

# THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



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## Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of The ArtSparks Angle, ArtSparks Foundation's Professional Learning and Development Program newsletter. In this newsletter we feature the 2nd Edition of Project Empow[HER], a special project initiated by ArtSparks. We also feature Ashwini from Avaniti Education and Training Foundation, a past EdSparks Collective participant, sharing her story of bringing transformative art educational experiences to the children her organization serves.

## Project Empow[HER] - Expanding Notions of Beauty



Narrow stereotypical standards of physical beauty set by society, and amplified by the market and media, are detrimental to young adolescent girls and their growing sense of self. Instead of recognizing and celebrating diverse forms of beauty, and uplifting the vast potential of all young girls and women to contribute to a beautiful and more caring world, it leaves many feeling inadequate leading to issues around body image, low self-esteem, and impaired psychological functioning that detract girls from realizing their full potential. Furthermore, these problematic definitions of beauty, in time, are internalized by girls and women, perpetuating a cycle of subjugating other girls and women to feelings of worthlessness.

Disrupting these problematic definitions of beauty, and empowering girls from a young age is imperative. It can raise their self-confidence and self-worth, which in turn can have a positive impact on their education and life. It can also raise their awareness of future opportunities to grow and thrive. Empowered girls go on to become empowered women who make

empowered choices for themselves and their families. They, therefore, contribute to the empowerment of their communities. Helping girls realize their strengths, capabilities, and aspirations, in their formative years, while enabling them to dismantle systems that seek to keep them down, can be a catalyst for this development to occur.

Project Empow[HER] emerged from ArtSparks' commitment to enriching the learning experiences of girls, particularly at-risk girls from underserved communities, giving them a platform for representation, as well as a voice to help build their confidence and sense of self. Using art as an expressive tool to inspire dialogue and catalyse change, through this project, ArtSparks has sought to facilitate reflection, strengthen identity formation, as well as group cohesion and a sense of community amongst young girls ages 10 to 14. The project has also served to alter problematic narratives surrounding girls, encouraging them instead to recognize and celebrate their individual and collective potential.



In the 2022-23 school year, our aim through Project Empow[HER] was to enable participating girls to challenge narrow stereotypical definitions of beauty, while broadening their own understandings of what it means to be beautiful. Reflecting upon the various qualities of women in their own lives and beyond—women who serve as powerful role models—including the various aspects that contribute to their beauty beyond physical appearance, the girls were encouraged to reconsider how they view their own beauty and potential. And, how to stand their ground and advocate for themselves rather than fall prey to societal views.

Through a 3-month project implemented within 6 schools, the participating girls were provided with an opportunity to engage in a longitudinal, multi-step project that unfolded

gradually over time. This enabled them to integrate more complexity into their work while also providing them with valuable opportunities to pause, reflect, and manifest their thoughts and feelings. As the sessions progressed it enabled the girls to explore and utilize the narrative potential embedded in the artistic medium of cloth tapestries, and utilize the medium to create powerful murals that rewrite stories of beauty and potential innate within women and girls.

Here's a small of what some of the girls portrayed and shared through their artworks:

*"I am inspired by my mother. She loved studying, but was not allowed to finish her schooling. Still, she always finds opportunities to learn. And she encourages me to study and learn. From her I am inspired to learn and to encourage others to learn as well, particularly girls in my community who do*







*not get to study as much as they want because of early marriage.”*

*“My grandmother is a very empathetic person. She keeps helping people around her. She considers everyone, not just at home but also outside, neighbours, etc., as her own family. I also want to be like that.”*

The culminating exhibition organized at a prominent gallery in Bangalore—Vismaya Gallery at the Rangoli Metro Art Centre on M.G. Road—offered the girls a wonderful platform to showcase their work, and more

importantly, engage audiences critically as they shared their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and ideas as girls, with a vision to instigate societal change. There was a visible growth in confidence amongst the girls that have participated in Project Empow[HER], and there is also a growing sense of sisterhood and shared sense of identity developed between the girls.

At ArtSparks, we look forward to creating more opportunities to elevate the voices of girls and women while using the power of the arts to bring about transformative change.



## Spotlight: Story From the Field

*It gives us great pleasure to showcase, in this section, Ashwini, Founder of Avaniti Education & Training Foundation, Chhattisgarh, an EdSparks Collective (2022-23) participant. Avaniti is working on strengthening the early childhood education system in disadvantaged regions. This excerpt includes Ashwini's experiences of participating in EdSparks Collective and conducting the Action Learning Project (ALP) as part of the program. For this particular ALP, ArtSparks Foundation provided Ashwini with a curriculum aligned to the age-group that she was working with along with all the materials needed to conduct it. Through this project, she took children through a process of exploring and experimenting with paper, and using their discoveries to create a collage of their favorite animal. The project was designed to facilitate the development of a range of essential skills and attitudes in the children such as the development of fine motor skills, control, collaboration, communication, flexible thinking and much more.*

Selected groups of children are enrolled in our community centres as there is no Anganwadi in the village. The nearest Anganwadi is 4-5 km away from the village. These children belong to a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG). Members of this tribe are devoid of basic amenities which includes access to an Anganwadi. 20 children were divided in two groups

and the same theme was facilitated in classrooms at different times over the duration of two weeks.

As the theme of my favourite animal was closely related to a recent project that was conducted, I noticed children making connections with their previous learning. The children were more engaged during the exploration stages as compared to making the collage art-piece. Children seemed hesitant when it came to tearing paper by hand (as adults constantly tell them not to tear papers). But, I observed that the children were getting confident about tearing paper with time and soon they started making different shapes and textures. Knowing the children, I was expecting that they would name the torn papers as some representational object but I was taken by surprise to see them explore the material and stick to shapes and different ways they can tear/cut the paper. For explorations both groups asked for extra time.

While making the animal I noticed children had a lot to say, they were making connections with previous projects on animals. During every session, I noticed that even after finishing their work children helped each other talk about what more could be added to the art piece and shared stories with one another. Within the group I was able to observe each child's





comfortability with a chosen medium and the difference in age characteristics as the complexity in their work differed. Growth and changes were seen in various areas, such as -

#### *Motor Skills:*

Over a stretch of 2-2.5 weeks, I noticed some of the younger children such as Reena (name changed), a 3-year-old who got a hang of how to hold the scissors and make simple cuts on the paper. Whereas older kids expanded their basic cutting skills to try to add complex shapes and textures to their explorations.

#### *Collaboration:*

Very organically some of the children decided to work together and make animals together. Rajat and Buggi was one such pair. The younger children constantly reminded the older ones to make big and small shapes and how not to use too much glue as it might spoil the art piece. Children among themselves discussed what colors would look good together and decisions were made about who is making which animals so that all of them can try out different kinds of animals.

#### *Language:*

Words like 'small', 'big', 'square', 'circle', 'triangle', 'thick', 'thin', etc., have become part of younger (below 4 years) children's vocabulary and they still continue to use them. While sharing about their favorite animals by the end of the sessions, the children somehow managed to connect stories with their friends' stories.

#### *Others*

Most of the children have also understood the concepts of big- small and thick-thin, etc.

In the very beginning children named these sessions as 'rangeen (colourful) activity' and they still refer to it and remember it with the same name. Before beginning the activity I along with center facilitators thoroughly planned about how individual children might respond to different instructions and during different stages of the sessions. With each passing day, we were glad to see how responsible every child was when it came to sharing resources or respecting

***"Till now I felt I was alone in the process of building an environment where every voice and their ways of learning are respected, but now I have found a community."***

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other children's space and mindfully listening to what others have to share about their animals.

We were provided with a detailed curriculum unit to execute this ALP by the ArtSparks team. We needed to prepare and carry out timely division of the given plan. This planning and preparation reduced with each session. Execution of the plan was not an issue for us as we had spent a lot of time on planning the little details of how we would implement the given plan and what/who might have a problem. We even predicted responses of children way ahead. It was surprising that even after such thorough planning children managed to surprise us.

While implementing the curriculum, we understood that facilitation is the key. The way a facilitator poses questions decides the direction of a child's actions. As the sessions progressed, we realized that strategically releasing instruction really helps with young children. This also helped in making each session engaging for up to two hours with young kids.

As I work with the early childhood age group, I have always known how art is a strong tool to achieve development goals in younger kids. But in my experience of working with both public and private schools, I didn't come across any practices that give each individual child (especially a young child) a chance to make their own art. The teacher is so concerned about the perfection of the artwork that every artwork of every child in the classroom is identical. Various stages in the creation of the artwork are overtaken by teachers either because teachers don't think that children are capable or they want to avoid a mess in the classroom. Till now I was alone in the process of building an environment where every voice and their ways of learning are respected, but now I have found a community.

I had not, till date, recognized the power of exploration of art mediums. This was a great





learning that I am taking forward in my space. Younger children are always in a hurry to complete their work and exploration gives them space to slow down the process and meanwhile also teaches them crucial skills.

During the ALP I realized that planning, facilitation, teachers' knowledge of mediums and facilitators' understanding of individual children is key to design and implement a meaningful art-based intervention. Overall, the ALP was a great

experience both for me and the children. It was great to hear children's stories and witness the joy of accomplishment at the end of every session.



## Upcoming Events

### ArtSpeaks Session



### **Book-Making: Integrating the Arts to Build Foundational Learning**

**Date: Saturday, 29th April, 2023**

**Time: 9:30am to 4:30pm**

ArtSpeaks is a series of talks, discussions, and hands-on workshop experiences around the role of art in education for all those seeking to broaden their understanding in the field.

We are excited to conduct a virtual hands-on workshop session that will provide participants an opportunity to explore varied art integration strategies that can help build foundational skills in children. Additionally, participants will be provided with invaluable ready-to-use resources that they can take back to their children in their classrooms, learning spaces or even home, to use during the summer break in an effort to engage children in meaningfully designed, seamlessly integrated activities that can support their learning and development.

To register, please use the link provided here: <https://forms.gle/j7EWHz9JHSfQLcWj9>  
Or scan the QR Code.



*"The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature, and help to shape our identity."*

—Barbara Jordan