

Transforming Lives of Less Privileged Adolescents in Mumbai: Stories of Dreaming Big and Building Life Skills Through Arts

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Abstract

Arts education benefits children beyond academics, fostering cognitive, emotional, physical, and social growth, especially for first-generation learners and those from resource-poor communities. Established in 2007 to encourage secondary school completion in government and aided schools, the Salaam Bombay Arts Academy equips children with confidence, creativity, and resilience, leading to aspirational and improved future outcomes through a holistic approach. Adolescents spend three years learning an art form—Indian Classical Dance, Western Contemporary Dance, Theatre, Creative Arts, or Music—alongside developing essential life skills. Classes of these adolescent students are held after school within school premises, ensuring accessibility.

This paper presents personal journeys of five students, one from each academy, highlighting the transformative impact of the Arts Academies. Stories were shortlisted based on maximum variation and intensity sampling. Outcome mapping technique tracked progress across individual, group (family, peers), and community levels. Field notes and internal reports underwent qualitative open coding and analysis, capturing the multifaceted influence of arts education on children's lives.

Data highlights that the Arts Academies fostered self-expression through experiential learning, enabling students to learn and hone technical art skills while showcasing their talents. This process developed their communication abilities and boosted their self-confidence. Their stories illustrate how art strengthened their resilience, helping them navigate personal challenges constructively. They also cultivated initiative, empathy, and leadership qualities. Ultimately, this journey of self-discovery has transformed them into articulate, career-wise better informed, confident leaders ready to face the world.

Keywords: Arts, underprivileged, adolescents, life skills

Introduction

An education in the Arts has proven itself to be incredibly beneficial for children from resource-poor communities. “74 percent of students in the low-income group who had arts experiences by the eighth grade were more likely to plan to go to college”¹. They performed better on standardised tests than their

¹ Ruppert S.S, Critical Evidence: How the arts benefit student achievement. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2006, pp.1–4
<https://tsd-wpe-largefs-storage.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/nasaa/fileBucket/2017/02/critical-evidence.pdf>

“arts-poor” peers and showed higher capabilities in both math-based subjects and languages. The benefits of arts-participation also extend out of the classroom for low-income students, as they are more likely to volunteer, read news sources, and vote. Thus, an education in and an exposure to Arts promote development and learning across cognitive, social/emotional, and physical domains, leading to better future outcomes.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the integration of arts into the school curriculum to promote holistic, experiential, and joyful learning. It recognizes arts education—visual arts, music, dance, drama, and craft—not as extracurricular, but as essential to developing students' creativity, critical thinking, and emotional well-being. The policy encourages art-integrated and play-based pedagogy, especially in early grades, and promotes the use of local art forms to instil cultural appreciation and national pride. NEP aims to make education more inclusive, flexible, and learner-centred, with the arts playing a key role in nurturing well-rounded, innovative, and expressive individuals.

Keeping all of this in mind, the Salaam Bombay Foundation (SBF) evolved a unique and innovative project, the Arts Academy in 2007 to provide adolescents opportunities to develop life skills and technical skills while supporting their artistic developments. By investing in the talents and dreams of young people, Salaam Bombay Foundation does not merely shape individual futures — they transform entire communities

Established to promote the completion of secondary education in government and aided schools, the Salaam Bombay Arts Academy fosters life skills through artistic expression. The Art Academies harness innovative art education tools such as Indian Classical Dance, Western Contemporary Dance, Theatre, Creative Arts and Music to build the confidence of under-privileged adolescents by enabling them to express themselves, to spark a sense of ambition by revealing their latent talents they didn't know they possessed, and to open up a world of careers and opportunities they never knew existed. All this goes a long way towards motivating them to stay in school. Youth equipped with life and job-specific skills are empowered. The academies follow a three-year model which gives adolescents an opportunity to learn the technical skills associated with one of the above-mentioned art forms. They move from Level 1 (Year 1) which focuses on basic skills to Level 2 (Year 2) where they gain advanced skills before achieving Level 3 when they graduate from the academy. Many students go onto Level 4 and develop a repertory after graduating from the academy, while simultaneously completing their schooling. Classes are conducted after school, in school premises, ensuring they are accessible to all. This comprehensive approach empowers children with confidence, creativity, and resilience, ultimately resulting in enhanced aspirations and better future prospects.

This paper forms a segment of a broader longitudinal qualitative study and explores the personal journeys of five students—each representing a different Arts Academy—to illustrate the transformative role of arts education in the lives of underprivileged adolescents. The stories were carefully selected using maximum variation and intensity sampling methods. The outcome mapping approach was employed to trace changes at the individual, interpersonal (family and peer), and community levels. Field notes and internal documentation were subjected to open qualitative coding and analysis, revealing the diverse and meaningful ways in which the arts have impacted these young lives.

Five incredible journeys of Empowerment and Growth Through the Arts

1. Siddhi: Journey from fear to freedom

The **Western Dance Academy** offered Siddhi opportunities to learn and excel in various contemporary dance styles. Through structured training and practice, all participants in this academy develop their dancing skills, coordination, and stage presence, building a strong foundation for artistic performances. Additionally, Siddhi grew as an individual, growing leaps and bounds in confidence in her three years at this academy.

Siddhi grew up in a modest home in a Mumbai chawl with her parents and two younger brothers. Her father earned a living by selling panipuri on the streets and doing other odd jobs, while her mother managed the household. Their combined income of ₹20,000 a month was enough to survive, but far from sufficient for dreams of a better life. For Siddhi, opportunities seemed limited, and her future uncertain.

In the midst of this, Siddhi harboured a deep love for dance. But her family was initially sceptical. Dance, they believed, was not a path that would lead to a stable future. With determination and the support of her dance trainer at SBF, Siddhi convinced her parents to let her pursue her passion. This was the beginning of a journey that would change her life.

When Siddhi first entered the SBF Dance Academy, she was a timid and restless teenager. She struggled to follow instructions, and her low self-confidence prevented her from fully embracing the dance techniques being taught. Her energy, while abundant, was often misdirected, making it difficult for her to focus and learn. Siddhi's life at home was also challenging, with heavy expectations and limited encouragement.

Despite these obstacles, Siddhi showed resilience by attending every session without fail. Her trainer and the SBF facilitators saw potential in her, recognizing that although she was struggling, her dedication to learning and her consistent efforts demonstrated that she could one day become a skilled dancer and a leader. Siddhi's consistent practice enabled her to grasp the dance techniques with greater precision. Her focus and self-confidence grew, allowing her to actively participate in performances.

A pivotal moment came during the Navratri festival, when a family religious ceremony coincided with a scheduled dance performance. Despite initial opposition from her parents, Siddhi convinced them to let her attend both events — her passion for dance giving her the confidence to speak up and convince her parents.

As her dancing skills improved, Siddhi gained a sense of ownership over her life. She participated in multiple performances and supported others within her dance group.

One of the highlights of Siddhi's journey was her solo performance during the Navratri celebrations in her third year at the academy. She also delivered a speech on cleanliness — overcoming her longstanding fear of public speaking. Her passion and exemplary technical skills enabled her to choreograph and lead a group dance performance for the farewell ceremony of Grade 10 students at her school.

Her trainer noted that Siddhi's **dedication and discipline** had led to her becoming a much more confident, focused, and expressive dancer. She was no longer the shy girl who hesitated to take the lead — Siddhi blossomed into a confident young woman, equipped with leadership skills that extended far beyond dance. In Siddhi's own words:

"Dance has changed me completely. My shyness is gone. Dance gives me energy, confidence, and courage. I know I can achieve much more — not just through academics, but by using the life skills I have built."

Siddhi's passion for dance and the technical skills that she developed not only helped her grow in confidence but also enabled her to develop other critical life-skills.

- **Time management:** She successfully balanced her academic work, dance practice, and family commitments.
- **Leadership:** Siddhi organized and led multiple group performances, motivating and guiding her peers.
- **Public speaking:** She overcame her fear of speaking in front of others, gaining the confidence to deliver speeches.
- **Teamwork and communication:** Siddhi demonstrated the power of clear communication and collaboration, as she worked with her peers in dance and in other projects.

Impact Beyond the Individual: Empowering Families and Communities

Siddhi's growth did not stop with her own transformation. Her journey has had a ripple effect on her family and community. By gaining the confidence to pursue her passion for dance and her education, Siddhi has set an example for her younger brothers and others in her community. She has become an inspiration to other adolescents facing similar challenges.

Siddhi's journey although unique is not the only successful one. The alumni from the Western Dance Academy have embarked on careers such as dance choreography for various events and some are currently employed as assistant trainers.

Further, all children who graduated from the western dance academy attained high levels of self-confidence and interpersonal communication skills. All alumni demonstrated an ability to use skills of etiquette & social responsibility, and hygiene & nutrition for the benefit of the communities in which they resided. Ninety seven percent showed significant progress in emotional management skills while a developed ability to set goals setting was seen in 96 percent. Skills of prioritization & time management were displayed by 95 percent of children. Skills of creativity and decision making were seen in between 92 percent of children each while leadership qualities and group work were seen in 90 percent of the children.

2. Navin: Journey from isolation to creative freedom

Navin, a student of the **Theatre Academy** which offered him a chance to delve into the world of dramatic arts. Through acting exercises, role-playing, and stage performances, the Theatre Academy enhances the students' confidence, communication, and storytelling abilities. Theatre empowers them to express emotions and narratives effectively on stage. For Navin, the academy was the key that unlocked his creativity.

Having lost his father when he was three years old, Navin lives with an aunt in a tiny home in one of Mumbai's eastern suburbs. His mother, who earns a living by looking after small children, lives with his sister in another area. Navin stays in a different area for his schooling but misses his mother and younger sister, getting emotional about them at times. Navin's mother does not own the home in which they live, and much of what she earns goes in paying the rent. This does not leave the small family with much money to do other things.

Navin is a kind, helpful boy who treats everyone with respect. During the first year, his confidence levels were low, he kept to himself in the class and was introverted and quiet. Navin was attentive but reluctant to participate in class. However, his enthusiasm for theater and acting ensured that he did not miss class despite his emotional issues.

Over time, Navin developed the confidence to participate, ask questions and voice his opinions. He grew interested in academics and began taking the initiative to motivate and help other students. Over the three years, Navin learnt technical skills related to theater such as acting, voice modulation and script writing, unlocking his hidden creativity. He has often written scripts for the performances the group puts up. His scripts have always captivated the audiences.

One memorable moment is related to a performance in a community setting requiring a background score. Navin searched for the most appropriate music, downloaded it and edited it. The background score enhanced the performance and was most appreciated by the audience.

Navin regularly offered creative inputs during the classes and often surprised the trainer with the depth of thought behind these.

In Navin's own words:

I learnt script writing, how to do make up and so many more things due to Salaam Bombay Foundation. My mother, grandmother and aunt are so proud of me and my writing. I want to make my career in theater focusing on acting and script writing and I have their full support.

Navin has integrated many of the life skills he has learnt into his daily life.

- **Leadership skills, ability to manage groups:** Navin's positive attitude, punctuality, and ability to motivate his peers contribute greatly to enhancing their performances.
- **Prioritization and time management:** He not only manages his own time well but also helps others prioritize and plan their own schedules.
- **Communication skills:** Navin's communication skills have developed greatly and are reflected in his excellent dialogue delivery
- **Technical skills:** the trainer stated that Navin's creativity, script writing, and other technical theater skills as well as strong work ethic will help him be successful in this field.

Extending the Impact: Uplifting Friends and Peers Through Personal Growth

Over the three years at the Theatre Academy, Navin has developed into a true leader. His encouragement, support and guidance motivated many of his batchmates to perform better. A creative, highly empathetic young man, Navin seeks opportunities to help and support others, demonstrating that change can start with one person, but impacts many other lives in a positive manner.

Navin's story demonstrates that the Salaam Bombay Foundation's ARTS Academy has an influence that extends well beyond personal achievement; it helps communities change their perspectives, and motivates the next generation to strive for greater things.

The Theatre Academy equips students not only for careers in acting, directing, dubbing, and scriptwriting, but also for developing essential life skills. More than 95 percent of those who were in the academy with Navin displayed significant progress in skills related to etiquette & social responsibility (97%), interpersonal communication (95%), leadership & group work (95%), and creativity (95%). Exactly 90 percent of children achieved high levels of self-confidence, were able to manage their emotions, set goals and make sound decisions. Enhanced competence with respect to skills of prioritization & time management, and hygiene & nutrition were observed in 85 percent of children.

3. Ishwari: Journey from a timid girl to an independent professional

Ishwari's journey started the day she joined the **Creative Arts Academy** where she was able to experience a wide range of artistic expressions such as painting, drawing, and crafting. The Creative Arts Academy enables students to develop their creativity; it provides a space for self-expression, fostering imagination

and artistic growth among the participants. In her three years at the Creative Arts Academy, Ishwari not only developed passion and finesse for painting but honed her skills emerging as an artist.

Ishwari lives in an urban poor community close to her school in one of Mumbai's eastern suburbs with her parents and older brother. Her father is manual labourer while her mother is a homemaker. Her father owns the one -bedroom house in which they live, having paid off the loan that he had taken to purchase it.

While their income, around Rs. 15,000/ month is sufficient for survival, opportunities for Ishwari and her brother are limited. This is reinforced by the fact that Ishwari studies in a government school which means that her family do not incur any educational expenses.

Ishwari started as a timid but sincere girl, who struggled to express her thoughts and feelings. She neither had the communication skills nor the desire to speak to others. She knew she had talents but lacked the confidence to display them. She also had a deep-set fear of speaking in front of people.

An obedient girl, with a passion for learning new skills, Ishwari responded well to both the technical sessions related to Creative Arts as well as the life-skills sessions. As her passion for art grew, she overcame her timidity and began asking questions and participating in discussions. Ishwari learnt to work with different art forms- she made bookmarks, clay objects and painting using different mediums. Her talent shone when in the second year she made a beautiful clay idol of Lord Ganesh (the elephant headed God) which was consecrated during the Ganeshotsav celebrations (a 10-day festival celebrating the birth of the God). This was indeed a prestigious moment for Ishwari, her family and her trainers at the Creative Art Academy. Ishwari also participated in an interschool elocution competition and won the 2nd prize.

Ishwari's passion led her to help other students, leading them in the Creative Art sessions and giving them tips to improve their artwork. Her technical skills in painting such as shading and painting on canvas also improved and she was selected to participate in two state level competitive drawing exams in which she excelled, securing A grade (the top grade).

In her third year at the Academy, Ishwari created posters on the importance of cleanliness and hygiene, and following traffic rules which were displayed prominently in her community.

She showcased her talents at the Navratri festival (a 9 days celebration usually held in October during which the Goddesses are worshipped). Ishwari created a series of painting that displayed the different forms of violence meted out to women. She approached the chairperson of the organising committee and asked for an opportunity to display her paintings to the public. Her love for her art enabled her to overcome her fear of speaking in public and Ishwari used a poem which she found online to explain her paintings to the public.

In Ishwari's own words

If I had not been selected for Salaam Bombay Foundation, I might not have been able to express myself and my skills to everyone. I am proud that my painting has been displayed in the exhibition. My dream is to be trained as an artist, painting portraits on canvas.

Ishwari's technical skills as an artist led to a personal transformation and an improvement in other life skills:

- **Confidence:** Her art has given Ishwari immense confidence- she is able to display her art in public and explain its nuances without hesitation.
- **Communication skills:** Ishwari who was unable to speak up in front of others, even to express her opinions is now able to talk to strangers on social issues.

- **Leadership skills:** Ishwari takes the initiative to help other students with their art, giving them suggestions to better themselves.
- **Time management:** She successfully prioritizes things and manages her time efficiently.

Beyond the Self: Using Social Awareness to Transform Families and Communities

Ishwari's financial condition is such that she had no opportunities to explore or develop her talent. Her canvas paintings of Mahadev and Parvati (Indian God and Goddess) were appreciated and her father's friend bought one from her. Her neighbour too was impressed by the painting and asked Ishwari to make a similar one for her. By selling her canvas paintings, Ishwari is moving towards economic freedom. She is also socially aware and uses her talent to create awareness on social issues and transform individuals, families, and communities.

Ishwari not only exemplifies the transformative power of creative art, but is also a visible symbol of the impact of ARTS Academy in terms of changing attitudes and mindsets of entire communities.

However, Ishwari is not the only student from the Creative Arts Academy to follow a new dream. Many students from this academy focus on the following career trajectories - designing merchandise products, acrylic canvas painting, modelling paste canvas art, and clay modelling.

All the children in Ishwari's cohort at the creative arts academy showed significant improvement in their ability to prioritize and manage time. Almost all children demonstrated proficiency in interpersonal communication and emotional management skills. Significant positive and lasting changes were observed in 9 out of 10 children when it came to skills of self-confidence, leadership & group work, creativity, goal-setting, etiquette & social responsibility, hygiene & nutrition, and decision-making.

4. Anmol: Journey: from an introvert to an emotionally mature individual

Anmol was part of the **Music Academy**, where he got an opportunity to explore the world of melodies, rhythms, and harmonies. Here, students receive training in playing musical instruments, vocal techniques, and musical composition. The Music Academy is a platform allowing participants to develop their musical talents and appreciation for different genres. The students also get an opportunity to perform on stage for boosting their confidence. For Anmol, the Music Academy was a place where he also learnt to deal with and manage his emotions.

Anmol originally lived with his parents and two sisters in an urban poor community close to his school in one of Mumbai's eastern suburbs. His father is an electrician. Their income is not fixed as it depends on the amount of work his father gets.

During his time with the Music Academy, Anmol's mother was diagnosed with cancer. Her treatment was in a hospital in Navi Mumbai. So, Anmol and his family shifted to a modest house close to the hospital so that they could be near their mother. The three siblings had to take up all the domestic chores in their mother's absence. Moreover, they had to leave home at 5:30 am so that they reached school on time. Despite the long hours of travel and the extra domestic burden, Anmol loved his music and remained committed to it, staying back after school to attend the classes.

When Anmol joined the Music Academy, he was an enthusiastic but shy and somewhat introverted young boy. He tended to stay in the background with his friends, rarely participating unless encouraged by the trainer and only when accompanied by his friends.

Anmol spoke about how music helped him deal with personal upheaval, about his mother's cancer diagnosis, the challenges he and his sister faced due to her hospitalization. During his second year at the Music Academy, they had to move residences so that they could be close to the hospital. This resulted in

him spending nearly three hours each day travelling to and from school. Although his sisters had stopped participating in any activities, preferring to return home immediately after school hours, Anmol's love for music kept him coming to the class despite all the challenges. "Singing makes me feel better, helps me cope", he affirmed.

Anmol's home circumstances made it difficult for him to participate in different programmes. Rather than be disappointed and upset, he was determined to contribute in some way. Anmol made time to listen to and provide support to the students who were participating. He encouraged and appreciated the singing of others in the class. He also took the initiative to plan the programme, helped in deciding the songs for the solo performances and supported the participants in multiple ways. Anmol's emotional maturity is seen from his unstinting support for his peers and his willingness to help and support sisters during their family crisis.

In Anmol's own words...

Music makes me happy and helps me manage my emotions. I have learnt to be patient. Music and my time in the academy have helped improve my patience level.

Music helped Anmol deal with his own emotions, and support others around him. This emotional maturity led to an improvement in other life skills.

- **Confidence:** Anmol has gone from being unable to sing in class to giving solo performances and creating videos of his performances.
- **Leadership and Team Management:** He took the initiative to plan programmes even though he was unable to participate in them. He encouraged and motivated his peers to give their best performance by identifying songs that best suit them.
- **Creativity:** He has shown his ability to think out of the box, plan, and organize performances.
- **Time management and prioritization:** Anmol successfully balanced his academic work, music practice, and family commitments.

Impact Beyond the Individual: Empowering Peers, Families and Communities

Anmol's family has now moved out of Mumbai to a suburban city in a neighboring district. Anmol's father owns the modest house that they live in. Tragically, Anmol's mother passed away a short while ago. Anmol and his sisters who are also currently studying, continue to be responsible for the domestic chores. His father's income is barely sufficient for their needs, but the family, still recovering from the loss of Anmol's mother, is coping and managing.

Anmol's development was not limited to him. Music has helped him cope with difficult life challenges. Music not only helped him transform into an emotionally mature individual but also provided emotional support and encouragement to his peers and family. A **confident** young man, **sensitive and supportive** of others, Anmol is an example of how ARTS Academy can help individuals, families, and communities by providing opportunities for exploring and discovering one's own hidden qualities and using these to benefit others around them.

Anmol's journey of growth extended beyond his personal development. Through music, he is able to break the cycle of low self-confidence and emotional immaturity, learning to navigate life's challenges with strength and resilience. This transformation not only shaped him into a confident, emotionally grounded young man but also enabled him to offer support and encouragement to his peers and family. Anmol stands as a powerful example of how ARTS Academy empowers individuals to uncover their hidden potential, fostering personal growth that uplifts families and strengthens communities.

Anmol is one of the many students who benefited from spending three years at the Music Academy. As a result of their time at the Music Academy, all children in the Music Academy showed significant development in their self-confidence and ability to communicate clearly and effectively even with strangers. Ninety five percent of children displayed the ability to work efficiently in groups, often taking on leadership roles. Ninety four percent of children were able to use skills related to etiquette & social responsibility and decision making to help peers, family, and others in their communities. Significant positive and lasting changes were noted in 90 percent of the children with respect to skills of hygiene & nutrition, creativity, emotional management, and goal setting.

5. Madiha : Journey from a reserved girl to a confident leader

The Kathak Academy aims to preserve cultural heritage while nurturing grace and rhythm in the participants. Madiha, as student of the Kathak Academy learnt the intricate footwork, graceful movements, and expressive storytelling techniques that are integral to Kathak. For Madiha, in addition to the technical skills, the Kathak Academy provided her an opportunity to develop and foster her leadership skills.

Madiha lives with her parents and younger brother in a modest home in an eastern suburb of Mumbai. Hers is a traditional Muslim family with her father managing a small business providing mobile software and her mother a homemaker. Their income of approximately Rs. 20,000/ month has enabled them to own a home and manage their expenses but there is rarely any money for extras such as learning new skills or developing a hobby.

Although art itself is not new to her family, her paternal uncle was an artist whose paintings sold internationally, dance and music are frowned upon in traditional Muslim families. Initially, Madiha faced a great deal of opposition from her family in her pursuit of kathak.

When Madiha first came to the Kathak Academy, she was a soft-spoken, quiet, and reserved girl who rarely spoke up or asked questions. She faced a lot of opposition from her conservative Muslim family for taking up Kathak. The trainer recalls, “I remember when she was attending 3rd or 4th class with me for Kathak, she came to me early one day and shared that her family was not supportive of her passion for dance, particularly Kathak. She confided in me about how her mother would beat her for wanting to attend dance classes.”

Despite her parent’s disapproval, Madiha was committed to her dance practice and wanted to improve her skills. After discussions with the trainer and the facilitator, Madiha approached her mother first and explained her reasons for wanting to learn kathak. She emphasised the fact that the training was free and that she would never get such an opportunity again. Her mother agreed and convinced Madiha’s father. The process took some time but Madiha persevered.

Madiha did not develop her leadership skills overnight. She started by paying attention to the technical elements of Kathak and improving her own performance. Self-improvement was her first step towards becoming a leader- she began standing in the first row so she could observe the trainer better and asked the trainer to correct her mistakes.

By the end of the third year, Madiha was taking on a leadership role. She would personally go to all the class rooms and get the students together so that the Kathak sessions could start on time. On days when the trainer was delayed or unable to come, Madiha would lead the sessions demonstrating **leadership** and **group work** skills.

A key moment in Madiha’s journey was when she started conducting classes for students who had graduated from the Kathak Academy. The girl who was so shy that she did not initiate conversations in

the class, was now leading and teaching students older than her. The trainer points out that her dedication to learning kathak has led to this. Madiha's **technical knowledge of Kathak elements and dance** are much better than anyone else in her cohort. I am so proud of her for staying true to her passion and for the incredible journey she has had.

In her own words

I have learnt more than dancing. I have learnt to **communicate well, convince people** (especially my parents) and I am so **confident** now. Kathak classes have made a huge difference to my life. I can teach others, help them with their Kathak and that makes me very happy.

In addition to her growth as a leader, Madiha showed progress in other essential life skills :

- **Self-confidence:** From a quiet and reserved girl, Madiha developed into a confident young lady who participates enthusiastically in programmes.
- **Technical skills:** Madiha's technical skills with relation to Kathak are impressive and her trainer has great hopes for her future. Her performances in school programmes and the Salaam Bombay Foundation's annual events have been greatly appreciated.
- **Communication skills:** Madiha is now able to voice her opinions in public.

Spreading the Spark: Motivating and empowering others to Dream Big

For Madiha, Kathak has unlocked doors she did not even know existed. She learnt to voice her thoughts and feelings, and managed to convince her parents. Madiha's parents who did not want her to attend Kathak classes are now whole heartedly supportive of her ambition to teach Kathak. This demonstrates not only Madiha's dedication and skill in Kathak but also her determination and ability to communicate effectively.

She has not only evolved into a talented and confident young lady but also takes the initiative to teach kathak to others in her school and neighborhood. Madiha is sensitive to the dreams of other and helps them fulfill their aspirations. Madiha is yet another shining example for how ARTS Academy creates a ripple effect, transforming families and communities, through individuals.

Madiha is not the only student of the Kathak Academy to grow in confidence. Data shows that children in the Kathak Academy showed significant progress when it came to in skills of self-confidence and interpersonal communication. Nearly all children (99%) had developed skills related etiquette & social responsibility and were able to use these in their neighborhoods. Ninety-five percent of the children displayed exceptional skills of prioritization & time management, and leadership & group work. Nine out of 10 children demonstrated high level of adeptness in skills of hygiene & nutrition, emotional management, and decision making. A high degree of creativity, and an ability to set long term goals were observed in 85 percent of children.

Conclusion

The five case stories clearly bring out the fact that the Art Academies go beyond merely providing children with an arts experience, it has given them the tools to build their futures. By equipping them with skills, the academies have set them on the path to empowerment- children have become agents of change in their families, communities, and beyond. Over the three years, the children have grown from learners to educators (of peers, siblings, parents and often members in their community). The possibility of new jobs and careers has given them the opportunity to escape from poverty and embrace economic independence. The arts experience has transformed the fledgling social change agents into critical thinkers and thought leaders of tomorrow, driving advocacy and civic literacy as technology rapidly changes the platforms and



modes of information assimilation, curation, and distribution.