

Nurturing the Spark: Creative Literacy & Adaptive Learning

Welcome to the Deep Dive. Today we're sort of navigating this deep, rich forest of educational ideas. Finding the right path, well, that can be the challenge. Absolutely. And we're focusing on one particular path today called the Spark. It's a unique approach to learning. Yeah, developed by Michelle Kornfeld. We're going to explore how she built this program around what she calls communicative, caring, creative literacy. And our sources, well, we've got some really insightful articles, some conceptual outlines, too, that dig into the program's origins, its principles. And even some takeaways from recent educational conferences, which is interesting. Right. So the goal, our mission for this deep dive is really to pull out the key nuggets. Creativity, adaptability. Exactly. How does this program actually try to get learners ready for, well, the complexities of the 21st century?

Let's dive in. Okay. So let's unpack this. Starting with the origin story of The Spark. It seems to have begun with Michelle Kornfeld's work at the Man and Living World Museum. That's right. She was writing stories and poems, but they had a strong scientific basis aimed at engaging young students. Yeah, her own daughters. Right. They apparently brought in their own school conflicts, their own ways of dealing with things creatively. Which really underscores that caring piece right from the get-go. It wasn't just an idea. It was, well, lived. Definitely grounded. Yeah. And then things got even more layered, didn't they? They did. What's fascinating is Michelle showed her work to her mother, who apparently said, 'Why not study painting?' You could make coloring pages.

Ah, so that's how the art component came in, to make it more engaging. Exactly. And then her uncle, Dr. Mosher Rishpan. He is the one behind the Core Garden of Science. Quite renowned. Okay. Well, he saw her paintings and started pointing out the science in them. Things like structural coloration. You mean like how a peacock's feather gets its color from light, not pigment? Precisely that. And also the spectrum of colors. Symmetry. Basic scientific principles right there in her art. Wow. So that blend, that art and science scheme, essentially that became the foundation. It led to her 10 books. Siona Levi using the CEFR framework. That's the Common European Framework for Languages, right? Yeah. Standardizing proficiency levels. Exactly. To outline language teaching.

And, you know, it's quite touching that she says her daughters, who are now adults, 21 and 26, they still teach her about creative thinking. That really speaks to the collaborative, continuous learning aspect, doesn't it? It absolutely does. It shows the whole philosophy, personal experience, scientific rigor, artistic expression, all woven together through collaboration and just, well, ongoing learning. So moving from the origins to what the program actually offers, let's talk about the pillars. What teachers and students get out of the Spark? What are teachers equipped with? Well, they receive quite a lot. Things like virtuous educational and ethical role modeling empowerment. That's a mouthful, but important. Okay. Empowerment for role modeling. What else? 16 online sessions, five personal consultations, a whole bank of learning units, 50 of them, rich vocabulary, humanly created.

Not AI-generated then. No, explicitly humanly created, plus 20 research-based classroom tools and techniques for fearless facilitation and apparently a warm smile. Always important. And underpinning all these tools is that core principle you mentioned earlier. Yes. Principle one, communicative, caring, creative, literacy. And it's worth breaking that down because it's central. So four components. First, listening: identifying main ideas, emotions, insights, messages. Really deep listening. Got it. Second, reading: tackling complex texts, literary and informational things on sustainability, science, art, understanding events, emotions, plots. Right, not just surface reading. Definitely not. Third, conversation interaction: actually participating, using rich language, expressing ideas fluently, connecting to real-world problems, finding the essential points, making connections, seeing multiple perspectives. That sounds demanding but crucial. It is. And fourth, writing.

Creating texts with a personal style, learning to edit from complex down to simple, clear ideas, conveying those ideas and connections effectively. So those four make up that first core principle. But there are others too. Yes. Briefly, there's also the 5E's strategy for creative problem solving, components for professional development, building a common language in the classroom, and really focusing on curiosity to drive that internal motivation. And what are the big picture aims? Operationally, what's the goal? English proficiency, yes, but for tolerant communication. And equally important, nurturing the student's whole personality, their competencies, culture, heritage, all within a classroom climate that feels, you know, trustful, sharing, and joyful. It sounds very holistic. What about the underlying values? Key values are equity, really trying to fulfill each student's unique creative potential, and developing their agency, their ability to act and solve problems for their community's well-being.

And the payoff. Yeah. What are the promised results educationally? For improved achievements, obviously, but through meaningful learning. Also, renewed motivation for teachers, which is huge. Definitely. Teacher burnout is a real issue. Exactly. And developing that communicative, caring, creative literacy in students. And crucially, this idea of channeling aggression. How does that work? It provides specific ways, specific channels, and problem-solving exercises in a supportive space to take that raw energy, that aggression, and redirect it. Turn it into creativity, productivity, adaptive thinking. Transforming it precisely, transforming it into something that contributes to 21st century readiness-that's a powerful idea! So flipping to the student side, what do they tangibly gain? They develop what the program calls 'human intelligence skills' while also learning to leverage AI effectively for their learning; they get to create their own English learning products based on their ideas, ownership that must boost engagement immensely.

They gain awareness of their own creative potential, their vision, and this interesting concept called waypower. Waypower-yeah! The ability to find the way, the path or strategy to reach a goal, even when maybe the willpower fluctuates. It's about resourcefulness. Interesting distinction. And teamwork. Yes. Mastering personal participation within teamwork. Crucial skill. It's all geared towards embracing lifelong learning. You mentioned a visual metaphor earlier, the tree brain. Green and orange branches intertwining. Yes. And it's more than just a pretty image. It represents this core idea: that intelligence isn't fixed, it's organic, like a tree. It grows, it connects in diverse

ways, like roots and branches. So learning is about making connections, adapting, not just memorizing facts in isolation. Exactly. It's alive, interconnected, constantly evolving, fostering adaptability. Okay, that makes sense.

So connecting this to the wider world, what about insights from that ETL conference in Jerusalem you mentioned? How do they feed into this? Well, some speakers there really echoed these themes. Susana Galante, a techno-pedagogical coach. Okay. She emphasized that digital literacy isn't just about using tech. It's about durable skills, adaptability, creativity. She pushed for an integrated approach, critical, adaptive, and creative skills together. Did she suggest practical tools? She did. Things like napkin AI for making quick infographics, visualizing concepts, or Leonardo AI, which is fascinating. Actual images. Wow. So AI helping visualize abstract ideas. Right. Bringing student creativity to life visually. But what about students who find learning difficult? That came up at the conference, too. It did. Simone Duvall and Arona Agranoff pointed out that struggling students often, well, they avoid practice.

It's a common issue. So what's the takeaway there? It really highlights the need for resources that students actually connect with, things they're curious about. That's the starting point. And of course, differentiation is key, meeting those individual needs. Makes sense. You also mentioned Elias Farah, the chief instructor of English language education. Yes, and he made such a powerful point about teachers. Even with machines learning language, the human teacher remains essential. He used an example. A great one from Gulliver's Travels. It took only six teachers to teach Gulliver a language, but 300 tailors to make him a suit. Huh. That certainly puts the value of teaching in perspective, the human element. Absolutely irreplaceable. And that links to what Arona Agranoff and Leo Sullivan stressed, the importance of practice, repetition, exposure for fluency, automaticity.

Right. The basics still matter. They do. Agranoff noted that reading more builds vocabulary and having more vocabulary makes reading easier. It's a positive cycle. She also liked the idea of an English board in the classroom, for showcasing student work. Of I can do this. Were there other AI tool suggestions? Yeah. Howie Gordon mentioned Notebook LM. Students can feed it their compositions or links, and it can generate a podcast from it. A podcast from their own writing? Yep. And even add questions within the podcast. It turns their work into an interactive product. Very cool. That is cool. What about Leo Sullivan's point on complex systems? Right. He talked about complex systems being inherently adaptive and creative. And he applied that to education systems. They have to adapt to changes, reforms, external events.

Like a living organism. Exactly. And language itself. He reminded us, drawing on Piaget, that language isn't static. It's a living, changing, adaptive system. It evolves. That idea of adaptation seems central. It brings us back to that ancient wisdom you mentioned from Percavant. Mm-hmm. The comparison between two kinds of learners, Eleazar ben Hercanus, the plastered cistern which loses not a drop. Perfect recall. The retainer. Right. Versus Eleazar ben Arak, The ever-flowing spring, the generator of new ideas, the creator. And Michelle Kornfeld, with the spark, believes we can nurture both. That's her conviction, that we don't have to choose. We can help learners be both the cistern mastering the fundamentals through practice and the spring adapting, creating, generating that's fostering true human intelligence. It's not either, but both hand. Precisely. A

powerful combination.

And when we talk about adaptability, it's nuanced, isn't it? Encyclopedia of Creativity points this out. It does. Adaptability can just mean conforming, fitting in, which might actually stifle creativity. Just going along. Right. But it can also mean something much more dynamic. Adjusting subtly to new situations, creating new ways to cope or deliver results. It's proactive creation within adaptation. So less about just fitting in, more about creatively responding. Exactly. And here's a related kind of fun insight. Humor is a form of creativity. Humor? How so? Because it depends on seeing things from a new perspective, right? Shifting the frame, Kornfeld shared a lovely anecdote about her and her mother laughing over Yiddish jokes. As a way of coping and adapting. Yes. Within their own cultural context, it's a subtle human way of using creativity humor to adapt.

That's a great example. So bringing it all together, the spark seems to be about more than just students adapting to the world. Right. It's also about empowering them to adapt the world to their ideas. A living, vibrant English or any language that serves their expression, their problem solving. Okay. So. Reflecting on this deep dive, it feels like the spark offers a really holistic view. It's weaving together communication, care, creativity. Definitely. Fostering that human intelligence, using AI thoughtfully, building adaptability, seeing learning as organic, growing like that tree metaphor. It really emphasizes balancing the foundational knowledge, the cistern, with that agility to innovate and adapt to the ever-flowing spring. Navigating the complexities we face today. You need both. So here's a final thought for you, our listener, to mull over. Given everything we've explored about the spark, about learning, about human intelligence. How might you consciously cultivate both that disciplined cistern and that creative flowing spring in your own life, your own learning journey? Yeah. What's one small, maybe a JAPTA step you could take, even this week, to deepen your own human intelligence in a way that feels genuinely creative? Something to think about.