

THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



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Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of *The ArtSparks Angle*, ArtSparks' Professional Learning and Development Program newsletter. In this edition we provide highlights from ArtSparks' course on Visual Art & Aesthetics with MA Education students from Azim Premji University. We also have Poonam from Unnati ISEC, a past EdSparks Collective participant, narrating her experiences of conducting art-based learning interventions with the children in her space.

Course - Visual Art & Aesthetics in Education



ArtSparks Foundation was presented with a wonderful opportunity to join forces with Azim Premji University, and teach a four-month course on visual art and aesthetics in education for the MA in Education students. ArtSparks envisioned and designed the course to provide students with a set of unique immersive experiences that would not only expand their understanding of the educational potential of art and aesthetics, but would also enhance their capacity to facilitate such experiences for others, children and adults alike. Through this course they were introduced to various aspects of art in education: The value of art and art-making by itself, art's use as an instrument in education, social and moral dimensions of art, and the controversial perceptions around good art and bad art through the medium of collage and its techniques.

There is no doubt that engaging in art-making is an enjoyable endeavor for children. Children are able to explore, find meaning in art and use it as a means of self-expression. Further, having critical appreciation of art enables

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children to form judgments of a very special kind, namely, aesthetic judgment. This enables a child to grow into conscious and receptive adults who have focused attention on making sense of the world around them and appreciate cultural productions.

Socialization is also acquired through engagements with art-making, as children get to know and understand each other and make friends as they work collectively. Art gives children a space to think, create and reflect, involving their hands, head and heart. It is for all these reasons and more that the MA in Education students, as they set out on the path to becoming educational practitioners, need to acquire a deeper understanding of art in education. Additionally, they should gain familiarity with some critical debates in art education, even if they intend to work in other subject domains.



Collage was chosen as the visual art medium for the course. A major aspect of collage, and one that is sometimes overlooked, is the incredibly diverse array of materials and objects that can be used. Collecting interesting materials is an ongoing activity for artists and for those who teach collage. But it is just as important for young people to hunt for and make decisions about materials they would like to incorporate into their work. Working with and creating artwork in Collage involves various

aesthetics aspects: selecting materials, manipulating materials, investigating materiality, closely observing materials, discovering possibilities, composing, designing the artwork, planning, finding solutions, applying solutions, thinking flexibility, decision-making, research, using imagination, expressing, taking creative risks, developing perseverance, and much more. As educators it is critical to know how to develop these skills and attitudes in children. By the end of the course, students were able to articulate





the importance and the role of art in education. They got a good understanding of the medium of collage and its versatility. Students were able to design, plan, and create an expressive self-portrait by applying a variety of collage techniques. And as a conclusion to the course, the students designed and set up an interactive visual art exhibition to display their artworks, and build recognition that the exhibition in of itself hold valuable opportunities for learning and development. As a result, they were able to appreciate art- based learning experiences and developed the ability to reflect and challenge their assumptions and beliefs around art!

Here is what some students had to say:

"Before this course art for me meant perfection. After the course, I have realized art is a way of self-expression and you can be proud of what you create. It is all about the process of creating art, where one learns so much." --Anurupa Kundu

"I have grown to be comfortable with art being 'imperfect' through this course. I've also understood that art education should not be seen as an extra course but as central and crucial in the overall development of children." --Fatima Ashraf

Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Poonam from Unnati ISEC that work towards improving access to formal school education, who was our EdSparks Collective (2021-22) participant, in this section. This excerpt includes Poonam's experience of participating in EdSparks Collective and conducting the Action Learning Project (ALP) as part of the program. In this particular ALP, ArtSparks Foundation provided Poonam with a curriculum based on the age-group that she was working with along with all the materials needed to conduct it. Through this project, she had to take children through a process of making an imaginary animal collage that brought out the development of various skills and attributes.

I did my ALP with a group of 4 boys and 2 girls who belong to a tribal community and speak Korku (A language of the Korku tribal community). The village they come from is a very small close-knit community and has abundant natural resources like forests and a river around the village. Most children's families are engaged in farming. As the group was very new to me, we began with games and songs for building rapport with the children. During the demonstrations, children would intently listen and respond.

During the art-making process, children didn't pick up representational colors, but referred to their explorations for adding details to their collage. Many children used their fingers to measure the animal's body parts on the printed image given to them and decided the scale for their animals. Children used magnifying glasses to observe details and draw details like patches, stripes, hair, feathers etc.

One of the students, Chaitanya (*name changed*) would often finish earlier than other children and would demand we go to the next step. In one session when the children were adding details to their collage, Chaitanya was feeling a little impatient as he had finished before everyone else. I asked him whether he would like to go around and take a look at what others are doing. He was hesitant initially but once he looked at other children's work he decided to add more details to his own work. This strategy worked with him in other sessions too when he would finish earlier than others.

Suresh used an innovative way of sticking the details on the body of his animal by sprinkling the smaller pieces on the glue that was sparsely spread on the



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body of the animal. He also looked at what his friends were doing and added 2D and 3D tails to his animal collage. While describing what his imaginary animal's super powers are, he stated that his animal could change colors like a chameleon.

Prema would not speak a lot but would be very attentive during the demonstration. Once he received the materials, he would very calmly sit and ideate what he wanted to do. He tore paper, tried textures and also had a very clear idea in his mind about how he wanted his imaginary animal to look like. It was also interesting to see that his imaginary animal was facing left in the ideation stage and in the actual collage it was exactly the opposite. He seemed to work around that with a lot of ease.

An interesting thing that was seen in most collages was children also added the habitat in which these animals live. They also added other details like humans and what is locally grown or something that their animals eat like oranges, cotton etc.

I think what worked best for me was setting the context and localizing the content for the children. For example, we used local examples while exploring textures like how does the floor feel, how does hair feel, how do the tin sheets of the classroom roof look like, etc. This enabled the children to participate

in the process of manipulating the paper as the textures were in front of them.

Spending time on exploring the art medium and getting comfortable with the medium was experienced by me during the process, which is why I could understand the needs of children better. As I had enjoyed exploring and getting enough time to explore as a participant of EdSparks Collective, I realized that this exploration time is so crucial for the children too.

I think I have found a great approach to engage children with art in learning spaces. ArtSparks' robust approach has given me an idea of how to create an environment for children to enjoy the process of making art and learning through it. It gave me an opportunity to create a space for them to express themselves in their unique ways without having the pressure to meet a standard or make a product that should be liked by the teacher. I could see the children trying to find their solutions to the challenges they encountered in the process. They had the freedom to make their choices and take their own risks to work on their ideas. They also got to ideate and translate those ideas into reality with the materials provided, that was appreciated by them.

Scaffolded learning is something that I had never tried in art-based interventions before and it has helped me in making the process of learning more meaningful and participatory for the children. Clear and specific instructions, asking questions to nudge





children to explore more and try more made the process easier for the children too. Sharing the work after completing and creating opportunities to speak about what they have ideated and created also made children see how everyone's work is different. The questions I posed to children while they were working, were with an intention to set them up for success. But I always left the decision with them to make choices for themselves. Such an approach would definitely enable children to develop agency for themselves.

Another thing that I had in my mind was to learn how to use this robust approach with children and I discovered during the process that as much as the content is important, how it is facilitated with the children matters the most. Believing in the



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participants' agency to make decisions and playing a role of facilitating this process as an educator is something that has been reinforced through EdSparks' Action Learning Project (ALP) for me. I now feel confident about using art in learning spaces with different kinds of learners. And I certainly find myself in a better position where I will be able to analyse and help children develop skills while enjoying the process of art-making.

2022 in Review - Image Gallery

Throughout the last year our past EdSparks Cohort Members shared their passion for transforming their learning spaces using art, by actively sharing stories of change encountered within their own spaces. Let us take a moment to celebrate the fantastic work done by our reflective educators during the year 2022.



Upcoming Events

EdSparks Collective 2022-23 (Part 3)



Date: Monday, 16th Jan. to Saturday, 21st Jan. 2023

EdSparks Collective consists of full day workshops, each day having different agendas. Part 3 is the last 6 of the 12 sessions, which takes place after the participants have had some practical experience, and is essentially to build capacities to design and plan for robust art-based programs. This allows for each participant to walk away with a personalized implementation plan that is well-suited for their space, goals and the children they work with, along with a comprehensive resource package. They will also be learning about assessing children's growth, arts integration, sustainability and become a part of a community of reflective educational practitioners that will assist them in their workshop to workplace journey!

To know more, please click here: <https://www.art-sparks.org/edsparks-collective.html>

"Creativity is now as important in education as literacy"

—Sir Ken Robinson