

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 the Champions of Art Education series, we feature one of the pioneers and powerful voices in art education, Viktor Lowenfeld. We also have Megha from Adhvan Foundation, a past EdSparks Collective participant, sharing her story of bringing transformative art education experiences to children in child care institutions.

Champions of Art Education: Viktor Lowenfeld



Photo Credit: Pennsylvania State University

*In this article, we celebrate the late and great Viktor Lowenfeld, a Viennese artist, scholar, psychologist, educator, prolific writer and speaker, and one of the powerful voices in art education. He was the professor and chairman of art education at the Pennsylvania State University. Lowenfeld was one of the pioneers who helped to define and develop the field of art education in the United States. His book, *Creative and Mental Growth* (1947), became the single most influential textbook in art education.*

Lowenfeld began his career by teaching in the elementary schools in Vienna while attending the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Later, he moved to the United States and became one of the powerful and cogent voices in art education. Lowenfeld believed that art is not just for those who were artistically talented, but for everyone to develop and enhance their creativity and self-expression. Most often in the art classes art is taught in such a way that it creates a notion that art is only for certain children who are born with artistic talent. The focus is more on creating perfect drawings or paintings which thereby limits a child's creative, cognitive, social, emotional, and even physical development. According to Lowenfeld, the purpose of art education is to develop creativity and skills in children so that it could transfer to other spheres of life.

Lowenfeld believed that evidence of aesthetic, social, physical, intellectual, and emotional growth is reflected in the art of children. He further developed a theory of stages in artistic development. The stages consisted of

1. Scribble;
2. Pre-schematic;
3. Schematic;
4. Dawning Realism;
5. Pseudorealism; and
6. Period of decision/crisis.

Each stage has its own distinct qualities and knowing these will help us to best serve the needs of children. In his book, *Creative and Mental Growth* (1947), he describes the characteristics of child art at each stage of development and prescribes appropriate types of art media and activities for each age. Understanding these artistic stages of development will help educators to design art interventions that are challenging as well as can provide numerous learning opportunities to develop skills and attitudes in children. Lowenfeld never regarded child art as an end in itself. He stated that, "*The goal of education is not the art itself, or the aesthetic product, or the aesthetic experience, but rather the child who grows up more creatively and sensitively and applies his experience in the arts to whatever life situations may be applicable.*"

Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Megha Dharnidharka, Founder, Adhvan Foundation, our EdSparks Collective (2020-21) participant, in this section. This excerpt includes Megha'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 library educator and I facilitate weekly library sessions with children living in Child Care Institutions with a view to supporting their holistic education by fostering a love for reading, supporting literacy and language development and enhancing their life skills. I conducted the ALP with 15 adolescent girls at Asha Sadan, a Child Care Institution in Mumbai.

The initial ALP sessions were a little difficult for children as they were used to creating greeting cards and other craft items by looking at samples. They weren't comfortable creating without a road map to guide them and the idea of exploring a medium was new and challenging for them. Non-representational took them further from what was familiar and made the experience more difficult. Initially they would want the activity to end after 15-20 minutes. They had never been given so much time to explore and it was difficult for them to keep pushing themselves to see what else was possible. Towards the end of the ALP they began to value having time to figure things out and as they began creating their 3-D paper collage communities they began to ask for more time for experimentation, which was a remarkable shift.

"The truly remarkable part of the ALP was that it enabled all children to grow and move according to their own pace."

During the different sessions it was evident that self-esteem influenced children's engagement with the different activities. Those who were more confident and self-assured allowed themselves to play with the medium and to explore it. Those who were more self-conscious needed more support to even begin the process of exploration. Fear of judgment from self and others prevented them from even beginning. In the beginning, I offered children a lot of hand holding and encouragement to help them overcome their inhibitions. During the later sessions I tried giving them space when they struggled with the constraints of the activity. I realized that sometimes trying to motivate children when they felt stuck made them hold onto their beliefs more strongly. Instead, giving them the space when they said *"Main yeh nahin kar sakti."* (I cannot do this) *"Agar aap mujhe rubber nahi doge to main nahi banaungi."* (If you won't give me an eraser, I won't make this) enabled them to return to their activity after sitting still for 5 minutes. When no one was looking or trying to convince them to try; their natural curiosity took over. Observing them I began to understand the importance of taking a step back and allowing children to tap into their internal resources for overcoming their resistance instead of providing external motivation.

The truly remarkable part of the ALP was that it enabled all children to grow and move according to



their own pace. Even though they were engaged in the same activity each one had to overcome their own challenges and push themselves in different ways. For some working independently was challenging while some struggled to work collaboratively.

As the ALP involved numerous processes it offered children many diverse opportunities. Some children took on leadership roles for the first time. Some were reticent during the ideation stage, but contributed significantly during the construction stage. This made me realize the importance of thoughtfully creating groups to help children move out of internalized roles in group work. Repeated reminders of the ground rules for collaboration and the opportunity to work with the same group on the same idea over multiple sessions strengthened their teamwork.

As the sessions progressed, children's self-confidence and focus grew. During the initial sessions they would request me to play music as they worked. Towards the end of the ALP, they were so focused on their work that they had no interest in anything else. During the second session creative risk taking started to emerge. Three to four girls began to attempt really tall structures. One girl's tall structure fell 5 minutes after she created it. She then spent 15-20 minutes trying to find a way to make it stand exploring 6-7 different options. I was truly impressed with her perseverance and the creative thinking skills she mobilized to solve the problem.

Experiencing the robust art education approach through the EdSparks was truly revolutionary. It

changed my notions and assumptions about art education. Not only did I begin to value art education as a standalone and not just a medium for learning, but I was also deeply dismayed at the disservice I had been doing to my children by introducing art activities irregularly through conventional didactic approaches. Through EdSparks, I learnt the potential of visual arts in developing life skills in children and as well as adults.

After the first half of EdSparks Collective, I noticed a significant shift in my own creative thinking skills and perseverance. After experiencing these dramatic shifts in my own thought process, I was extremely eager to explore this intervention with the children. I had assumed that children would love this new approach. But I had failed to account for years of conditioning. While some were excited to begin, others were a little vary of this new approach. This wasn't just a fun art session where they could decompress, but a structured intervention that challenged them to grow. I could see the resistance in children. However, their resistance only strengthened my resolve. Their resistance was proof that these activities were pushing them out of their comfort zone, forcing them to grow in ways that they hadn't been challenged to do so far. Seeing my children grow and strengthen key life skills through the ALP process has convinced me beyond a shadow of a doubt that this robust approach to art intervention is critical for all children.

This program has completely shifted my perspective. My experience during EdSparks and the growth in my children through the ALP have convinced me that our library programmes at Adhvan need to include robust art education to effectively enhance children's life skills.



Upcoming Event

Learning Circle *(Only for EdSparks Cohort Members)*



Ideas & Themes: Developing Social Emotional-Learning through Art **26th & 27th Nov. 2021**

We are happy to present the 9th Learning Circle with our EdSparks cohort members! The intent of the learning circle is to continuously build and share knowledge around art education with the cohort members through hands-on sessions and discussions.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential to children's well-being. From effective problem-solving to self-discipline, from impulse control to emotion management and more, SEL provides a foundation for positive, long-term effects on children, adults, and communities.

Join us for an interactive and hands-on session where we explore different themes and ideas for art-based activities to foster social-emotional learning skills in children through visual art!!

To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/dB7p4DSjqwnfyTVD9>

"Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information."

—Paulo Freire