

# 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. We are introducing a new series on Champions of Art Education, through which we bring to you the works of some powerful voices in the field of art education. We also have Rohit from LECIN, our EdSparks Collective cohort member, narrating his experience of incorporating new learnings from the program to bringing meaningful and rich learning experiences to children.

## Champions of Art Education: Elliot Eisner

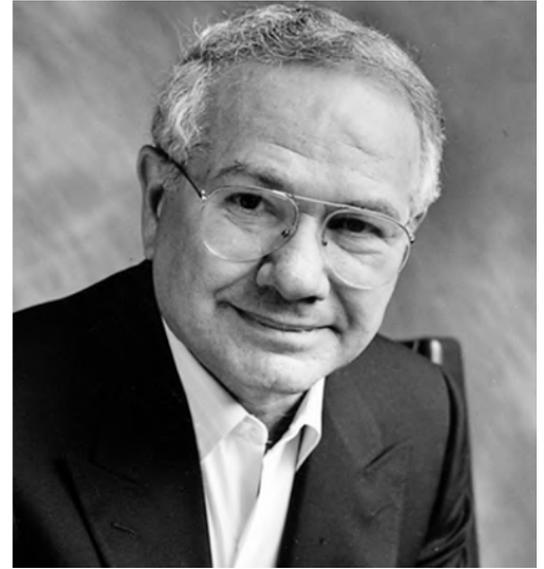


Photo Credit: Stanford Graduate School of Education

*In this article, we celebrate the late and great Elliot Eisner, a renowned scholar and one of the pioneers of art education. Eisner wrote over a dozen books and published several papers addressing art education, aesthetic intelligence, curriculum, teaching, learning, etc. and frequently spoke in many national and international conferences. He received several honors for his work on education and served on the editorial boards of many acclaimed educational journals.*

Eisner was a fervent advocate for the arts in education. Throughout his career as the Professor of Education at *Stanford University* and Professor Emeritus of Art, he championed ways that the arts could benefit student learning, as well as educational practice. Eisner made a strong case for developing proper attention to the cognitive in art rather than it being only driven by emotional and creative forces. He argued that the arts is critical in developing skills in children and incorporating methods from the arts into teaching of other subjects would cultivate a richer educational experience. Art can act as both a powerful guide and critical tool in teaching practice.

In his book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, he states that including the arts in the curriculum is important for the development of thinking skills and a better understanding of the world. He disagrees with those who believe that the arts are secondary to education's core curriculum and not intellectually demanding. Through the book, Eisner further strengthens the

argument that art can stimulate cognitive processes which are not easily achieved in other disciplines.

Eisner provides us with a fresh perspective on what the arts can contribute to education and what we can learn from the arts. One lesson the arts teach is that there can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem. In contrast to our education system which over emphasizes "one correct" answer for all, the arts teach children that their personal signature is important and that answers to questions and solutions to problems need not be identical. Art encourages us to see and interpret the world in multiple ways.

Another lesson that the arts can teach education is the importance of imagination. The arts provide a platform for seeing things in ways other than they are normally seen. In so doing they help us wonder, "Why not?". Especially in today's changing times, the world needs more creative and flexible thinkers who are capable of seeing the beyond.

According to Eisner(2004), the important outcomes in education are located not within the school, but outside it. He envisions "*a culture of schooling in which more importance is placed on exploration than on discovery, more value is assigned to surprise than to control, more attention is devoted to what is distinctive than to what is standard and that has a greater focus on becoming than on being*" (p.10).

## Spotlight: Story From the Field

*It gives us great pleasure to showcase Rohit Kumar, Co-founder, LECIN and our EdSparks Collective (2020-21) participant, in this section. This excerpt highlights the efforts taken by Rohit to incorporate new learnings from the EdSparks Collective program to bringing meaningful and rich learning experiences to children they serve.*

Let's Educate Children In Need (LECIN) is a non-profit organization which started its operation in 2015. We have two major programs - Early Childhood Education and Community Library. At present, we are running a Balwadi in Delhi and recently started working in a rural village of UP. Since the inception of LECIN, art has always been an integral part of our sessions. EdSparks Collective made us realize the true potential of robust approach in art.

Art has always been an important part of my life. Since the age of 3, I started doing art and enjoyed creating art with different materials. In the past, we have facilitated various art sessions with our children at LECIN, but most of them were conducted in a traditional manner which is more didactic in nature. The children were simply asked to follow certain steps and create a product. The focus was more on getting the right end product. But as we progressed with the sessions, I felt that something was missing or wrong in the way we were doing art; as I knew that art is a more powerful tool and it has the power to enrich both minds and hearts of people. And, I was in search for a robust method to teach art to children. That's how I came to know about ArtSparks Foundation and EdSparks Collective.

*"Slowly, I started to find answers to many questions that I previously had about art and teaching art, the confusion faded away and I gained immense confidence to become a good art educator. Now, the one thought which constantly revolves in my mind when I facilitate any art session is – Process is more important than the product."*

From Day 1 of EdSparks Collective, it has triggered a lot of ideas and thoughts in me. Slowly, I started to find answers to many questions that I previously had about art and teaching art, the confusion faded away and I gained immense confidence to become a good art educator. Now, the one thought which constantly revolves in my mind when I facilitate any art session is – Process is more important than the product. I can proudly say ArtSparks holds a special place in our lives. The shift, the realizations, the learnings, the unlearning, the exposure, the reflections during EdSparks definitely have impacted us personally and professionally. Today, the shift in mindset about art and art education is truly evident in each of our team members. Next, let me share some stories of what happened after EdSparks Collective.

The first change that we adopted was emphasizing on open-ended conversations with children and we repeatedly shared the thought that our focus must be on process rather than product. We talked about



robust art approach with all our facilitators. The second was a challenge to break some myths about art and art education among our facilitators. Most of them lacked the confidence to do art and thought that they cannot do it well. I wanted to burst this mindset and make them realize that art is much more than just making perfect things. So, we started off with some material explorations and introduced them to the robust teaching methodology which included having specific objectives, scaffolding, gradual progression of lessons, participatory demo, etc.

We conducted many sessions with the facilitators to explore and experience this robust methodology on their own before they introduce it to the children. Since last few months, facilitators have become more confident with art. Recently, we conducted a virtual session on creating hybrid animal puppets. With many goals, one was to let them overcome the fear of making mistakes, to take some creative risks and feel the complete power of process. We started with close observation and ended up creating a story on the animals in a zoo. Everyone came up with a name for their hybrid animal and the special power it possess. Later, the story was shared within the team.

Some of the reflections shared by the facilitators included:

*"Muje bharosa nhi tha ki mai ye bana paungi lekin mene pura kiya." (In the beginning, I was not sure if I will be able to create the hybrid animal puppet, but I was able to completely do it)*

*"Bhaiya, sketching me ye important nahi hai ki hum kesa bana rahe hai par ye important hai ki hum kitna dhyan se dekh rahe hai, observe kar rahe details ko." (While sketching, it is important how closely we observe the animal by paying attention to the details on it rather than how perfectly we can draw it)*

*"Agar aap humein push nahi karte ki aur naye patterns kese bana sakte hai, aur naya kya kar sakte hai, toh hum naye patterns nahi bana paate." (If you wouldn't have told us to push ourselves and try something new, we wouldn't have been able to come up our own new patterns)*

Before EdSparks Collective, we underestimated the creative and cognitive capabilities of children. We are now conducting various sessions with children using recyclables, tempera paints, natural clay, oil pastels, etc. We, at LECIN, are constantly exploring art with children and exposing our facilitators to the world of art and its immense potential in children's learning, growth and development. Now, since all of us are physically disconnected due to the pandemic, the arts is helping us to bridge the gaps. We are able to remotely connect with our children by sharing art activities through WhatsApp. First, we test and experiment the activities with our facilitators and then we send it to the children. Most of the activities require only simple found objects. Recently, the children made a sculpture of their favourite animal using the utensils in the kitchen. As an organization, we are constantly exploring and thinking about what new and more we can do to serve our children.



## Upcoming Event

### ArtSpeaks Session



#### Exploring the Role of Art & Artists in Society

28th May 2021

4:30 pm - 6:00 pm (IST)

What is the role of art and artists in society, especially in these divisive and fast changing times? How can we develop meaningful collaborations between artists and communities?

Join us for an interactive discussion, where we explore the role of art and artists in empowering communities, building collaborations and bringing social change. We will be in conversation with a few interesting artists from across India.

To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/VLdcQjK1Jni72wC59>

*"The arts are fundamental resources through which the world is viewed, meaning is created and the mind developed" —Elliot Eisner*