

THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



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Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of 'The ArtSparks Angle', Professional Learning Program Newsletter. In this edition we highlight research undertaken and presented in Harvard's Project Zero report, 'The Qualities of Quality' offers insights on broadening learning through enriching art experiences. In this issue we also have Mahaingam Bartholomew from Teach for North East, a past EdSparks Collective participant, sharing his story of bringing transformative art education experiences to the children he serves.

Quality Experiences in Art Education



In this article, we bring forth findings from the riveting research study, 'Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education', conducted by Project Zero, led by Steve Seidel at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and commissioned by Wallace Foundation. Their research data gathered by hundreds of literature reviews, expert interviews and site visits, offers us thought-provoking ideas that give center stage to extending and broadening learning experiences through the arts, for those both in and outside the classroom.

Rich learning experiences through the arts must entail engagement at all levels and help children grow and develop in various ways. One of the most important purposes of art education is to build the capacity to think creatively and to make connections. This study identified multiple purposes of arts education;

- Fostering broad dispositions and skills, especially the capacity to think creatively and the capacity to make connections. These capacities are often called 'dispositions' or 'habits of mind'.
- Teaching artistic skills and techniques
- Developing aesthetic awareness
- Providing ways of understanding the world.
- Helping students engage with community, civic and social issues
- Providing a safe space for students to express themselves.

- Helping students develop as individuals. (Steve Seidel, 2009)

Quality in art education is brought out by experiences **with quality** like using materials that are a good fit for an activity. Additionally, it entails experiences **of quality** where there are opportunities for developing skills like collaboration, communication, and more.

Aspects of the experience must be visible in the setting and surroundings itself. What kind of activities and projects the children are engaged in, the teaching practices followed, the social relationships among the children, teachers and adults, the space and resources available and the amount of time given for children to engage in the arts.

Those outside the classroom, like decision-makers and administrators, who make program-defining decisions and set the framework for pursuing quality, play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of learning experiences provided through art. The report highlights some important points that decision-makers and administrators can consider while making decisions; what, where and how are the arts taught, who teaches art and how are the learnings assessed.

These findings are important in the context of building visibility about things that are often ignored while setting up art programs and is also relevant to the Indian context in terms of bringing art into schools in a robust manner where the positionality of the arts is elevated.

Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Mahaingam Bartholomew, from Teach for North East, our EdSparks Collective (2021-22) participant, in this section. ArtSparks' EdSparks Collective is an annual professional development program attended by different organizations and individuals across India. This excerpt includes Mahaingam's experience of participating in EdSparks Collective and conducting Action Learning Project (ALP) as part of the program. Through the ALP, our EdSparks participants get an opportunity to implement the learnings from the program into the field and broaden their own understandings of art education.

I am a Teach for North East fellow, teaching in under-resourced government schools with students coming from low-income families. My teaching emphasizes on social-emotional learning and bridging the educational gap. I had conducted the *Action Learning Project* - as part of ArtSparks' EdSparks Collective Program - with 5th and 6th grade students from Phungyar Higher Secondary School, Kamjong-Manipur.

The ALP sessions started with my students showing great enthusiasm and excitement, filled with curiosity. It was interesting to observe their reactions when they were told to draw their artworks from their own imagination. Few students went ahead to play with and explore art mediums, some needed assurance that they were doing fine, some started by following their peers and then adapted it, giving their own personal touch and managed to create a unique and amazing final piece. A few who were initially shy about their work, sought their friends' validation and got excited with their encouragement. At first it was hard to get them into a system of following pre-work instructions and to get them to work collaboratively

"The arts develop an openness to unlearn, be flexible with your approach or methods, encouraging us to not be set in one pattern or method of doing things."

with each other. When they were told to closely observe the animal pictures and draw them, they said, "Shaknarei" (*It will be difficult*). The children were also reluctant to do their work without an eraser, saying "Eraser masingkha mararmarei" (*without an eraser, I won't be able to draw*).

However, something that was evident from the very first session, was the increase in children's curiosity, especially while using the magnifying glass to get all the details from the pictures. The children started experimenting and tried many exciting things with the magnifying glass.

There were several instances where I noticed changes in skills and attitudes among the children. One particular child, Ram (name changed), found it very difficult to break away from familiar ways and try something new. He thought multiple pencil strokes makes artwork 'untidy'. Ram's patience was finally put to test when we started working on collage at a later stage. This was something completely new for him that he had never tried before. His collage piece turned out to be one of the best pieces from the class. All the other children liked his collage and encouraged him as well. Another child, Alok (name changed), whose teacher expressed that he is very poor in drawing, came up with an amazing imaginary animal which he was so happy and proud to share with everyone.



"..by the end of the session they would make their very own masterpieces rather than making a replica of another's artwork".

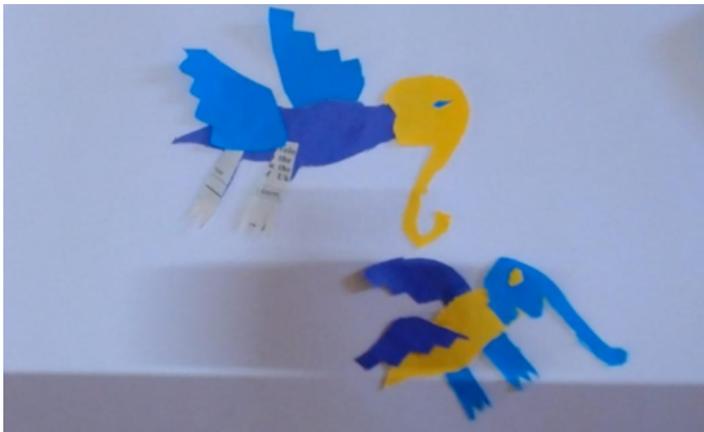
The only girl in the class, Chiara (name changed), was very quiet throughout the sessions and would hardly speak to anyone, but by the last session she was much more comfortable and cheerfully shared about her work with others.

The children also came up with a solution themselves to collaborate with each other. They decided they would keep the picture half way from everyone and they made a rule *"no touching, only looking"*. The children quickly got used to this process-oriented approach in the art class and realized the importance of each stage. The whole experience became very enjoyable for them.

The *Action Learning Project* helped in bringing out

optimism and positivity, by encouraging the students to think about what works, instead of what does not work.

I have looked at the sessions as liberating, letting children explore their creativity with no judgement of what is right or wrong. I had faith to expect the best outcome that came from their heart and beautiful minds. As I demonstrated techniques, I reminded the children that by the end of the session they would make their very own masterpieces rather than making a replica of another's artwork. It was a great learning experience for the children and for me too. As a facilitator of arts, I feel managing the classroom and engaging the students are of utmost importance. Things like preparing ahead of sessions, having effective communication skills and most importantly openness to unlearn and embrace change is something that came to the forefront. Also, being flexible with your approach or methods and not being set in one pattern or method of doing things.



Upcoming Events

ArtSparks Annual Exhibition (Virtual)



An Exhibition of Children's Art

23rd April 2022, Saturday

10:00 am - 11:30 am

We along with our children are all ready for the second virtual annual exhibition! We are excited for you to see them showcase their work with pride. The children will be presenting various activities and artworks that they have done in the past year, followed by a discussion with our guest speaker;



Prakash Iyer

Prakash did an MSc in physics at Bombay University, and a diploma in cultural studies with CSCS (Center for Study of Culture and Society). He worked in the software industry for a decade before entering the world of education reform. His work in education included managing education reform initiatives, building a community of people committed to education reform, and organizing debates on critical educational issues. Philosophy of education is his main area of work, with a particular focus on moral and political philosophy, and democratic education.

To attend the exhibition, please register here: <https://forms.gle/AhuZY7Mw8h4be7Wv8>

*"Art has the role in education of helping children
become more like themselves instead of more like everyone else"*

—MaryAnn F. Kohl