

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 explore how participation in creative activities can unlock many wonders. We also have Padmini from Jhamtse Ghatsal Children's Community, a past EdSparks Collective participant, narrating her experiences on conducting educational interventions using art with the children in her space.

Why Participate in Creative Activities?



We have heard the word creativity being used in different contexts. Some of the words that we hear used alongside it are inventiveness, imagination, innovation, originality, artistic and so on. Creativity has been defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems and communicating with others. Creative thought is found in all aspects of one's life.

We can see how creativity manifests when a scientist discovers a cure for a disease, when a business owner figures out a way to increase sales, when a vegetable vendor bags the items, or when a parent finds a way to convince a reluctant child to go to bed.

Creativity requires original thought, which in turn requires clarity and a deep enough understanding of a concept from which an innovative idea and problem solving can emerge. In children, creativity develops from their experiences with the process, rather than concern for the finished product. It is about thinking, exploring, discovering, and imagining.

Art offers people the opportunity to express themselves, ask questions and address issues. Without art and creativity, our societies would cease to grow and change. We need art and

creativity if we want to move forward as humans. Studies show that students engaged in art education display a more ambitious attitude towards academic work as well as higher levels of commitment and motivation. (Ellen Winner, 2013)

Art can provoke deep, engaged, and reflective learning. The leaders of today tell us creativity and thinking "outside the box" is the foundation for the success of our communities, economy and country. There is a dire need for more critical and creative ways of thinking, being, doing and knowing.

Art education provides an open space where children are not bound by right or wrong answers, which results in a space where one can introspect and find personal meaning and free individuals to explore and experiment. Children who feel free to make mistakes and to explore and experiment will also feel confident, comfortable and more likely to invent, create, and find new ways of doing things.

Children need to be given the freedom to make mistakes and learn from doing. Fostering creativity in our classrooms not only makes teaching more rewarding, but gives children an eagerness towards learning that would last for a lifetime.

Spotlight: Story From the Field

It gives us great pleasure to showcase Padmini, a teacher from Jhamtse Ghatsal Children's Community, 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 Padmini'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 in their spaces and thereby witness the practical implications of the program. In this particular ALP, the participants had to take their group of children through a process of art-making to develop skills and attitudes like close observation, investigation, communication and much more.

The children were excited about getting to do some form of art. The students were extremely focused and always eager. The children became so engrossed that when it was time to stop and start packing up, they would be hesitant to stop working.

There definitely was a shift for at least two students through the session. Lham was hesitant to participate in the first session. She had a strong notion that she is not good at it. In the first session, I had to convince her to at least give it a try. But once she started engaging in the activity and realised that it was a skill that she had to explore and not follow any set format, she started enjoying it thoroughly.

Pema was always distracted in the initial sessions and would just scribble on the paper. He would say that he has completed his work in a few minutes. He would be distracted or say that he wants to use the washroom. He would give multiple reasons to be away from creating anything. But gradually he started participating more and became completely involved. When it was time to create the final art-piece he was enthusiastic and also could narrate an imaginative story for the art-piece he made.

Another very noticeable change was how each student could positively speak about their artwork and happily share with one another. During the first and second session, they would be hesitant to show their art to

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each other and would immediately judge theirs or other's creation. It was beautiful to see them appreciating each other's work as the sessions progressed.

The most endearing moment was when the children shared materials like scissors and glue with one another. They formed their own teams to share resources. The students would be very conscious to not fight when choosing their materials. After the fourth session they were encouraging each other to use the art materials in different ways. By the last session the students could endlessly make stories about their creation and share it. The sessions were always most awaited for.

I was personally worried that I would not be able to conduct these sessions. I wondered what if I am not able to facilitate it in a proper manner. Would my inhibitions and fear towards art influence the students? When I realized that I do not have to give children set guidelines, but instead guide them while they lead their own learning journey, I too started enjoying facilitating these sessions.

My learnings from EdSparks Collective, enabled me to guide students in an effective manner. I always wanted to integrate art with students' learning but felt that I was not very good at art to teach it. But with these sessions, I realized how having just the basic levels of understanding of materials by touch and feel, the process of exploring different art mediums and its relevance to what is being learnt was definitely a change in my mindset towards building art-based learning. Integration of flexible thinking through exploration and using detailed observation is really exciting. I genuinely hope that this becomes an unconscious part of my teaching practice.



Upcoming Events

EdSparks Collective 2022-23 Cohort

We look forward to welcoming our new cohort members from various organizations across India! Read how they believe the arts can help in furthering their goals for the children that they serve.

"We strongly believe that children have various ways of expressing themselves. More knowledge on how we can use art in our curriculum will help us respect every child's individual style of expression."

- Ashwini, Founder, Avaniti Education & Training Foundation

"Art is another medium through which you can see development in a child. Art is a great medium through which children are attracted towards our library and develop their reading habit. Due to art, the number of children in schools will increase."

- Amit, Operations Head, Karunodaya Foundation

"Art in any form plays an important role in everyone's life. It helps children to connect and learn faster and learning becomes more exciting as it is innovative. We at Mimaansa follow VAKT and art adds to it."

- Kaushal, Operations Head, Mimaansa

"The role of the arts in the development of imagination, communication, co-operation, perspective building ability, creativity, problem-solving skills and many areas of cognitive development is a proven fact. The Organisation envisions communities that are employable, financially sustainable and healthy. I do not see this happening without raising a conscious learner. Hence, I believe in using art-based learning approach."

- Nidhi, Education Outreach Coordinator, Aarohi

"We work with primary school children and believe that art can help in their learning. With the help of EdSparks Collective, we look forward to redesigning our classes in a more innovative and creative manner."

- Swarnarupa, COO, Gramothhan

"Art has always been an integral part of Unmukt. One of our aims is to create safe learning spaces where children can unshackle their inner artist and know their true potential."

- Shweta, Founder, Unmukt Foundation

"The future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create."

—Barack Obama