

# THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



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## Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of **'The ArtSpeaks Angle'**, Professional Learning Program Newsletter. In this edition, we share glimpses of the eighth ArtSpeaks session on Art & Early Childhood. We also have Soumya from Kshamatalaya Foundation, one of our EdSpeaks Collective cohort members, narrating her experience of incorporating new learnings from the EdSpeaks Collective in the Learning Festival 2021 conducted by Kshamatalaya Foundation.

## Art & Early Childhood



*"For me, the child is a veritable image of becoming, of possibility, poised to reach towards what is not yet, towards a growing that cannot be predetermined or prescribed. I see her and I fill the space with others like her, risking, straining, wanting to find out, to ask their own questions, to experience a world that is shared."*

—Maxine Greene

Traditionally, art is viewed in Early Childhood Education (ECE) simply as brief opportunities to engage them in "fun activities". Significant research points that robust arts education interventions can foster key skills such as imagination, perseverance, problem-solving, decision making, etc., and empower children to communicate, represent, and express their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and much more. The January session of ArtSpeaks, our first for the new year, featured Lindsay Erben, an early childhood educator and expert who currently serves as Director of the new Arts Institute of Middlesex County in New Jersey. Our discussion with Ms. Erben was focused on identifying problematic, yet commonplace, practices in early childhood art education, understanding why these practices are perpetuated, and identifying ways to explore ways to provide purposeful learning experiences for young children through the visual arts.

### Highlights of the session

- Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to 7 years old. During this period, children are little scientists, who are curious and eager to know about the world that they see. During this period, they are also learning language, developing their fine and gross motor skills and starting to identify themselves as individuals.

- Children, especially in the early years, are like little sponges, absorbing all the information around them and then actively making sense of it. So, as an educator, we have to be conscious about what we say and do in front of these little ones.
- Most often in art classes, we come across activities that do not have much learning attached to them, and lack purpose. Examples range from creating a cat using paper plates and following a series of rote steps, to copying a well-known artists work. These activities are didactic in nature and limit a child's creative, cognitive, social, emotional, and even physical development.
- Another commonplace approach that is problematic is the "free art" approach, whereby children are left to do whatever they want with the art material without any guidance or support from the teacher. Here the teacher abdicates responsibility to mindfully develop meaningful learning experiences for the child. As such any learning is accidental versus intentional.
- Well-designed learning experiences in the visual arts enable children to exercise their fine and gross motor skills, foster curiosity through exploration of materials, discover and learn new things through investigation, nurture their imagination, develop language skills, build confidence and be independent.

*To watch the entire session recording, please visit our Facebook page.*

## Spotlight: Story From the Field

*It gives us great pleasure to showcase Soumya from Kshamatalaya Foundation, past EdSparks Collective (2020-21) participant, in this section. This excerpt highlights the efforts taken by Soumya to incorporate new learnings from the EdSparks Collective in conducting workshop with facilitators and the Learning Festival Program at Kshamatalaya Foundation.*

The Learning Festival program of Kshamatalaya Foundation was curated in June 2016 with a purpose to enhance children's creative confidence. By setting up a democratic learning space, the environment encourages students to try, experiment, create, learn through collaboration, feel safe to take risks and experience all this by learning through various mediums such as music, story-telling, theatre, stitching, art and craft.

When our supporter Wipro Foundation provided the opportunity to learn from a leading organization ArtSparks Foundation in the area of art education in our country, our joy knew no bounds! The EdSparks Collective experience gave so many answers to questions we have been having in designing learning experiences for children and most importantly there was a perfect platform of the Learning Festival to implement our learning. Brief learnings and outcomes from the EdSparks Collective are:

- The role of art in education is to embrace children's creativity, imagination and curiosity. And we also learnt how to create a learning experience that provides an opportunity for the learner to experience and demonstrate the above skills.

*"Art has the ability to seamlessly integrate various disciplines and the much important understanding of the difference between representational art and true meaning of integration was achieved!"*

- How do we make the process of learning more enjoyable and meaningful for the child rather than grading/assessing the child through scores. Rather, can the process of learning be given more importance with respect to allocating time for exploring, investigating and observation in the classroom.
- The role of scaffolds during learning - scaffolds act as a guiding light to students. It gives a gentle push to learner and takes them on a step-by-step journey of discovery. They help the learner in reaching the particular goal of the lesson in a progressive manner.
- Art has the ability to seamlessly integrate various disciplines and the much important understanding of the difference between representational art and true meaning of integration was achieved!.

The learning from the EdSparks Collective has been immense. We have received a lot more nuanced understanding of what an art facilitator must adopt through atomic habits for their self and for the overall class which have further enriched our understanding



of facilitation on the whole. With the confidence gained by doing an Action Learning Project during EdSparks, Kshamtalaya was ready to integrate one of the learning experiences learnt at the EdSparks sessions that was in-line with our current curriculum theme- Animals! It all happened so fast! The team was onboard & ready to train 26 facilitators in conducting the Imaginary Animal Collage learning experience.

The facilitator training or Kshamta Utsav as we call it prepares and builds the capacity of our fellows in an experiential methodology. To suit the theme to our context in hindi we gave it the name "Ajab-Gajab Jaanvar".

Some of the responses from the facilitators included:

*"This training has been a very meaningful experience in terms of understanding the nuances of facilitation and the role of arts in education!"*

*"The best part about the Learning Festival this time was each collage was unique, it immediately reduced the urge and need to compare one to another in terms of whose is more beautiful because everybody's collage was beautiful!"*

Our efforts have led to reaching close to 700 children in grades 3 and above. We designed interesting activities related to the Ajab-Gajab Janwar theme for the students grades 1 and 2 as well so the cumulative

reach of grades 1 to 5 in the Learning Festival has been to 1432 children in 26 villages of Kotda and Gogunda.

### **Student Engagement & Discovery**

Students were amazed during the close observation activity when they were looking through the magnifying lens. It prompted them to look at their environment and notice the details! In the middle of the observation many fellows came with stories that they were shocked to see the paper start burning through the lens! One of the facilitators shared, *"It was seriously like how scientists discover things! Children were to engrossed and curious and we had a wonderful conversation around why it happens."*

### **Observations and Reflections**

During the daily de-brief sessions facilitators shared their observations on how integrated learning was occurring naturally among the students. Students were using pre-math and language skills to describe, compare & contrast between two animals, identify patterns and also share general information about the animal. Students were also seen counting the number of spots on the deer or the feathers of the peacock.

One of the facilitators shared, *"I noticed students actively engaging in the discussion where they were sharing their observations of the animals. They were using words like big and small, fat and thin; they were also sharing the colours that they see."*



## Upcoming Event

### ArtSpeaks Session



#### Art & Social Change: Empowering Communities through Visual Arts

25th Feb. 2021

4:30 pm - 6:00 pm (IST)

*"The arts, it has been said, cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world."*

—Maxine Greene

Join us for an interactive discussion, where we explore the role of arts in empowering communities, bringing social change and nurturing creative, socially responsible individuals at a time of unprecedented social challenges.

To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/6qcnTaDUEdEEZrc57>

*"The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action."*

—John Dewey