

8. ART

Children at Play: The Art Activity Center

The art activity center brings joy, excitement, and satisfaction to young children. Its major purpose is to nurture children's creativity, curiosity, imagination, and initiative.

If children are given time, opportunity, and freedom to experiment with creative materials, to make discoveries, and to test ideas, they develop a foundation for both academic and adult achievement.

E. Paul Torrance, author of *Developing Creative Thinking Through School Experiences*, defined creativity as:

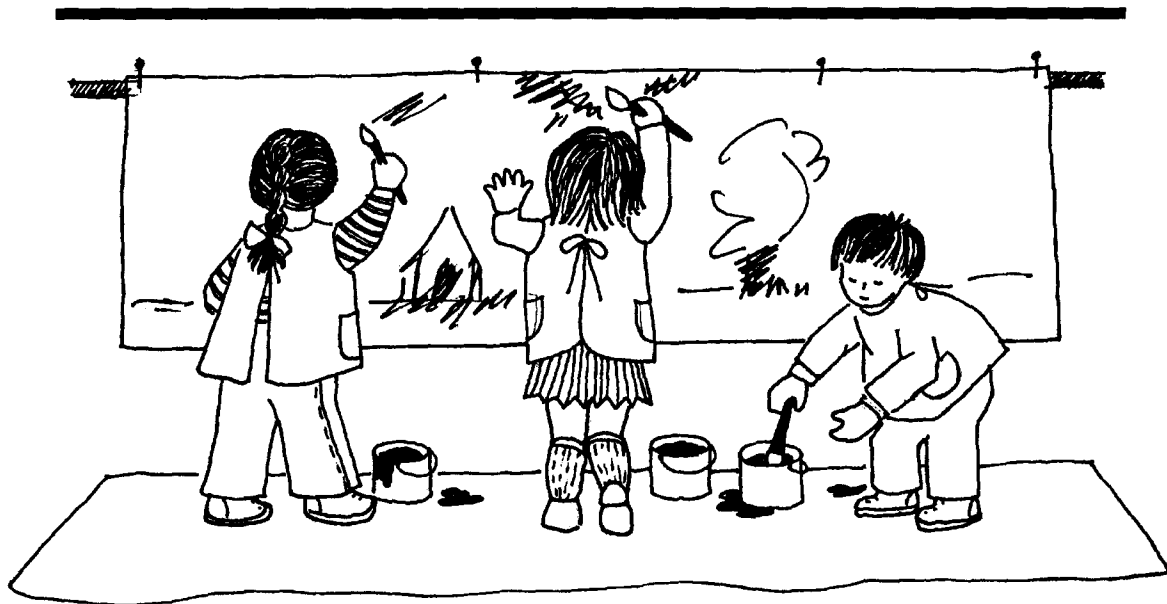
The process of forming ideas or hypotheses, testing them, and communicating the results. Implied in this definition is the creation of something new, something which has never existed. . . . [This process] involves adventurous thinking, getting away from the main track, and breaking out of the mold. It represents a successful step into the unknown. Creative ideas ultimately become evident in such things as scientific theories, inventions, improved products, novels, poems, designs, paintings, and the like.

Children become intensely involved in the art activity center. They explore different media. They paint with brushes and with their fingers. They use clay, crayons, markers, yarn, sticks, brushes, collage materials, paper of all colors, weights and sizes, chalk, paste, scissors, and a host of other materials. An important point to remember is that the exploration process itself is the most vital activity.

A high-quality art education program provides creative experiences through a variety of materials. Children create both two-dimensional (painting and drawing) and three-dimensional (construction and weaving) products. The program also allows children opportunities to look at and talk about art. These activities give them a chance to discuss what they like, what is pleasing to them, and how art makes them feel. They acquire information on culture and history, and become aware of the community around them.

Children become excited about what they are doing, even though their final product may not be recognizable to an adult. Sensitive teachers respect each child's feelings and accept her efforts. They also keep in mind that children of the same age may be at different developmental levels.

In the early stages of painting or drawing, a child's muscular activity leads to scribbles (ages two to three years). This first stage is a sensory kinesthetic experience and a very important developmental stage. Between the ages of two and four years, the child begins to draw distinctive shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles. One day, the child may accidentally make a circular shape with two little circles and will joyfully exclaim, "I made a face." This usually happens between the ages of four and five. Practicing over and over again, the child begins to develop motor control. Later, depending on her range of experience, she begins to create intentional forms and may imaginatively tell stories about these forms. By the age of five, many children are drawing pictures that include people and can tell stories about their pictures. It is important for the teacher to keep a file, or portfolio of children's drawings so that progress can be documented and discussed with families. It is important for parents to know about the stages of art development so they can encourage and praise their child's efforts.



The preschool teaching team should serve as facilitators who encourage children's originality. Teachers sometimes unwittingly limit children's creativity by presenting them with patterns and models. Trying to imitate adult models can cause frustration, since young children's eye-hand coordination and hand dexterity are not fully developed.

Developmental Characteristics

The following pages present characteristics of children's art from a developmental perspective.

The Three-Year-Old

- Children at this age begin to associate lines and shapes with tangible objects.
- There is a transition from "marking" to drawing.
- Art work is determined by factual and kinesthetic activity more than vision.
- Compositions reflect motor activity and a part-by-part thought process without regard for adult notions of visual or logical coherence.
- Size relationships are largely determined by the scale of the children's motor activity and nature of the medium. They may exaggerate size relationships in order to show parts of the work that are of special importance to them.
- Color choices are governed by personal preference and children's access to new or easily reached colors as well as by their expressive intent or perceptions.

The Four-Year-Old

- Children become consciously aware that lines and shapes can stand for people, animals and objects.
- They begin to verbalize a narrative account of their work. They should be encouraged to do so. This reinforces their awareness that visual forms are related to life experience.
- Four-year-olds begin to formulate ideas for expression before they begin working. This does not happen immediately but becomes part of their learning style in a gradual way. They are conscious of the need to discover visual means to communicate what they have in mind. This effort begins more noticeably by the age of five. The "early expressive"

stage of development has really begun.

- Their eye development is still not complete and children at this age still tend to be far-sighted. Detailed work at a close range is often difficult and produces eye fatigue.
- They are more aware of size and color relationships. They are usually happy if placement of an image is judged appropriate by them.
- They are also now aware of doing art in group settings. Basic skills in listening, sharing materials, getting along within a group and assuming responsibility for materials (gathering and putting them away) are beginning to be understood now.

The Five-Year-Old

- Children at this age enjoy discovering that different art mediums allow them to create images and objects. Their interest span continues to grow and they will now work for extended periods of time on one project.
- Their painted and drawn images are more involved. Narratives about their work are more involved and longer. Growing competencies allow them to feel in control and confident.
- Three-dimensional work reflects growing skills in using and joining parts together. This skill is closely related to physical strength and motor control.
- Children approaching the age of five (or six) show a preference for using the right or left hand.
- Their color choices are now apparent and deliberate. They want to please adults and want to use the “right” colors. (The sky is blue, the grass is green, and so on.)
- Children at this age become interested in repeating images from earlier work. They may be trying to master a skill and will practice it over and over again. They will move on to new images as they grow tired of repeating themselves and see another image they want to master.
- They also enjoy learning words or vocabulary that help them to express their visual ideas more precisely: for example, scissors, glue, paint, brushes; twist, rub, and roll.

Impact on Developmental Areas

The art activity center plays a significant role in a comprehensive curriculum. It contributes to all areas of development: emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and creative.

Emotional Development

The art activity center fosters emotional development by:

- Offering opportunities to communicate without words
- Providing an outlet for the expression of feelings
- Permitting the release of emotional pressures
- Giving a sense of power
- Providing self-gratification in the creation of an individual piece of work

Physical Development

The art activity center promotes physical development by:

- Developing small-motor control
- Developing a sense of touch
- Enhancing visual discrimination
- Encouraging body movement
- Giving experience in eye-hand coordination

Social Development

The art activity center enhances social development by:

- Encouraging children to make decisions and solve problems

- Fostering independence
- Affording opportunities to work with others and take turns
- Learning to assume responsibility for the care of materials
- Encouraging respect for each other's ideas

Intellectual Development

The art activity center strengthens intellectual development by:

- Increasing vocabulary
- Helping to learn about cause and effect — how and why things happen
- Learning about line, color, shape, and texture
- Helping children recognize their own names (Teachers put names and dates on work or children begin to write their own names on their work.)
- Increasing the attention span
- Learning to arrange, sequence, and plan

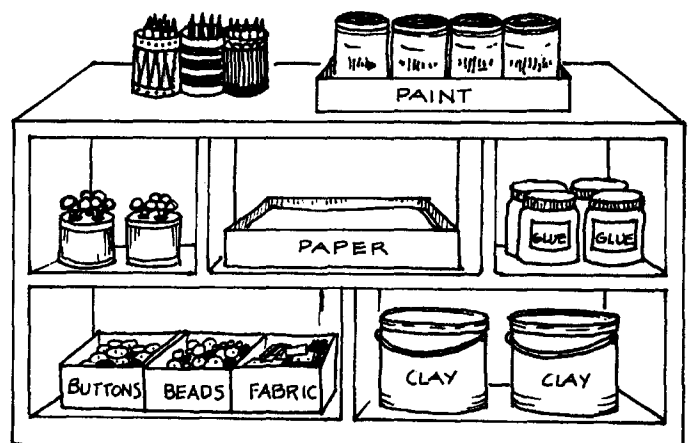
Creative Development

The art activity center strengthens creative development by:

- Encouraging divergent thinking through open-ended solutions
- Building an appreciation of cultural and artistic heritage

Setting Up the Art Activity Center

Crayons, washable markers, scissors (right- and left-handed), collage materials, paste, glue, and paper



(construction, newspaper, used paper, and magazines) should be on an open shelf so that children can reach everything by themselves. Recyclable materials like wire, tape, staples, and string should also be available for making three-dimensional constructions. These materials should be available at all times.

Children should have opportunities to paint every day. Set up the easel with large sheets of newsprint (24" x 36") and water-based paints (red, blue, and yellow) in small paint containers. Use small amounts of paint so there won't be much to spill and so that brush handles don't get sticky. Refill the containers promptly.

Have a long-handled brush available for each color. Younger children or children who have little experience with an easel will need short-handled brushes, which are easier to manipulate. A combination of brushes will give the children a choice and a variety.

Hang paint smocks or old shirts close to the easels. Children should wear them as they paint so that they do not stain their clothes. They may need gentle reminders to wear the smocks.

Moist clay should also be available in the art center. Cover it with a wet cloth and keep in a large can or crock. Keep clay boards and clay hammers on shelves.

The Teaching Team's Role

Opportunities for painting should be available daily, and paint should be introduced in the first week of school. Some teachers use all three primary colors at once; others prefer to put them out one by one. One color can be put out first, another can be added a day or two later, and a third can be introduced thereafter. The children can then use these basic colors to mix the secondary colors. Eventually, they can learn how to create pastel colors by adding white.

During the year, changing the shape of the newsprint can motivate children at the easel to try new approaches. (For example, you might cut the sheets to make large circles.)

Children should not be limited as to the number of paintings they create unless other children are waiting a turn. If the number of easels is limited and children often have to wait, they can try table painting. Painting on the floor is another option. Protect the floor with newspapers.

To vary the experience, you might also let the children paint with:

- Smaller brushes
- Old toothbrushes
- Squirt bottles
- Cotton-tip swabs
- Cut-up sponges or vegetables
- Spools or cardboard rollers

Many teachers encourage experimentation by setting up an art table with a special activity. This might include finger painting, soap painting, string painting, blot painting, wax-resist painting, or materials for making puppets or mobiles.

Stimulating Creative Activity

Almost anything motivates children to experiment and be creative. Some children are naturally very inventive while others feel less comfortable expressing themselves. The teacher provides many objects, ideas, and motivators to assist and expand children's interest in art.

The teacher can:

- Bring art objects to class for the children to see and discuss
- Display copies of famous art works around the room
- Discuss art in children's books
- Collect natural objects to discuss and use in art projects
- Have children draw and paint to music
- Provide sensory experiences of tasting, smelling, hearing, feeling, moving and encourage children to express these sensations through an artistic medium

Take the children on field trips to museums to look at art and learn about art history. Ask a local artist to come to the classroom and work with the children. Both activities will be interesting and fun. Integrating art into all activity areas and reinforcing children's creativity, innovation, and natural affinity for making things magical allow children the freedom to explore and feel confident about themselves as artists.

Positive, practical suggestions for adults involved in art activities with young children cover "what to do" as well as "what not to do." This is partly because

children will ask adults to do their work (“Make me a dinosaur”). It is tempting for adults to acquiesce, not only because it is hard to resist children’s repeated requests but also because the materials themselves may tempt adults. Many adults have not had opportunities to be creative, and they may want to get involved. Someone once said that the teacher sets the stage, but is not the performer. Doing for the child may make her fearful of trying.

“Do’s” and “Don’ts” for Encouraging Children’s Interest in Art

DO

Provide enough space for each child to work comfortably without interfering with others. Sit near a child who needs encouragement. Show enthusiasm and interest.

Provide choices of color, a variety of options, and a generous amount of materials so that several children can work side by side.

Respond to all children as they work and evidence appreciation of their efforts. A smile, a pat, a comment on color, line, or a combination of textures can go a long way. Comments such as “You’ve really worked hard,” are helpful, if they are sincere.

Comment judiciously and honestly on children’s work. Remember that your body language may not be correspond to your words. If you don’t think it’s beautiful, don’t say so.

Allow children to take their work home. At the Orientation Session, describe the stages of children’s art work to parents.

DON’T

Do not model or show children exactly how to make something, such as how to make different kinds of lines with a brush or how to blend colors with crayons.

Do not tell children what to make. Give ideas, offer suggestions, and bring in models and many varieties of materials for them to explore.

Do not emphasize the final product. Emphasize and reinforce the process.

Do not tell children, “You have enough.” They may never have had enough of anything.

Do not ask what the child is making. They may not have anything in mind. If they do and you can’t recognize it, you are telling them that they are failures. Be careful about saying “It’s beautiful.” They may have been painting a scary monster! If you want to encourage discussion, ask *how* a child did something.

DO

Allow children time and freedom to experiment. Children need "to mess" as they explore. Process is primary.

Help children put on their smocks for easel painting. Encourage children to use the easel by having it available every day. Encourage care in the use of materials. Model correct use.

Put names and dates on all children's work. If children spontaneously tell you about their painting or drawing, put this information down, too.

Encourage painting to music for children whose body movements are tight. Painting with fingers, hands, toes, and feet is fun, too!

Realize that "wrong" proportions may represent children's feelings or an experience. They may also be due to the child's developmental stage. Understand that children's feelings toward art are different from adults. Appreciate their work on its own merits, not by adult standards.

Hang some of each child's work on the walls at children's eye level, as well as on bulletin boards, for parents to see.

While it may not be feasible to display every child's work every day, make sure nobody is neglected. Help children respect one another's work.

Encourage children to help in the clean-up, but work alongside them.

DON'T

Do not hurry children.

Do not compare children's work. Competition interferes with the development of positive peer relationships.

Do not hang only the "best" examples of children's art.

Do not feel you have to comment on every piece of a child's work.

Do not allow tools or materials to be misused.

Do not expect that children will be able to clean up at first without adult help.

Do not omit the child's name or put it on the back of the picture. Print it on the front.



Activities and Projects

Finger Painting

Finger painting takes space, so it is best to do it with a small group at a time. Put each child's name and date on the dull side of wet-glazed paper before putting water on the paper. Press out the wrinkles before a child begins. Children should wear smocks.

Tell children that in finger painting, they can use their fingers, hands, and fists. No brushes! This activity allows children to mess in a socially acceptable way. You may need to set limits. Because the activity is so enjoyable, children will accept these limits.

Finger painting can also be done without paper on a plastic-topped table. You can make a print of what is on the table by pressing easel paper over the design and pressing down. This makes it easier to clean the table when children are done.

Although finger paint is available commercially, it can also be made in the classroom using any of these three recipes:

Cornstarch Finger Paint

- = Use one part cornstarch to three parts water.
- = Mix cornstarch with cold water until it is smooth.
- = Cook until it is clear and has the thickness of pudding.
- = Add vegetable coloring while the mixture is still warm.

Small groups of children can help measure and mix. They can also help with the cooking, under close and careful adult supervision.

Laundry Starch Finger Paint

- = 3 parts laundry starch
- = 3 parts cups of soap flakes
- = 8 parts boiling water
- = 1 part talcum powder
- = Poster paint or food coloring

Mix starch with enough water to make a smooth paste. Add boiling water slowly, mixing constantly. Cook over low heat until glossy. Stir in soap flakes while still warm. Add powder and paint when cool. If liquid nontoxic starch is available, mix it with either liquid tempera paint or powdered paint.

Soap Flakes Finger Paint

Whip soap flakes to the consistency of cake batter. Add a small amount of washable paint for color. If some children seem reluctant to put their fingers in the soap flakes, involve them in the whipping process and let them paint with brushes on plastic table tops with the mixture.

Other children can use the mixture to finger paint on the table. When the tabletop has been "painted," it can be cleaned with sponges.

Sponge Printing

Cut several sponges into different shapes. Dilute tempera paint with water and put it into shallow bowls. Have children dip the sponges into the paint and make prints on paper. Some children will rub the sponges over the paper instead of printing. In time, they will grasp the idea of printing.

Found-Art Printing

Collect large buttons, cardboard rollers, plastic forks, bottle caps and other objects. Place paint in shallow plastic dishes or in a cupcake baking tin.

Have children choose an object and cover it with paint. Each results in different patterns. Teachers can start by showing the activity as the children watch. Students quickly catch on and make their own designs.

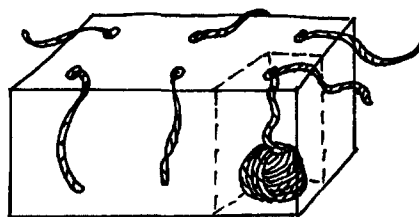
Blot Printing

Children drop paint (it is easiest to do this from a plastic bottle with a narrow tip) on one side of folded paper. They then fold the paper together and press or rub the two sides against each other. As they open the paper and see the design that has emerged, they talk about what they see. This activity is useful for language development as well as for expressing fears.

Depending on the age of the children, teachers may have to fold in half the paper on which the children will work. If you do this, let the children watch. Soon they will pick up the idea and do it on their own.

String Printing

Children dip string in paint and pull it through a piece of folded paper. Repeated pulls make interesting designs. Smocks should be worn.



Wax-Resist Painting

The children crayon heavily on paper. They might even use candles as crayons. Then, using paint that has been thinned with water, they cover the whole picture. The wax resists the paint, and the drawing shows through. The children often call this "magic." The teaching staff should refer to it as a science experiment.

Play Dough

Play dough is available commercially. It can also be homemade. Children enjoy helping to make play dough.

Play Dough Recipe

- = 4 parts flour
- = 2 parts salt
- = 1 to 2 parts water

Mix flour and salt. Add water and stir well. (Adding 1 tablespoon of salad oil makes a smooth mix.) Add tempera paint or food coloring to color.

Play dough does not harden. Keep in a closed container.

To provide variety, start with uncolored play dough. The second time, add one color. Thereafter, you can keep changing the color.

Puppets

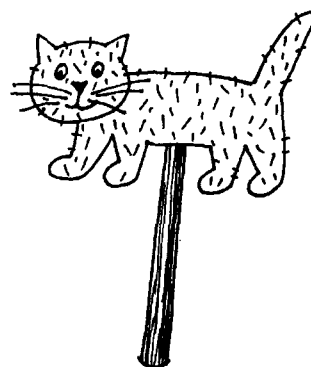
Puppets are an integral part of several activity centers. Purchased puppets may be used for dramatic play in the manipulative center, the block center, the family corner, the literacy center, or the music center. In the art center, children can create their own puppets; this adds the dimension of imagination and creativity to their value.

Puppets can be made in many ways. Begin with simple ones and allow children to repeat making these before moving on to more complex ones. Puppet making should take place with small groups or with individual children. Don't press for realism. Let the children's imagination take hold.

At first, short impromptu performances are best for either small groups or for the total group. Plan group performances around familiar stories or books. Stages can be constructed with blocks. They can also be made out of large cartons: just remove the back section and cut an opening in the front.

Paper-Bag Puppets

Use small paper bags that fit easily (but not too loosely) over the child's hand. Show children how to put their hand inside the bag and, with their fingers, open and close the fold. This will help them to think about where the mouth should be.



Children can use collage materials and glue (buttons for eyes, cut-up straws or pipe cleaners for mouth, pre-cut shapes for nose and cheeks) or tempera paint, crayons, or colored markers to make a face.

Another way to make paper-bag puppets is to have children fill paper bags with torn-up, crushed newspaper to form a ball shape. Staff will need to tie the shape with string. This becomes the head. The children can either paint or use collage materials to make their puppet. Puppets can be an animal, a make-believe creature, or a person.

Stick Puppets

Cut pictures of people, animals, cars, trucks, or machines out of magazines. Paste them to thin sheets of cardboard or heavyweight paper. Trim. Glue the stiffened shape to a tongue depressor or stick. As children mature and begin to paint representational figures, use their paintings instead of pictures from magazines. When using stick puppets, hold the stick below the stage and move it back and forth so that only the picture is visible.

Stick Masks

Stick masks are another version of stick puppets. Young children are sometimes fearful of over-the-head or eye-covering masks. Stick puppets can be used as a mask, providing a way for children to dramatize or role-play without fear.

Sock or Mitten Puppets

Materials needed include socks or mittens, buttons, yarn, trimming, glue, and felt pens. Staff should demonstrate the idea by putting the sock or mitten over the hand. Children may need help in cutting holes for fingers to protrude.

Stables

A stable is best described as a standing mobile or a three-dimensional collage. Stables are easy to make.

Make a base from hardened clay, play dough, or Styrofoam. Used Styrofoam from packing cases can be cut into rectangles approximately 6 centimeters by 8 centimeters. (This has the added benefit of demonstrating to children the value of recycling.) Insert uprights into the base. These can be small branches, popsticks, wire, pipe cleaners, or dowels. Fasten collage-type materials to the uprights with hole punchers, paste, glue, wire, staples, or paper clips.

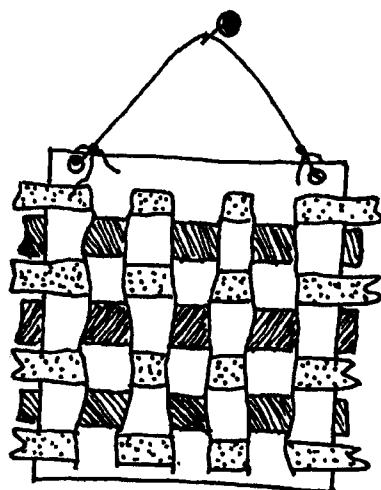
Mobiles

Mobiles are for older children, since they involve balancing. Use a clothes hanger or a large dowel for the crossbar. Children use string and paperclips to hang items. They must slide them to different spots for balance.

Weaving and Stitchery

Children can weave with strips of paper, yarn, natural materials, and other found objects. Once children learn the basics of weaving, they can create their own weavings.

Children can also do simple stitchery using big needles and yarn. Adults should show the children how to use needles safely and be present when children are using needles.



Summary

Art activities appeal to everyone. The more varied the materials, the better. The art activity area is a place where extra hands are always needed and parents are actively involved.

The art area can always use new materials. Encourage parents and family members to contribute any of the following:

Boxes
Cans
Styrofoam
Magazines
Old paint brushes
(for painting outside)
Seeds
Wood scraps

Buttons
Fabric
Newspapers
Old shirts
(for smocks)
Sticks and twigs
Yarn, string, ribbon