

THE ARTSPARKS ANGLE



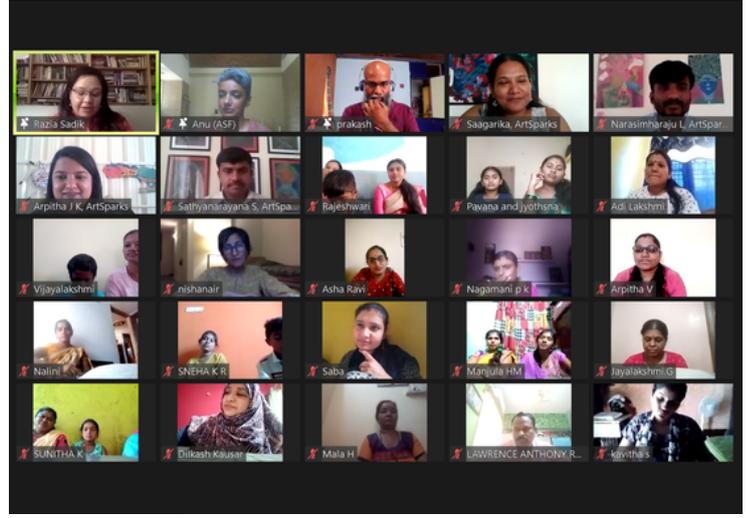
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Welcome Message

We are happy to present the latest edition of 'The ArtSparks Angle', Professional Learning and Development Program Newsletter. In this edition we share highlights of ArtSparks Virtual Annual Exhibition. We also have Mukta Navrekar from Better Education Lifestyle and Environment Foundation (BELIEF), a past EdSparks Collective participant, narrating her experiences on conducting art-based interventions with the children in her space.

Highlights: ArtSparks' Annual Exhibition (Virtual) 2022



"Documentation can provide evidence of valued student learning that is often not assessed by standardized tests. This entails learning like students using their imaginations, thinking critically, listening to and learning from each other, and developing a sense of emotional understanding."

- Mara Krechevsky

Children's individual expressions and artistic learnings were showcased during ArtSparks Annual Exhibition that was held virtually on 30th April, 2022. These learnings and development blossomed from our *Creative Learning Labs* (CLL) in local government schools across Urban and Rural Bengaluru. The selected presentations were then followed by a moderated discussion on the topic of *'The Role of Art in Education'*.

At ArtSparks, we provide meaningful art experiences to children where the focus is more on the process of learning rather than the finished artistic product. And, we strive to make the learning process visible and tangible. Documenting this process is a way to reflect on the learnings, based on the visible objects of those learnings which others can also point to and make sense of.

The artworks showcased during our Annual Exhibition were filled with evidences of children's learning. The children enthusiastically shared about how they created their distinctive artworks, what they discovered while making them and narrated stories that brought the artwork to life. By sharing their learnings, children are encouraged to

be in touch with their thought processes and this further helps in deepening their own understanding as well.

Presentation Highlights:

1. Children presented their artworks of various artistic mediums such as paint, oil pastels, clay, paper-mache, collage and more.
2. CLL women facilitators shared about their professional development through perspective transformation and participation in creative endeavours at ArtSparks, which enabled them to see themselves as creative individuals to contribute to the creative re-envisioning of education.
3. Mr. Lawrence, an English Teacher from one of our partner schools, *GHPS Thindlu*, shared his experiences of how he has observed his students express themselves more freely in his classroom. He also appreciated the artistic sensibilities that his children have developed and displayed as a result of their engagement with ArtSparks' Creative Learning Lab Program.
4. Glimpses of this year's special project. Project Empow[HER] was also featured in the virtual annual exhibition. This project was conceived of on the basis of the work we do within our Lab spaces. The objective of this project was to bring young girls together in select schools that we work with, to create a safe and brave space for them to discuss, have dialogue about themselves, their aspirations and their strengths and create collaborative murals. These were exhibited in a gallery in Bengaluru.



5. A review of the offerings and events that took place under ArtSparks' Professional Learning and Development Program was presented as well like the ArtSpeaks Sessions, EdSparks Collective 21-22, Community of Practice and so on.

Our guest speakers, Dr. Razia Sadik from LUMS SOE and Mr. Prakash Iyer from Azim Premji University, brought in perspective and meaningful insights to the role of art in education drawing examples from the exhibition, during the panel discussion;

What is aesthetic education and why is it required in schools? Aesthetic education is required in schools to help children form their own aesthetic judgments as we all make judgements about the world around us. Art has the potential to form us as human beings and determines what kind of human beings come out of the education system. It helps activate the link between education and life. Through the exhibition it is evident how art can bring about a myriad of learning experiences such as an understanding of lines, shapes, scales, along with value judgements, civic responsibility, feelings and so on. No other subject has the potential

to be able to help children navigate through their own feelings.

How does art play a role in education and how does it benefit children? We do not only think through the arts but think with the arts. When working with different mediums there are a lot of processes taking place like dealing with the physicality of the medium and getting to know the material. There is a significant cognitive aspect to the process. The children are constantly facing different challenges while trying to figure out how to express what they are thinking through their artwork. All the artworks shown in the exhibition were unique and distinct. None of the artworks looked the same and sufficient time was given to work on the complexity and diversity of these expressions.

How can we develop teachers to utilize art to its fullest potential in the classroom? Pedagogical content knowledge, essentially for the arts, will help teachers look at the content in different ways to bring it to the classroom. Teachers have to position themselves as a learner and ask questions like 'why do you think this is beautiful?' rather than telling children what they think is beautiful. It is crucial for

teachers of art to engage in the process of art making. They would get the opportunity to go through the challenges and difficulties themselves just like the women facilitators of CLL.

For art to be a part of curricula and be given the same status as other subjects, what is the way forward? The socio-cultural aspect in India plays a role in art being sidelined because importance is given to those subjects that are related to a vocation for income. It is important to realize that aesthetic ability would help an individual to be a better doctor or engineer and so on. For instance, medical colleges in America use visual thinking strategies to develop observational powers in their students.

The meaning of art in education needs to expand in our minds and for this more demonstrations and evidences need to be shown. This way, ArtSparks Annual Exhibition helped in showcasing and advocating for the potential of art education that is convincing, motivating and uplifting, and is relevant across educational contexts, as adults and educators are curious to dig deep into learning experiences to inform future pathways.



Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Mukta Navrekar, a core team member and Director of Better Education Lifestyle and Environment Foundation (BELIEF), our EdSparks Collective (2021-22) participant, in this section. ArtSparks' EdSparks Collective is an annual professional development program attended by different organizations and individuals across India. This excerpt includes Mukta's experience of participating in EdSparks Collective and conducting the Action Learning Project (ALP) as part of the program. Through the ALP, our EdSparks participants get an opportunity to apply their learnings from the program into the field and thereby witness the practical implications of the program.

Being a development professional, I run an organization BELIEF that mainly works in early Childhood Education with government-run preschools (Anganwadis) in the low-income areas in Pune. Focusing on the development of children below 6 years, we enhance the capabilities of the teachers and parents through direct intervention, training and handholding. I did my ALP with 5 children between 5 and 6 years of age from one of the communities in Hadapsar with which we are associated through our intervention.

I observed the increasing engagement of the students as the workshop took shape. Initially they were shy and kept mum, later they became more engaged in the conversations about collage, colors of the paper, different forms of the paper they cut and about pasting those shapes. Viraj, the youngest child, did very little exploration on the first day. But on the second day, he took two papers and created a lot of



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forms and shapes. He was so engrossed in the work, that he did not notice someone calling out his name. In the subsequent sessions too, all the children showed notable engagement in the work. No one was in a hurry, no one got very distracted. As they went deep into the activity, they gradually changed their postures. Sitting in more comfortable positions and arranging the material as per their convenience. The children had not come across the term collage, experiments, and explorations before. So, I explained those terms first and then talked about how we can explore the paper, its tearing and cutting etc. They were able to relate the things with their own experiences. Shravani said *"I see deer when I visit my village."* Viraj said *"I love cutting with scissors, but no one gives it to me at home"*. They also responded well to the names of animals, describing their shape, skin, look, etc.

Ganesh was unpredictable at the beginning. On the third day he tried following others while drawing. His responses were simple. But he told an altogether unique story at the end. Manasi was very active from the beginning. She used to talk a lot about the things which were not much linked to the topic or the session. Manasi, while cutting the paper collage, used red colored paper. She put only one piece of pink paper in the negative space and told me that because this shape is different from other shapes, it's being highlighted in her work!

Then while making a collage, I wanted them not to follow anyone and make their own explorations. So I used a method explained by Nisha (Founder and Executive Director of ArtSparks Foundation) during the EdSparks Collective sessions. I observed everyone's work carefully throughout the session and tried to see what they did differently. For instance, I saw Shravani making some small pieces of paper and Manasi using the negative space effectively. This helped students realize the worth of their own work. Now I realized that this was happening with us too as a participant during the

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EdSparks Collective Program.

When I attended the sessions of EdSparks Collective by ArtSparks, I learned a lot about ideal art facilitation by observing the facilitators. It influenced me a lot. I could understand my constraints during the reflection talks at the end of every full day sessions. When it was my turn to apply what I learned, I was very clear about overcoming my constraints. Surprisingly this time it was more joyful and less stressful than my previous experiences with art facilitation. Previously I was more concerned about not overpowering children's own expressions and ideations. But this time I knew the precautions to be taken to prevent that. I constantly recalled the things I learned and read the ALP curriculum every day. When I got confused, I was able to reach out to ArtSparks' program team for support. With their suggestions, I could go ahead with greater clarity.

During EdSparks, I learned something regarding the demo which was very helpful during the ALP. I observed that no facilitator was giving a complete demo. Previously I used to do that, giving step by step instructions, expecting the students to follow. This time I purposefully avoided that and I could observe a greater diversity in their explorations.

I am the product of the traditional school of arts. I learned various forms of art from one of my relatives

in a conventional way. Though I love art in various forms, this type of training created a hatred towards art in my mind. After the many reflections and explorations through the EdSparks Collective Program, I could come out from this feeling. With this in my mind, I spoke with children about what art is, how we can express ourselves through it, how there is no good and bad in it and that we should never compare our work with others. To my surprise, they were receiving that very well. I could address this because it came from my own experience, and I was already so connected with this issue emotionally.

I aimed at creating a safe and brave space for these children to explore and express themselves through art. I talked with some of their parents before conducting the workshop to understand their background and what happens with them in their families. I found that the parents are very ambitious for their children's future. And hence the children are always expected to do what is 'ideal'. I really wanted to bring them out of this burden and enable them to do whatever they like, think and can do, at least during the time of the *Action Learning Project*.

This experience demands a lot of alertness and engagement as a facilitator. I was also very careful about my demos. I did not want to do it to be impressive but provide sufficient explanation. The biggest discovery for me was that I realized the potential of a facilitator. I still need to practice more with different art forms and with different age groups. What I gained from the ALP was breaking down my own barriers and I am looking forward to using the experience in my organization and in my personal life too.



Upcoming Events

ArtSpeaks Session



Cultivating Creative Risk-Taking through Visual Art

21st May 2022, Saturday

10:00 am - 12:30 pm (IST)

The creative process often involves creating something while being uncertain of the outcomes. The world of visual art enables children to come up with new strategies, techniques and ideas. They are able to make and learn from “mistakes” and be comfortable with ambiguity. These are essential 21st century learning and life skills that we help develop among children.

Join us for a hands-on session and interactive discussion, where we will explore ways to nurture creative risk-taking in children through visual art.

To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/wR32NzRrG5NLrk1o7>

*"I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way -
things I had no words for."*

—Georgia O'Keefe