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# Introducing Contemporary Visual Art Construct in Text Book for Constructing Interpretations in Constructivist Classroom

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## Abstract:

*The National Education Policy (2020) emphasizes experiential learning and art-integrated learning. Traditional classrooms gradually converted to Constructivist classrooms where knowledge is actively constructed not just*

*imparted. Constructive Interpretation by the learner can be a vital step towards the betterment of this constructivist classroom system. This form of interpretation is a part of the agile methodology which allows everyone to adopt and construct as per their educational environment. Text Book is one of the essential elements of the curriculum which gives a clear perspective to the stakeholders. The visual design and arrangement of a textbook can give an impact on the learners. Textbooks' illustrations always play a key role to enhance the power of visualization of the learners but sometimes we can see inappropriate and irrelevant illustrations in the textbook which may create conflict between the learners' knowledge that has been shared via the text. This study sought to explain how contemporary visual art in the textbook can construct interpretations in a constructivist classroom. This study is based on the Class VII English textbooks of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and previous research papers, conducted through qualitative methods. The findings of the study manifest that illustration is not only a piece of art, but it helps to build the concept of fine art, artists and culture with the society. Appropriate illustration and its visual effect will make students' studies and observation more retentive. The concept of Studies-the art-Society-Language and Literature are not an individual thing; it could be interdisciplinary.*

**Keywords:** Visual Art, Text Book, Constructive Interpretation, Constructive Classroom

## 1. Introduction:

Visual elements in textbooks have been cherished as indispensable tools for enriching learning experiences, bolstering comprehension, retention, and engagement. Yet, in the realm of education, contemporary visual art emerges as an intriguing alternative to conventional illustrations. This discourse recognizes the pivotal role played by illustrations in education. These visual aids are not just embellishments; they are indispensable companions on students' learning journeys, enriching comprehension and supporting educators in delivering content effectively.



From the earliest stages of childhood development, students intuitively harness the power of visuals to solve problems, count, sort, match words, letters, and pictures, and convey their ideas. As Segun (1988)<sup>1</sup> astutely observes, even before mastering the art of speech, children display a remarkable sensitivity to pictures. This innate affinity between children and visual stimuli has prompted educational publishers to incorporate illustrations as essential components of textbooks.

The creation of educational textbooks, as detailed by Ikoja-Odongo (2010)<sup>2</sup>, involves a multifaceted process encompassing manuscript preparation, editing, illustration, typesetting, design, printing, and distribution to eager readers. Within this intricate journey, illustrators and designers bear the significant responsibility of seamlessly weaving illustrations into the educational narrative. In this context, illustrations transcend mere adornment; they serve as bridges between the abstract and the tangible, infusing vitality into textbook pages and rendering complex ideas comprehensible. For effective written communication with children, the use of high-quality, contextually relevant illustrations becomes paramount. These visual aids unlock the imagination, breathing life into textual content and serving as essential tools in facilitating learning.

In the realm of education, the undeniable potency of images and pictures in conveying concepts and enriching learning experiences comes to the fore. While these visual representations may capture only fragments of reality, they wield the power to shape students' focus on essential aspects of their lives and educational journeys (Dimopoulos, Koulaidis, & Sklaveniti, 2003)<sup>3</sup>. In pedagogical realms, pictures act as catalysts, motivating students to engage with accompanying text, arresting their attention, and inspiring in-depth examination of the textual content intricately interwoven with illustrations. The import of visual aids in education transcends mere motivation. Images possess the unique capacity to elucidate and clarify intricate subject matter that might otherwise prove elusive. They serve as invaluable tools for decoding content resistant to facile verbal explanation. Moreover, pictures create a parallel nonverbal layer of communication, enriching traditional verbal channels of learning. This dual coding, as elucidated by Peeck (1993)<sup>4</sup>, enhances students' potential to comprehend and retain content associated

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<sup>1</sup> Segun, M. (1988). *The Importance of Illustrations in Children's Books in Illustrating to Children*. 25-27. Retrieved from <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/20150930/the-importance-of-illustrations-in-childrens-books-mabel-segun>

<sup>2</sup> Ikoja-Odongo, J. R. (2010). *Publishing in Uganda with notes from Africa: a review*.

<sup>3</sup> Dimopoulos, K., Koulaidis, V. & Sklaveniti, S. (2003). *Towards an Analysis of Visual Images in School Science Textbooks and Press Articles about Science and Technology*. *Research in Science Education* **33**, 189–216. Doi <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025006310503>

<sup>4</sup> Peeck, J. (1993). *Increasing picture effects in learning from illustrated text*. *Learning and Instruction*, 3(3), 227–238. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-4752\(93\)90006-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-4752(93)90006-L)



with visual elements. Beyond the present moment, pictures possess a remarkable ability to ignite imagination and stimulate students' cognitive processes.

On the other hand, the National [Education Policy \(2020\)](#)<sup>5</sup> represents a significant shift in the philosophy and approach to education in India. It recognizes the need for experiential and constructivist learning, which emphasizes active knowledge construction. This study aligns with the policy's objectives and seeks to explore how contemporary visual art in textbooks can contribute to this educational transformation. The transition from traditional classrooms to constructivist ones is a pivotal aspect of contemporary education. This shift acknowledges that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their learning journey. Constructive interpretation, as mentioned in the study, is a fundamental component of this constructivist approach, and this research aims to elucidate its significance.

## 2. Literature Review:

The integration of visual elements, such as illustrations and diagrams, into educational materials has been extensively studied for its positive impact on learning. Visual aids act as cognitive tools, assisting learners in organizing and processing information effectively. Illustrations, in particular, bridge the gap between abstract concepts and tangible understanding, serving as indispensable components of educational resources (Ikoja-Odongo, 2010).<sup>6</sup> Students, from an early age, naturally connect with visuals, using them to solve problems and communicate ideas ([Segun, 1988](#))<sup>7</sup>. As a result, educational publishers incorporate illustrations into textbooks to support learning.

Assessing the quality of educational materials requires considering both textual and visual elements. Textbook quality should encompass the appropriateness of language and illustrations, as noted by UNESCO ([Simam, Rotich, and Kemoni, 2012](#))<sup>8</sup>. However, there is a need for more detailed criteria in evaluating the impact of visual elements on educational materials. Contemporary visual art, with its avant-garde forms and thought-provoking themes, presents an intriguing alternative to traditional illustrations. While its integration should be thoughtful, weighing innovation against the risk of distraction, exploring the potential of contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Government of India. (2020). Ministry of Human Resource Development. *National Education Policy 2020*. Retrieved from [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ikoja-Odongo, J. R. (2010). *Publishing in Uganda with notes from Africa: a review*.

<sup>7</sup> Segun, M. (1988). *The Importance of Illustrations in Children's Books in Illustrating to Children*. 25-27. Retrieved from <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/20150930/the-importance-of-illustrations-in-childrens-books-mabel-segun>

<sup>8</sup> Simam, R., Rotich, D., & Kemoni, H. (2012). *Educational publishing and provision of quality primary school textbooks in Kenya*. *Inkanyiso: The journal of humanities and social science*, 117-127.



visual art to engage and challenge learners intellectually is a subject worthy of further exploration.

### 3. Statement of the problem:

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020)<sup>9</sup> of India advocates a fundamental shift towards experiential and constructivist learning within the education system. Traditional classrooms are transitioning into dynamic environments where knowledge is actively constructed, fostering a need for constructive interpretation by learners. This transformation aligns with agile methodologies, emphasizing adaptability in educational practices. In this context, textbooks play a pivotal role as educational foundations. However, a concern arises regarding the utilization of contemporary visual art in these textbooks and its potential impact. The problem at hand is two-fold: first, the lack of understanding about how contemporary visual art in textbooks can facilitate constructive interpretation in constructivist classrooms; and second, the prevalence of inappropriate or irrelevant illustrations in educational materials, potentially hindering the learning process. Therefore, the present study, titled *“Introducing Contemporary Visual Art Construct in Text Book for Constructing Interpretations in Constructivist Classroom”* seeks to investigate the role of contemporary visual art in textbooks within the constructivist classroom context and address the issue of inappropriate illustrations, ultimately aiming to enhance the quality of education in line with the evolving educational landscape in India.

### 4. Objectives:

- (1) To find out how different forms of contemporary visual art construct an interpretation of the related content in textbooks.
- (2) To find out how the introduction of contemporary visual art in textbooks builds up the learner’s familiarity with contemporary art and artist.

### 5. Research Questions:

- i) How do different forms of contemporary visual art construct an interpretation of the related content in textbooks?
- ii) How does the introduction of contemporary visual art in textbooks builds up the learner’s familiarity with contemporary art and artist?

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<sup>9</sup> Government of India. (2020). Ministry of Human Resource Development. *National Education Policy 2020*. Retrieved from [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)



## 6. Methodology:

This study has been conducted as a qualitative research study. Document analysis method of qualitative research study has been used in this present study to answer the research questions and satisfy the objectives.

**Sources of Data:** Only secondary data has been used in this present study. The existing illustration pictures and the texts of English Textbook of Class Seven of Bengali medium schools affiliated to West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and some visual art constructs of the contemporary artists have been used as the secondary data of this study.

## 7. Discussion and Interpretation:

### (1) How do different forms of contemporary art visuals construct an interpretation of the related content in textbooks?

In their scholarly article titled EFFECTS OF PICTURES IN TEXTBOOKS ON STUDENTS' CREATIVITY, (Sara Kasmaienezhadford, Masoumeh Pourrajab, and Mohtaram Rabbani, 2015)<sup>10</sup> delve into the role of images and pictures in textbooks and their influence on students' creativity. They put forth the notion that these visual elements play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions and understanding of the world around them. While images and pictures may not capture the entirety of a subject, they serve a crucial purpose in directing students' attention to essential aspects of their own experiences and the broader reality they encounter.

The authors emphasize that images and pictures are not mere embellishments within textbooks but are, in fact, a reflection of a portion of our reality. They act as powerful tools for guiding students towards a deeper understanding of their surroundings and fostering their creativity. By presenting a visual representation of concepts and experiences, these visuals help students connect with the subject matter on a personal level. This connection can trigger their imagination and stimulate creative thinking. Considering the above statement, four illustrations of English textbook for Class VII "Blossoms" of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education has been analyzed and interpreted below.

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<sup>10</sup> Kasmaienezhadford, S., Pourrajab, M., & Rabbani, M. (2015). *EFFECTS OF PICTURES IN TEXTBOOKS ON STUDENTS' CREATIVITY*. Multi-Disciplinary Edu Global Quest (Quarterly), Volume4(2).

Table No.1: Theme and Illustration of the English Textbook

Text	Theme	Illustration
The Book of Nature	This chapter is about a letter from Nehru to Indira Gandhi when he was in Allahabad. Nehru wrote her a series of letters in which he told her the story of how and when the earth was made, how human and animal life began, how civilizations and societies evolved all over the world. So, in one-word Nature will help us to understand our own history.	
The Riddle	Emperor Akbar is troubled by a riddle about the world's fastest object. Birbal cleverly answers that the human brain is the swiftest, impressing the court with his quick thinking and problem-solving skills.	
Mowgli among the Wolves	In the jungle of Seonee Hills, Father Wolf and Mother Wolf adopt a human "man's cub" named Mowgli after a standoff with the menacing tiger, Sher Khan. With the support of Baloo, the bear and Bagheera the panther, Mowgli becomes part of the wolf pack, setting the stage for his adventures in Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book."	
My Diary	The excerpt from Anne Frank's diary covers her early teenage years, beginning on her 13th birthday, describing her everyday life, friendships, and the impact of anti-Semitic regulations in Amsterdam. It concludes with a note of safety for her family in the face of the looming threat of World War II.	

In illustrations line drawings, discrepancies in figure and object proportions can disrupt the visual storytelling experience. These inconsistencies, along with variations in an individual's skin tone between illustrations of the same story, can be distracting. Furthermore, there are instances where the textual content and the illustrations do not align, creating a disconnect between what is described and what is depicted. For example, in "The Riddle," the portrayal of Birbal varies between illustrations, including differences in facial structure and the positioning of a special stole. To address these issues, it's crucial to emphasize clear communication and collaboration between writers and artists, maintaining a style guide for consistency, and implementing quality control processes during production.



Another thing is, In the Mughal era, particularly preceding the reign of Shah Jahan, local architectures such as the Red Fort and Agra Fort etc. were constructed using red stone, not white marble, as observed in the background of the illustration.

Moreover, when adapting texts like "The Diary of Anne Frank" or "Letters from a Father to His Daughter" into educational materials, integrating images or descriptions from the original works can provide valuable context for students, helping them understand the historical or cultural elements. Additionally, if portrait accuracy is a concern, consider working with a specialized portrait artist who can capture the subject's likeness more accurately.

Regarding the placement of illustrations within a text, it's essential to strike a balance between adherence to specific requirements and the flexibility to adapt to the flow and context of the narrative. This ensures that illustrations enhance the reader's comprehension and overall experience. Drawing inspiration from the conventions of comics and graphic novels can also guide the creation and placement of illustrations.

## **(2) How does the introduction of contemporary visual art in textbooks builds up the learner's familiarity with contemporary art and artist?**

In their respective articles, Iqbal (2009)<sup>11</sup>, Mahmmod (2011)<sup>12</sup>, and Saeed (2009)<sup>13</sup> shed light on key considerations in the construction of textbooks. These considerations include content clarity, text layout, page design, decoration, imagery, printing techniques, and sizing. When we examine the English textbook for Class VII "Blossoms" of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, several aspects come to the forefront, particularly page quality, text layout, page design, decorations, and illustrations. These aspects are critical as they can significantly impact student development and reading comfort. Neglecting these elements might result in student fatigue and hinder their learning process. Therefore, it is imperative to address these issues with utmost care and attention. In alignment with these concerns, Diamond (2008)<sup>14</sup> articulates in his article that students exhibit a preference for rhetoric in textbooks. This preference arises from the fact that the use of visuals aids in their understanding and facilitates faster and easier learning compared to text alone. Students naturally establish connections between images and their own

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<sup>11</sup> Iqbal, M. Z. (2009). *Textbook Evaluation Through Quality Indicators: The Case of Pakistan*. Bulletin of Education & Research, 31(2), 27. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/4122427>

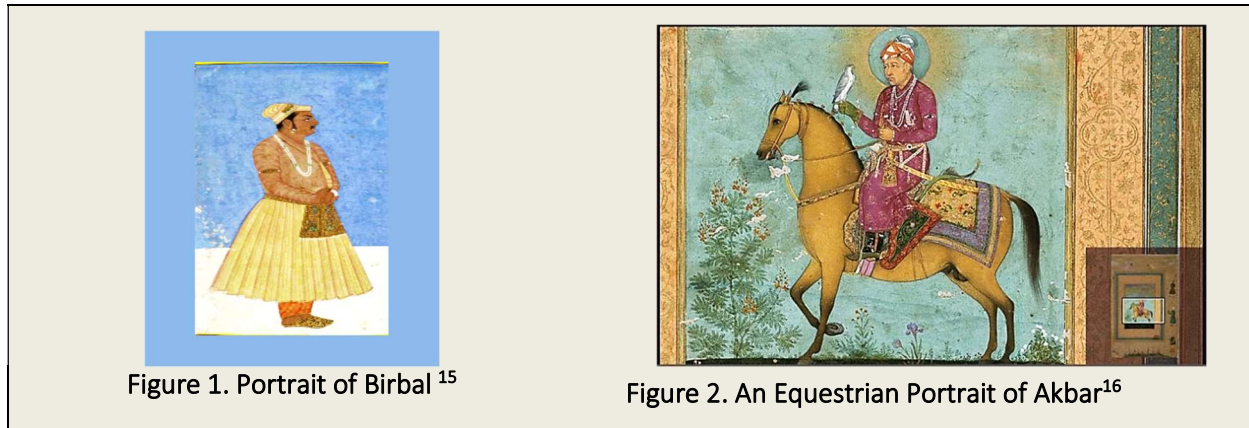
<sup>12</sup> Mahmood, K. (2011). *Conformity to quality characteristics of textbooks: The illusion of textbook evaluation in Pakistan*. Journal of Research and Reflections in Education, 5(2), 170-190.

<sup>13</sup> Saeed, M. (2009). *Textbook Evaluation Through Quality Indicators: The Case of Pakistan*. Bulletin of Education & Research, 31(2), 27.

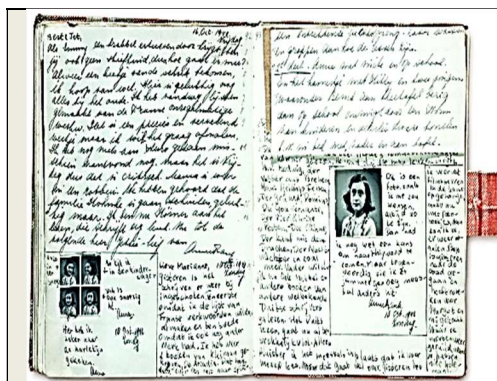
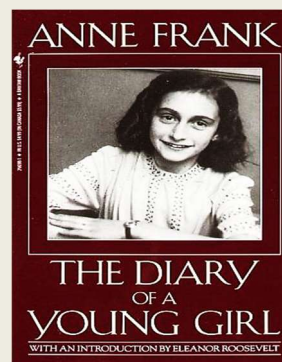
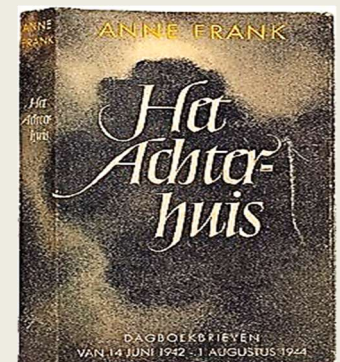
<sup>14</sup> Diamond, M. S. (2008). *The Impact of Text-picture Relationships on Reader Recall and Inference Making: A Study of Fourth Graders' Responses to Narrative Picturebooks*. united states: ProQuest. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/07ada841145a4963536c1fa580d45721/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>



life experiences. This connection enables them to interpret and make sense of the text based on their existing knowledge schema. For example, in 'The Riddle', the original picture of Birbal depicted the fashion and costume style prevalent in the Mughal era. This image has been observed to embody the essence of that period. If portraits of Akbar and Birbal were to be created in a similar fashion, it would be deemed more appropriate to authentically represent the era. Furthermore, the painting technique or style employed is recognized as Mughal art. If the Mughal art style were to be followed in the illustration, it would provide a justifiable context for the text, given that the text is centered around that historical period. Additionally, insights into Mughal painting, costume styles, and cultural aspects would be imparted to the students.

Figure 1. Portrait of Birbal<sup>15</sup>Figure 2. An Equestrian Portrait of Akbar<sup>16</sup>

In "My Diary," the original photo of Anne Frank, images of her letters, and the book cover can be seamlessly incorporated with the main text.

Figure 3. Pages of Anna Frank Diary<sup>17</sup>Figure 4. Available book cover of the book<sup>18</sup>Figure 5. Original cover of the book<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.foolsareeverywhere.com/painting-birbal/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sylff.org/news-voices/17830/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-anne-franks-diary-changed-the-world-180957215/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.esmonitor.com/Books/chapter-and-verse/2013/0508/Is-the-unabridged-Anne-Frank-Diary-of-a-Young-Girl-too-much-of-a-good-thing>

<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Diary\\_of\\_a\\_Young\\_Girl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Diary_of_a_Young_Girl)



Similarly, for the text 'The book of Nature' also the incorporation of the book cover into the main text is possible.

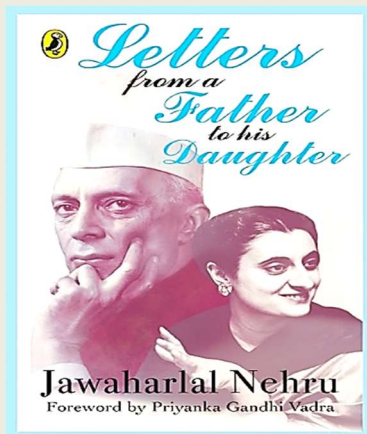


Figure 6. Book cover of the original book<sup>20</sup>

In the text "Mowgli among the Wolves," the illustrations, though good, somehow convey a slightly diminished sense of wildness. However, the story revolves around a baby who was adopted by wolves, wild animals, and jungle life. In the referenced illustration by John Lockwood Kipling, the renowned art teacher and illustrator, that wildness is effectively captured.



Figure 7. Illustration of a page from the original book<sup>21</sup>

In the introductory note at the beginning of the New Edition of the book, it is stated that "famous artists were invited to illustrate the books." However, the book does not provide any specific names of the artists responsible for the illustrations, and this information is not presented anywhere else in the book. The rationale behind this decision likely centers on the understanding that 7th standard students may not be expected to possess an in-depth knowledge of individual artists or their artistic styles.

The decision not to include artist names or details about their works may be motivated by the desire to maintain a strong focus on the educational content itself, preventing any potential distraction from the primary learning objectives. This approach allows students to engage with the educational material without being encumbered by additional information about the artists.

However, it is worth noting that an awareness of the cultural and artistic contributors to society can play a crucial role in shaping a child's holistic development. Understanding the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of their culture and society can enhance a student's sense of identity and appreciation for the world around them.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.penguin.co.in/book/letters-from-a-father-to-his-daughter-2/>

<sup>21</sup> [https://books.google.co.in/books/about/The\\_Jungle\\_Book.html?id=HvJaAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books/about/The_Jungle_Book.html?id=HvJaAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)



In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020<sup>22</sup>, which underscores the significance of the arts in imparting culture and enhancing cognitive and creative abilities, it is evident that the arts play a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity, fostering awareness, and uplifting societies. Moreover, the arts have a remarkable capacity to boost individual cognitive development and contribute to personal happiness. These considerations emphasize the importance of including a variety of Indian arts at all educational levels, commencing from early childhood care and education.

The NEP 2020 acknowledges that it is not solely through textbooks and the acquisition of knowledge that students can gain a comprehensive education. It is equally important to make students aware of their cultural and artistic identity, as well as the individuals who have made significant contributions to it. This can be accomplished through the inclusion of art and culture within the educational framework, with a focus on elements such as decorations and pictures. By integrating art and culture into the curriculum, students have the opportunity to engage with their heritage, explore the work of artists, and understand the cultural context of artistic creations. This holistic approach to education is invaluable for the overall development of students. It not only enriches their knowledge but also nurtures a deeper connection to their cultural roots, enhances cognitive abilities, fosters creativity, and contributes to their overall happiness and well-being.

In essence, the NEP 2020 encourages a well-rounded approach to education that encompasses both academic learning and cultural awareness, recognizing the profound impact of art and culture on individual development and societal progress. By exposing students to their cultural heritage and the contributions of artists, we empower them to be more culturally informed and creatively engaged citizens.

## 8. Conclusion:

In the article titled "Critical thinking: How to prepare students for a rapidly changing world," Paul (1995)<sup>23</sup> emphasizes that the primary goal of education is to assist students in developing excellent and creative thinking abilities (constructing ideas) and harmonizing them with analytical thinking. The National Education Policy of 2020 also emphasizes the same.

Therefore, in the 21st century, we cannot view art merely as a form of leisure and entertainment. Instead, we must move beyond this notion and recognize that art is an integral

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<sup>22</sup> Government of India. (2020). Ministry of Human Resource Development. *National Education Policy 2020*. Retrieved from [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Paul, R. (1995). *Critical thinking: How to prepare students for a rapidly changing world*. Foundation for Critical Thinking



part of everything around us. It plays a crucial role in enhancing retention skills, fostering creativity, and promoting self-development. Ultimately, it can be concluded that the responsibility for fostering these qualities does not solely rest with the realm of art or artists. It extends to educators, policymakers, parents, and all individuals who are directly or indirectly connected with the world of art and education system. Collaborative efforts among these stakeholders can make a significant impact on a child's holistic development.

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