

# 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 feature Project Empow[HER], a special project initiated by ArtSparks. We also have Ranjit Kokate from Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, a past EdSparks Collective participant, sharing his story of bringing transformative art educational experiences to the children his organization serves.

## Project Empow[HER]



Empowerment of girls and women is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set up by the United Nations General Assembly and is designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Empowerment is a process of ongoing change through which girls expand their aspirations, strengthen their voice, and exercise more choice. Through this process—gaining awareness of the opportunities to grow and thrive—their self-worth and self-esteem can be exponentially raised which in turn can have a positive impact on their participation in education. For this development to occur, helping girls realize their strengths, capabilities, and aspirations in their formative years becomes imperative.

Girls attending the government schools that we at ArtSparks Foundation work within, come from underserved communities. During our conversations with them within our Creative Learning Labs, their aspirations seemed limited as they seemed to get little opportunity to think about themselves. These conversations helped us identify a valuable and untapped opportunity to develop a project specifically designed to meet this need to engage our girls in deeper conversations around self.

ArtSparks initiated Project Empow[HER] in an endeavor to inspire dialogue about the achievements of women and girls, to enable reflection about each girl's individual potential and capabilities, to strengthen their identity and build

confidence, to build strong bonds and a sense of community amongst the girls and to help the girls recognize their collective potential and power. The project also aimed at engaging girls in valuable hands-on experiential art making to yield an evocative outcome to the discussions that occurred. Throughout the process, the girls who participated, not just individually but collectively with their peers, were able to appreciate themselves and each other, art serving as an effective medium to build a shared sense of community.

The project was conducted over 6 sessions at select government schools in Urban and Rural Bengaluru and saw the participation of 166 girls. Sessions were led by ArtSparks' community-based Creative Learning Lab facilitators who served to create a safe and brave space for young girls to come together.

The first session entailed discussions driven by students and moderated by the facilitators revolving around their aspirations and strengths. Post the discussion, the girls were asked to reflect on what had been discussed and think of ways that they could represent themselves, their strengths, and aspirations, and sketch the same. In the second session the girls worked in groups to collect all individual sketches and design a mural, exploring different colors and creating a color palette, constantly giving feedback to one another. By the next session, the girls started working on their final murals, negotiating and coming to agreements on the placement of colors. Throughout the final

sessions the girls shared responsibilities to complete the project and came up with solutions to the various challenges they faced in the creation of the murals. Finally, when the girls analyzed their final mural creation, they reflected on the learnings that took place through this experience. The multi-step process that the girls underwent helped them understand how a complex task can be broken down

into small manageable chunks that lead to a successful outcome—one that they can be proud of.

The murals created by the girls at our participating schools were displayed in a special exhibition in a gallery in Bangalore from the 8th to 10th of April, 2022. This exhibition served as an avenue to give visibility to the participating schools, the



participating girls, and the facilitators. The reception for the exhibition was held on 9th April. The exhibition reception offered guests and members of the general public a unique opportunity to engage with the girls that had participated in Project Empow[HER], hear their journeys of self-discovery and self-expression, and get deep insights into their artistic process as well as the skills that they had honed along the way.

More specifically, the children spoke about their artwork to all the guests with a lot of confidence and enthusiasm. This ability to feel and express enthusiasm is immensely empowering that transforms one into a compelling and memorable communicator. This further strengthens their belief in their own abilities and worth that boosts their confidence. Audience members were captivated by the girls' presentation of their process, efforts and thoughts behind their pieces of art. As the reception wrapped up, a group of girls shared their feelings about the experience

saying,

*"I have never had the opportunity to get out of my village, but today I stood in a gallery space in Bengaluru and spoke to distinguished people about the work we did back in our school space in our village. It was the best experience I had in my life which I can never forget. I am feeling overwhelmingly happy about being here and definitely feeling more confident than I ever was."*

When a girl's voice strengthens, she is able to speak up and be heard in discussions and decisions that shape her life and future in both public and private settings. And when their choices expand, an array of opportunities open up, many of which she may never have previously imagined. Project Empow[HER] was a great celebration of the girls' efforts and accomplishments. They all worked in pursuit of a goal, made interesting mistakes along the way and learned from them. It served as a great example of girls' strength gained from solidarity, collective action and mutual support.





## Spotlight: Story From the Field

*It gives us great pleasure to showcase Ranjit Kokate, from Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, 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 Ranjit'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.*

I am associated with Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan as an art educator, where I conduct workshops for children and adults on visual art. I conducted EdSparks Collective's *Action Learning Project* with 12 adolescent girls and boys from different schools in Mumbai.

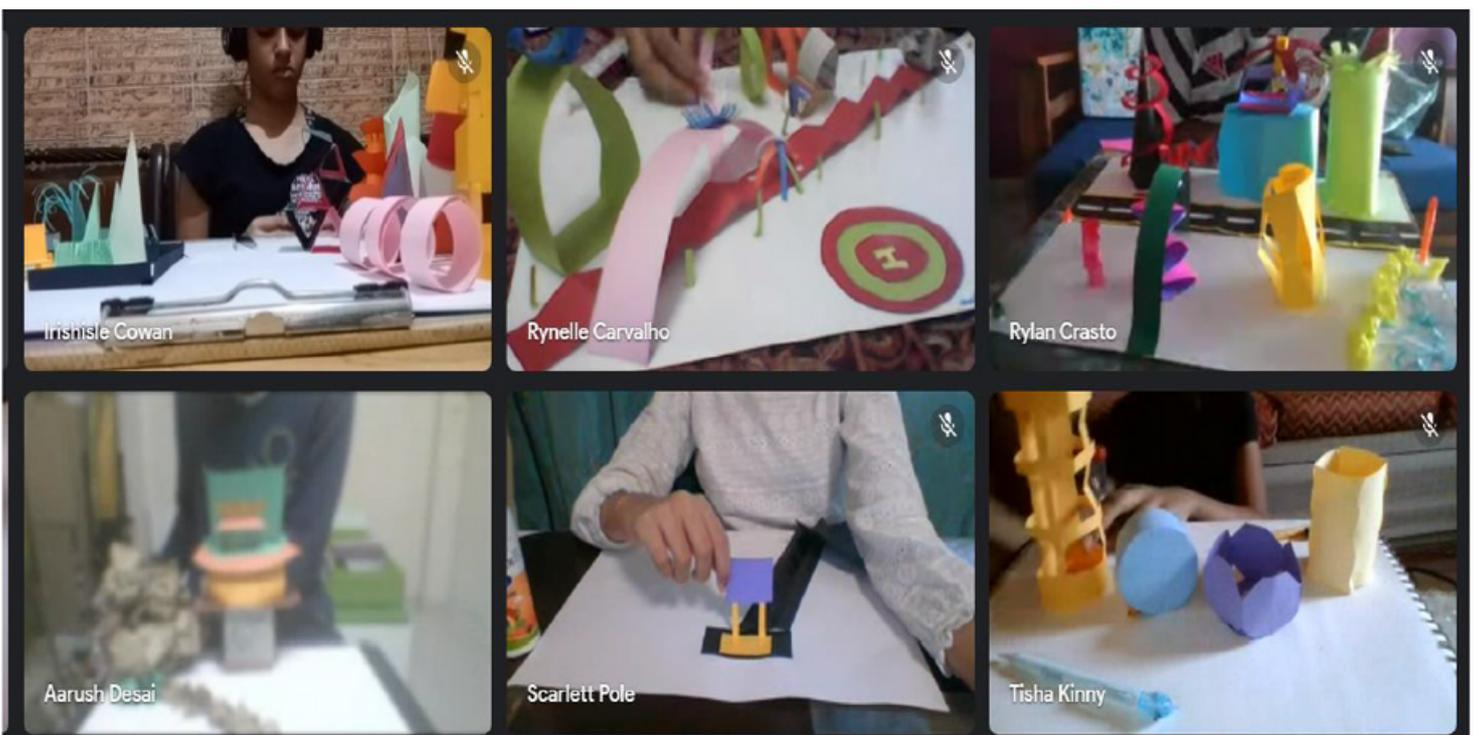
The first time I asked the students 'how to tear a piece of paper?', they laughed. They were wondering why I asked them this question. One student answered, followed by the rest. They replied that they could tear or cut the paper with scissors or by hand. Then I asked them how could we tear paper in other ways? Then they all started to really think about how they can tear paper in different ways and how many different shapes they can get and so on. Initially, three or four

*"I was able to understand the specific sequence of things in an art class."*

shapes were cut quickly but then it took a long time for them to really think and come out with other different shapes. The children were consistently engaged in the activity throughout the hour and asked for more time.

Scarlett and Aarush were two students who struggled a little throughout the session. Even after constant reminders, Aarush kept going back to representative forms of buildings, roads, etc. It was not that he was not trying, it was hard to think in a non-conventional way. Same thing happened with Scarlett. The form she created was non-representative, but she was not very sure of what to do with it. After I asked the students to share their work with each other, they were able to draw inspiration from each other's work and complete the assignment.

As the days passed, the children got used to this method of working. They started sharing their ideas and work with each other themselves. When it came to the ideation part, they were talking more around the difference that they found in their surroundings. Then, one day Scarlett asked why can't they make



*"The idea of visual medium for intellectual growth along with developing skills is important to be recognized."*

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the tree look like a normal tree? All the other students had the same question as well. I told them that if they make the shape of the tree as it is, then they already know the science of how to make it stand tall and everyone will make the same tree. But if the shape of each tree comes from their own imagination, they will also have to find the science to make the tree stand while making the 3D collage. The children seemed satisfied with this answer.

The Action Learning Project was a great learning experience for me. I was able to understand the specific sequence of things in an art class, like exploring the material before making the final product. This makes the experience with the material as important as the experience of the subject. I was able to witness the strength of this methodology when the children completed their final art-piece. I was actually expecting a lot of questions from the children during the ALP, but the children were able to discuss with each other and come up with solutions on their own.

Through this experience, I have got some direction and clarity for facilitating robust art interventions. Most importantly, I learned how to have the thought of the final art-piece from the beginning itself and how each assignment should be based on a larger goal and should be connected to each other. Also, the idea of visual medium for intellectual growth along with

developing skills is important to be recognized. Additionally, the skill of problem solving is an important skill that children need to develop and the biggest virtue of perseverance is developed by encouraging children to complete their work without providing an easy solution to the obstacles they face. I was able to experience these things during the ALP.

In my role as an art teacher, I will make sure I include all these elements in my classes. Letting the children engage in art along with their skills, thoughts, social knowledge, sense of sharing, all will play an important role in my upcoming educational journey.

Throughout the Action Learning Project, I was able to experience how to stimulate children's intelligence. Also, how each student gets an opportunity to express themselves through art. I also learned how to give more participatory demonstrations, where sharing is more about how children learn and develop their own unique and original ideas and not to just follow the art teacher.



## Upcoming Events

### Learning Circle (For EdSparks Cohort Members Only)



#### Visual Thinking Strategies

24th and 25th June 2022, Friday & Saturday

10:00am - 11:00 am (IST)

We are happy to conduct the 11th Learning Circle with our EdSparks cohort members! The learning circles are intended to continuously build and share knowledge around art education with the cohort members through hands-on sessions and discussions.

Art can serve as a valuable tool to develop critical thinking and communication skills in children. Through this session on visual thinking strategies, we will explore the possibilities of integrating critical thinking and communication in an art class.

To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/W7QBAtKQ56Vlr4Tp6>

*"The purpose of arts education is not to produce more artists, though that is a byproduct. The real purpose of arts education is to create complete human beings capable of leading successful and productive lives in a free society."*

—Dana Gioia