of arts education across socioeconomic groups on their academic and personal achievement and development.

The study further elaborated the effects of arts education on learning of children that they were four times more likely to be recognized for their academic achievement, participated in a math and science fair, win an award for writing an essay or poem; three time more likely to be elected to class office within their schools, and win an award for school attendance. Burton, Horowitz and Abeles (2000) conducted a study on about 2000 middle school students and found them having heightened soft skills after three years of arts instruction. These students scored significantly higher on quantitative tests of creative thinking than their peers with less arts instruction. Students with more arts instruction had index scores averaging 20 points higher than their peers on measures of creative thinking, fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure.

Arts education appears to have a positive influence on personal adjustment and self-concept. This is particularly true to mental retardates, those exhibiting anti-social behavior, and others with insecure feelings about themselves. Regular, frequent classroom music instruction appears to have a significant positive effect on self-reliance and total social adjustment of elementary school children. "Arts develop the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of human experience. They contribute to our intellectual ability and to our social, cultural and spiritual understandings [of students]. There is an essential element of daily living and of lifelong learning" (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Results of the Americans for Arts' New Harris Poll (2005) revealed strong public support of Americans toward arts education. Its results affirmed that 93% of Americans believed arts to be vital in providing a well-rounded education; 86% affirmed arts education encouraging and assisting children in improving their attitudes toward school(s); 83% acknowledged arts education to be useful in teaching children for communicating effectively with adults and their peers; 79% viewed integrating arts into education as a first step in adding to public education; 54% rated arts education as important as on 10th number; and 79% believed in their personal involvement for enhancing the quality of arts education.

8. Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that art education plays a positive role in attitude formation and eliminating negative social behaviors including violence from amongst the young generation –university students. Art education promotes aesthetic sense among students and they take part in healthy activities to divert their attention. Art education helps university students in understanding nature and natural environment around them with a realistic approach. It makes them helping hands and peaceful citizens of the society. It makes them feel the realities of life and cultivates self-actualization, softness, passion, patience and flexibility among them. Therefore, the concepts of art education may be included in curriculum and instruction at university level. Besides, series of workshops and awareness walks may be organized for the students. The students intended towards art education may be encouraged by organizing art festivals for their active participation.

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