

THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



In This Issue

- 1 Shaping the Future through Visual Arts
- 2 Spotlight: Story From the Field
- 3 Upcoming Events
 - Virtual Annual Exhibition
 - Online Workshop

Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of '**The ArtSparks Angle**', Professional Learning Program Newsletter. In this edition, we discuss the role of visual arts in arming children with key skills for the future. We also have Manasi from Ayang Trust, our EdSparks Collective cohort members, narrating her experience of incorporating new learnings from the EdSparks Collective to develop a robust art-integrated library curriculum for the children they serve.

Shaping the Future through Visual Arts



"With the quickly changing employment landscape and global ecosystem, it is becoming increasingly critical that children not only learn, but more importantly learn how to learn. Education thus, must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields."
- National Education Policy, 2020

There is no doubt that the world is changing rapidly. The pandemic has undoubtedly brought with it unprecedented challenges to so many. It has forced many of us to push our limits, think beyond the possibilities and come up with creative solutions. In order to thrive and be successful in such situations, children need to be equipped with a set of skills and attitudes—those that prepare them to tackle the known, and also the unknown. But unfortunately, our education system is still marked by assimilation of knowledge through didactic methods of teaching, rote learning and heavy reliance on textbooks featuring narrow content (Kumar, 1988). This can be attributed to decades of colonial rule and its administrative policies that sought to control knowledge acquisition (Kumar, 2009). This inhibit children's capacity to think independently, explore and experiment, make their own choices, problem solve, and so much more. As a result, our children are taught to memorize the concepts from textbooks without understanding how to apply these learnings in real-life situations.

As the 2016 World Economic Forum report on The Future of Jobs predicted, the top necessary skills required for the fourth industrial revolution will be complex problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity, alongside emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility. Significant research studies indicates that visual arts play an important role in developing these skills in children otherwise missing from the school curriculum.

The late and great Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education at Stanford University, cautioned against attitudes to art being coloured as outlets for emotional and creative expression. He argues that meaningful art interventions can foster flexible thinking and problem-solving skills in children. Art can teach children that problems have more than one solution and there are multiple ways to see and interpret the world. When confronted with emerging work environments and rapidly changing technologies, visual arts will ensure that individuals are able to flourish, and not flounder.

Many other disciplines have already realized the potential of visual arts and started to introduce it as a subject in their course. Schools including Harvard Medical School and the University of Texas at Austin's Dell Medical School, have developed their own arts programs to nurture critical thinking, close observation, problem-solving skills and build empathy in students.

Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Manasi Baishya from Ayang Trust at Majuli, Assam, past EdSparks Collective (2020-21) participants, in this section. This excerpt highlights the efforts taken by Manasi to incorporate new learnings from the EdSparks Collective in conducting a workshop with facilitators and developing a robust art-integrated library program.

At Ayang Trust (estd. 2017), we are working towards an equitable society with sustainable access to quality education and dignified livelihoods in Assam. We work with 27 government schools with 1366 children in Majuli through our Mobile Library Project. Along with the partner school library sessions, Ayang also has a community library to share the joy of reading with the community. Art has always been a part of our library project.

Edsparks Collective program provided me with the opportunities to challenge my perspectives towards the visual arts. As a learner, I felt the freedom to explore my fullest potential and as an educator I learned to create a space with specific objectives, where the learners can explore and discover. Some of my key learnings from the program are:

- The critical role of the visual arts in education and the association of art and life skills, which are essential for the holistic development of the child.
- As educators, we have a lot to learn from the process of art-making which can be integrated into our teaching practice. I also learnt the

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importance of creating a safe, brave and non-judgmental space for oneself and others.

- A robust process with specific goals and scaffolding creates a space for the learners to explore their full potential.
- The program helped us to realize the power of investigation and exploration. It drives curiosity and encourages the learner to try all the unexplored aspects of the medium, which leads to new learnings and discoveries.

The Action Learning Project (ALP), conducted as part of the Edsparks Collective program helped us to reflect on the various nuances in our approach towards art. At the end of the ALP, I witnessed the development in children's patience, eagerness towards investigation, problem solving skill, and attention to details. Every child's art was distinct and reflected their own thinking and imagination process. I felt happy and fulfilled after the project.

Our new learnings and experiences from the ALP and Edsparks Collective encouraged us to design an art-integrated library curriculum for our organization to enhance the learning experience of the children.



We designed an art-integrated library curriculum based on theme of nature. We piloted the curriculum with our education team members. From planning, designing the curriculum to implementing, a lot of learning happened in the process. One of the major reflections while designing the curriculum was the importance of testing out each art medium and process in the lesson plan to understand the feasibility before incorporating it into the curriculum.

During debrief sessions, the team members shared their learnings and reflections. Some of the interesting reflections included:

"Initially it was difficult to do the sketch without using the eraser, but while doing the close observation of the leaf I completely forgot that I have not used the eraser, I was so engrossed in the details of the leaf."

"It was unknown to me that oil pastel can be used in so many ways."

"I am discovering more and more without fear and gaining confidence in the process."

It was interesting to observe that each of them was fully engrossed in the process and eagerly looking forward to new sessions everyday to learn and experience the new robust teaching methodology in art education. At the end of piloting the curriculum, we organized an exhibition, to share and celebrate everyone's artworks with other teams from different verticals.

Finally, the participants shared their experience of the curriculum and robust teaching methodology in art education. Some of the responses included:

"After so many years I had a pleasant experience in art. There is a vast difference between what I learnt in my art class at school and what I experienced in the session. There was no peer pressure and competition. I got ample opportunities and time to express my ideas. I was to allowed to explore the materials without any restrictions. I enjoyed the entire process including close observation, ideation sketches and creating hybrid trees."

"While closely observing the plant and drawing, I was able to discover so many patterns and shapes that I never imagined before!"

"The session helped us to gain insights into our own selves, challenging our own perspectives towards art based on our past experiences. We had the freedom of expressing ourselves without the fear of being judged or wrong. Initially, we were not allowed to use erasers while drawing, it was quite challenging in the beginning but later we never felt the need of an eraser. We paid close attention to every minute details in the plant and hence an eraser was never required."

We are looking forward to designing more art-integrated library curriculums for lower primary classes and eagerly waiting to implement it with our children soon after the library project resumes in our partnered schools.



#1: Virtual Annual Exhibition



Reimagining Education - An Exhibition of Children's Art & Design **17th April 2021** **10:00 am - 12:00 pm (IST)**

We along with our children are geared up for the first virtual annual exhibition! We are very excited for you to see them proudly present their work.

Children would be presenting various activities and artworks that they have been doing in the past year- artworks that they created independently at home under remote supervision. They would be thrilled if you could interact with them during the exhibition, ask questions, and experience a hands-on activity to get a sneak peak into what they do in our Creative Learning Labs(CLL).

To attend the exhibition, please register here:
<https://forms.gle/8Mrw4XVudoMSbVo7A>

#2: Online Workshop



Unmasking Self Through Art **24th April 2021 & 1st May 2021** **9:30 am - 1:00 pm (IST)**

We are happy to present a 2-day online workshop to provide rich and meaningful art experiences to all. The participants get an opportunity to reflect and rediscover themselves through manipulating materials and ideas, making connections, and exploring the numerous possibilities hidden within art.

The workshop is open to all art and art education enthusiasts. We have limited seats and are looking forward to more enthusiastic individuals who are interested to explore the potential of visual arts in enriching minds and lives to join us.

For more details and to register, please click here:
<https://forms.gle/nxBh2zToqA8Z7ndg6>

"Art is part of the human condition---it is brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience." —John Dewey