

# CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INNOVATIONS

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Transforming education  
through new ideas  
and approaches.

**Fostering creativity  
in African schools**

**Digital curriculum  
for social good**

**Mobile phones  
and literacy in  
India and Jordan**

**The potential of  
DJ pedagogy**



 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

## Beyond the Textbook: Performing Arts Go High Tech

“We realized that over the last few decades, the proportion of students receiving arts education had shrunk drastically. When we asked students to share information about their culture and history, we learned that the majority of students lacked knowledge of their own history and culture. It is also important for students to have exposure to other cultures and perspectives. To create this learning environment, teachers need to skillfully draw on student experiences and enrich the curriculum by including art, culture, and history. These experiences and learnings gave birth to our new program of cultural education, called Virsa.” —*Rakesh Gupta, co-Founder of Routes 2 Roots*

**P**romoting art, culture, and heritage throughout the world, with the prime objective of spreading the message of peace, Routes 2 Roots has hosted over 26 international events, 14 exhibitions, and 110 concerts throughout the world. Based in Delhi, India, Routes 2 Roots is constantly striving to disseminate culture, art, and heritage across the world.

Routes 2 Roots also undertakes “Exchange for Change,” the world’s largest oral histories program, which is a year-long activity culminating in select children visiting each other’s countries. This program has been successfully operational since 2010, reaching 20,000 schools and more than 20 million children and growing.

In the course of our expansive work with schools, students, and educators in India, we learned that so many students had negligible exposure to art and culture and the little orientation that was provided often was restricted to the level of annual events. We believed this situation needed to be remedied immediately to ensure students’ holistic development. This is not just important for stimulating the creative side of the brain, it also promotes a cognitive balance.

On our visits to various schools across India, we learned that many schools did not have any music classes. And so we saw the need to not







only provide cultural education, but also make it available to students in the most remote areas of this vast country. Geographical boundaries needed to be traversed without delay in disseminating cultural education. The only way to achieve such a daunting goal was to provide this education through digital means.

We soon realized the drawback to existing digital education approaches was that they only provided one-way transmission. It was like watching a TV broadcast, which did not provide students with a proper learning environment as they could not interact with their teachers. We went back to the drawing board and explained to our technical experts that we needed a real-time classroom experience for these students. The success of our initiative depended on student involvement and engaging their interest in the subject matter, which could not happen with a one-way broadcast.

To address this challenge, we developed Virsa, the first of its kind, which marries technology with telecommunications and art to



**Routes 2 Roots** has provided quality cultural programs across India and in China, Russia, South Africa, the UK, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, among others. Their programs are provided on a non-commercial basis, offering a free shared experience that showcases each other's cultures. It has to its credit numerous prestigious international programs, such as a celebration of 60 years of diplomatic ties between India and China, which was held in four cities throughout China; a celebration of 65 years of Indo-Russian diplomatic ties, which was held in five Russian cities; a Festival of India in South Africa, covering four cities; and many more. Many important functions have been hosted in India, which the honorable President of India, Governors, Chief Ministers, and Ministers have attended, along with a large number of people from all walks of life.

**Routes 2 Roots** also has to its credit a one-of-a-kind initiative to promote Sanskrit and the Vedas, having digitized the four Vedas (ancient Hindu scriptures, written in early Sanskrit and containing hymns, philosophy, and guidance on ritual), with authentic chanting in Sanskrit and subtitling in leading world languages, including English, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, and German.



connect students in thousands of different geographical locations with teachers through real-time interactive classes. The program is one of many examples of how schools are integrating digital technologies with education to make it more engaging, interactive, and relevant in today's high-tech world.

Virsa operates daily live classes, conducted by renowned teachers at our central studio in Delhi. Students are able to attend these live sessions remotely and thereby have the opportunity to engage with maestros from 14 disciplines. The program reaches more than 150 cities in India and abroad. Our goal is to reach 10,000 schools in India, covering all the districts and blocks of the country, over the next three years.

Students also have access to archives of past Virsa classes, which they can watch at any time for reference. The program is further enhanced through live workshops, which are conducted in all schools. Virsa gurus conduct 90-minute sessions with students, exposing them to recitals of vari-

ous disciplines and then holding extensive teaching sessions with the students who attend.

Engaging with art is essential to the human experience. Almost as soon as they develop motor skills, children begin communicating through artistic expression. "We find that a substantial increase in cultural education has a remarkable impact on students at multiple levels, including academic, social, and emotional aspects," says Tina Vachani, co-founder of Routes 2 Roots.

There are strong reasons to believe that engagement in arts education can improve school climate, empower students with a sense of purpose and ownership, and enhance mutual respect for teachers and peers. Cultural education can have a significant positive impact on both academic and social development. Because schools play a pivotal role in cultivating the next generation of citizens and leaders, it is imperative that we support schools in providing this educational experience for students. Virsa is a step in that direction!