

# THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



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## Welcome Message

We are happy to present the second edition of '**The ArtSparks Angle**', Professional Learning Program Newsletter. In this edition, we discuss about the existing educational practices in India and the need of transforming the educational system to meet the changing times. We also have one of our EdSparks Collective cohort member, sharing some of her interesting experiences working with children using arts in the community library.

## Reimagining Education Through Visual Arts



*The article is written by Nisha Nair, Founder & Director of ArtSparks Foundation and author of the book 'ArtSparks'. Nisha has been involved in the education sector for 15 years in varied settings, from museums to intergovernmental organizations, schools to nonprofit institutions, both in the US and India. This article was published in Business World as part of a case analysis on the state of education in India.*

Memorisation. Lack of understanding. Uninspired learning. Disengagement. These are just some of the many terms used to describe the education system and school experiences of many children across India. Studies reveal that the heavy reliance on textbooks, uncritical assimilation of content, and narrow assessments in the form of tests, all perpetuate rote learning in classrooms. This, in turn, compromises deeper levels of understanding and development of higher order thinking skills. The rigid system marginalises a number of children. And the inordinate value placed on testing promotes a single, limited conception of intelligence, to the detriment of others. While educationists like late Sir Ken Robinson have promulgated the theory that “Human communities depend upon a diversity of talent not a singular conception of ability”, the

education system in India fails to accommodate this diversity.

Needless to say, our education system is in need of comprehensive reform. A system of education developed to meet the demands of colonial rule and the Industrial revolution is inadequately prepared to meet the needs of the 21st century and beyond. But transforming the system into something else of value requires asking the right questions: What is the purpose of education? What skills and attitudes do our children need for an enriched life?

We live in a time where things are continually evolving. And the future is uncertain. In order to thrive in such environments, children need to be equipped with a different set of skills and attitudes—those that prepare them to tackle the known, and also the unknown. Research indicates that 21st century learning skills and attitudes such as creativity, problem solving, independent and flexible thinking, risk taking, collaboration, communication, and more are of greater value to children’s holistic development and future success than acquiring static knowledge. It is not enough to just know

something, but it's your capacity to envision, test the limits of your knowledge, make connections, draw inferences, challenge assumptions, and contextually apply knowledge, that is of importance. In fact, creativity — a skill that receives short shrift within our education system — has been promoted by leaders across industries/sectors, to be the number one predictor of future success, and important for the creation of a vibrant and productive workforce (IBM study).

An education system that values developing 21st century learning skills and attitudes is one that embraces a hands-on, experiential, interdisciplinary, and inquiry-based approach. It cultivates in children an enduring understanding that a single problem can often have multiple solutions. It sees mistakes as a necessary part of learning. And, it rewards asking the right questions that help expand understanding, rather than memorising answers. By recognising that all new learning emerges from prior learning and understandings, and the interactions between the two, such a system sees learning as a dynamic, interactive, and recursive process.

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Given that the stakes are high, it is necessary to recognise the importance of actively involving all major stakeholders (government, educators, parents) in pushing the agenda for reform. We need a multi-pronged approach. We need to look to schools across the country that have successfully implemented alternative approaches to educating children (within syllabus parameters); document and share best practices; bring greater awareness about the value of alternatives (such as arts-based learning, for example). Engaged and informed parents that embrace a broader vision of education will be empowered to collectively demand systemic change. Engaging experts from academia and diverse fields in advocacy efforts can also help us move towards an education system that reflects the needs of the 21st century and beyond.



## Spotlight: Story from the Field

*This story is by Ruchi Dhona, founder of the organization - 'Let's Open a Book'. The excerpt is part of the Action Learning Project of the EdSparks Collective Program.*

It had been a while since I was looking for an inclusive art based intervention which would create an environment in which every child would thrive. This search led me to Artsparks Foundation's - EdSparks Collective program. When I joined the EdSparks Collective, I intuitively knew that an art intervention could be a very powerful tool for working with children. As part of the program, I conducted field project at The Community Library Project's library in sector 43, Gurgaon - a free community library, open to everyone. There were 11 participants of age group 10 years and below.

When we started the workshop, participants were a little unsure of what to expect, since the art classes in their schools are quite different. I could see that this was clearly out of their comfort zone - in fact in the beginning a couple of them were quite reluctant to actively participate. Participants were encouraged to seek support from their peers and be appreciative of each others' work. And the overall module was designed such that at the end of it, every artwork created by the participants was diverse and unique.

As the sessions progressed, some of them would often want to stay on and work on their pieces even

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It was quite impressive to see how participant behavior evolved over the sessions. For example, Baby was quite reserved during most part of the workshop - in the beginning she hardly uttered a word. But on the last day she smiled and happily shared her work with others. Khushi took it upon herself to help me, so she would show up fifteen minutes before everyone else did and helped out with putting out things that we needed during the session. The other interesting thing was that initially the boys were quite hesitant about speaking with the girls. But eventually everyone opened up to each other.

This field project has helped me understand that a robust approach in teaching Arts can infuse the joy of exploration with a meaningful learning experience.



## Upcoming Events

### Event #1: EdSparks Collective 2020-21



*"I had never realized the importance of art in education until my Manager had me attend EdSparks Collective. The program was an eye opener and I saw the wide spectrum of learning opportunities that art could bring inside the classroom. The opportunity to enable students to observe, explore, communicate and critically think".*

- Revathi, Program Manager, Mantra for Change,  
EdSparks Collective 2017-18 participant



*"Exploration with scaffolding is an interesting aspect of the ArtSparks methodology. It has encouraged my 5-year old to be creative, take risks & make mistakes, be disappointed yet not discouraged, and to try again. ArtSparks methodology is teaching her life skills through art."*

- Santhoshi, Parent & Freelance in social sector,  
EdSparks Collective 2019-20 participant

**EdSparks Collective 2020-21**, is a **12-session professional development program** offered by **ArtSparks Foundation** in collaboration with Wipro Foundation, for all those eager to explore the full potential of the arts in enriching children's learning, growth, and development.

Each session is carefully designed to gradually build participants capacity to design and implement enriching educational interventions that use visual arts to foster 21st century learning and life skills in children.

Register for **EdSparks Collective** , explore the educational value of arts and be part of a community of reflective practitioners with a shared purpose!

**Dates:** Oct. 5 to Oct. 10, 2020 & Jan. 4 to 9, 2021

**Timings:** 9:30 am to 12:30 pm & 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm

**Location:** Virtually (via. Zoom)

**Last date for registration:** Sept. 12, 2020

More details regarding the program, including the registration form, can be accessed at this link:

<http://www.art-sparks.org/edsparks-collective.html>

## #2 : ArtSpeaks Session



### In Conversation with Dr. Razia I. Sadik *Shaping Art Educators: Opportunities and Challenges*

12th Sept. 2020

4:30 pm - 6:00 pm IST

**Speaker details:** Dr. Razia I. Sadik is an art educator, scholar and curator. She is an Associate Professor at the Syed Ahsan Ali & Syed Maratib Ali School of Education, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). She is also a founding editor of the Journal of Art Education, Pakistan (JAEP), the first refereed journal on art pedagogy and curriculum in Pakistan. Dr. Sadik received her doctorate in Art Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York and her MA from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts (UAL) London.

To register for the session, please click: <https://forms.gle/hpsejYu8wVpP6Dkd8>

## #3 : EdSparks Extended Session



### Creating Your Own Art Materials

26th Sept. 2020

2:00 pm - 5:00 pm IST

(Exclusive for EdSparks Collective Cohort members)

Have you imagined that we can ever create paint brushes from twigs and leaves? Can we create colors from the everyday spices that we use?

The natural world is wonderfully diverse and varied. In this session, we will engage with the participants to create their own art kit by observing, exploring and collecting materials from the world around them. The participants will also learn techniques to use different mediums to create art materials.

For more details of the session, please visit the ASF website.

*"The arts aren't just important because they improve math scores. They're important because they speak to parts of children's being which are otherwise untouched."*

- Sir Ken Robinson