

# 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 provide highlights from the regional meet at Mumbai. We also have Bhubaneswari from Ashayen, a past EdSparks Collective participant, reflecting on her experiences using art as a tool to facilitate meaningful learning for the children she works with.

## Regional Meet - Mumbai, Maharashtra



*Educational non-profit organizations across India work tirelessly to extend the reach of education to children from underserved communities, and are continuously looking for ways to further develop their capacities and embrace innovative practices that significantly improve the quality of their teaching and the learning experiences on offer for children. In our own quest to improve and enrich the educational experiences and outcomes of children, particularly those on the margins, ArtSparks has served as an ally for these other organizations, supporting their vision and goals by understanding, collaborating, and aiding their efforts. This has served as an impetus for the periodic Regional Meets organized by ArtSparks' Professional Learning and Development Program.*

The Regional Meet in Mumbai, Maharashtra, organized by ArtSparks Foundation with support from Wipro Foundation, was scheduled from Feb. 20-22, 2023. The intent of this Regional Meet was to support past EdSparks Collective organizations and participants, as well as other organizations surrounding the selected region to gather, reflect, and further their understanding on the potential of art in enhancing education. It also provided ArtSparks an opportunity to engage these partner and

other organizations where they are at. During the meet, the ArtSparks team engaged with the following organizations:

- Unnati ISEC, Maharashtra
- Mimaansa, Mumbai
- Door Step School, Pune
- Sahyog Chehak Trust, Mumbai
- Sajag Trust, Mumbai
- Shikshan Mandal, Mumbai
- Apni Shala, Mumbai

These in-person meets give opportunities to develop relationships based on goodwill, generosity and trust between organizations. The education system can prosper and thrive by creating these spaces to build supportive relationships, share knowledge and learn from each other. The above served as objectives for the workshop we conducted.

Participants from different organizations attended the workshop and went through a hands-on experience where they needed to visually represent their thoughts using recyclables, collaboratively work on an art-piece that signifies their grouped ideas and also present their work to others. This led them to see

a clear link between art and the different aims of education such as literacy, inclusivity, application of myriad concepts, development of imagination, creativity and much more. Through their participation in the workshop, participants also had an opportunity to witness mindful facilitation that enable every learner in the classroom to meet session and lesson goals. Furthermore, the ArtSparks team revisited with participants a flexible robust methodology that can be tailored to their organizational needs based on the individual goals for their children.

During the visit, the ArtSparks team also conducted field visits to understand the

contextual realities of the work done by different organizations with communities, beneficiaries, team members, etc. In the process, our Professional Learning & Development team was able to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of partner organizations' purpose; the diversity that the each of them bear, their unique situational needs and the demography they serve. This will enable ArtSparks to further support these organizations by providing them with targeted support and guidance that can be integrated into their pre-existing structures and systems with ease.

Partner organizations expressed deep appreciation for the time and support provided





to them at this current stage of their learning journeys to further child-centric practices and approaches.

*"I experienced problem-solving with materials (during the workshop), and realized the habit of keeping time and of competing & completing in a hurry. But slowly, with the help of the facilitators, I started working mindfully and soon enough my mind was brimming with ideas! Thank you ArtSparks for letting us experience art in this way."* –Bilquis, Sahyog Chihak Trust

*"Vigilant facilitation, designing of learning experiences through art, and how objectives*

*can be streamlined were my biggest takeaways from this regional meet."* –Saesha, Apnishala

*"I can now see the strong connection and relation of what we experienced to literacy and language development. Being a non-artistic person, it was interesting to see how a non-judgmental space was created during the workshop and am amazed by the process and the concepts my colleague and I came up with together during the process."* – Sajitha, Sajag Trust

## Spotlight: Story From the Field

*It gives us great pleasure to showcase, in this section, Bhubaneswari from Ashayen, Odisha, an EdSparks Collective (2022-23) participant. Ashayen works towards providing basic education and life skills to children living in the streets. This excerpt includes Bhubaneswari'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 Bhubaneswari 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 had to take children through a process of envisioning their community in the future, thinking about the changes they would like to see, and recreating the same through the medium of collage. The project was designed to facilitate the development of a range of essential skills and attitudes in the children such as collaboration, communication, problem-solving, flexible thinking, and much more.*

As I have been working with this group of children for around 5 years now. As we started the ALP sessions, their interest slowly increased after each session. Their interest grew with the introduction of different materials, tools and the fact that they had to make their own decisions and choices along the way which was a different experience for them. During the first few sessions, they did not feel confident in themselves

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and said that they won't be able to do the activity. They were scared they would do wrong. This scare is prevalent as they are always beaten or abused whenever they get something wrong or make mistakes by their parents and family members. Hence, it became important to first help them feel comfortable to make mistakes and understand that mistakes are learning experiences.

I witnessed immense changes in the children through the ALP. Just to get them to sit and listen has always been a challenge. They would not come on time as well. Surprisingly, during the ALP sessions they started coming before time and would want to sit for extended periods of time till they completed the work they were engaged in. After a few sessions, some of them even began bringing their friends too, sharing that they would get to do something interesting at the center.

Shini (*name changed*) was one child who would rarely come to the center as his parents were not supportive and would not allow him to come. After attending an ALP session, he spoke to his parents



and came to the center even before I could reach there and was waiting for me. When asked why he came so early, he shared that he could not sleep the previous night as he was thinking about the activity that they had done and wanted to complete what he was working on in the last session.

Raju and Kanhai were always very restless at the center and would not sit for long. It would be very difficult for me to get them to focus even for a few minutes. It gave me so much joy to see them engaged for such long periods of time, as they were exploring paper and seeing the different ways they could make it stand. They were not able to do it with their hands, so they started looking for materials around them like sticks to achieve a greater height. It was truly a pleasure to see them so focused, while developing perseverance.

Before EdSparks Collective, I used to go on YouTube and look for different art activities that I could use to engage the children at the center. I used to try different things like drawing and painting with the children. However, the children always found it overwhelming or frustrating when they could not recreate the artwork. For example, during one of the sessions I asked them to recreate a picture using watercolors, but as the paper was getting wet, it tore and led many of the children to throw away the art materials in frustration and storm off saying that it was not working.

During the ALP, the curriculum that was provided to us was very detailed with clear information on the goals for each lesson, how to use the materials, how to guide children throughout the session, etc. I also used various TLMs prior to EdSparks Collective which only required the teacher to speak all the time. This did not really help in increasing engagement levels

among the children either. With the ALP, I experienced how we were able to give more space for the children to take over the classroom and help them take ownership of their own learning journey. I feel this also helps build better relationships between the children and the teacher. When I remember my experiences with art during my school days, we were always asked to just replicate a picture and were expected to do it perfectly. If it was not exactly the same as the picture shown, my teacher would tear the paper and tell me to do it again. This really built a lot of fear in me and I would hate going for art classes and lost all interest in the subject. When I started working with children, I tried introducing different kinds of art activities to help build their interest, but it wasn't very effective.

Through EdSparks Collective, I realized how many opportunities and possibilities art creates- opportunities for learning, using imagination, building original narratives and so much more. Looking at art from this fresh new perspective has built interest and engagement among the children that I work with and there is an added joy to learning, especially when they are first generation learners. One more important learning for me was the diversity of art materials available and how we can use each one of them in a purposeful manner. The possibilities are limitless!

Each EdSparks session gave me an opportunity to experience art as a learner in a very distinct manner compared to all my previous experiences with art. When I got the opportunity to take my learnings back to my space, these experiences as a learner guided me to facilitate the sessions with the children that I work with. I was equipped with deeper insights of how a learner would perceive, understand and be successful in the learning process. This program has really been an eye-opener to countless effective possibilities that I can use with my children.

## Upcoming Events

### Learning Circle #14 (for EdSparks Cohort Members only)



#### Exhibitions: A Form of Assessment

17th & 18th Mar. 2023, Friday & Saturday, via Zoom

We are happy to conduct the 14th Learning Circle with our EdSparks cohort members! The Learning Circles are intended to continuously build and share knowledge around the role of art in education through hands-on, immersive engagements and discussions.

It is essential to consider the various forms of assessment that can not only help assess student learning but also make that learning visible. Furthermore, rich forms of assessment also enable teachers to reflect on their teaching approaches and practices. Through this session, we will explore how to organize and leverage powerful exhibitions where year-round art interventions can be showcased and evaluated; an opportunity to reflect on the academic year gone by and to begin to ponder for the next!

*To register for the session, please click here: <https://forms.gle/i3gqhKg4MJEvdpLc6l>*

*"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up."*

—Pablo Picasso