

The Benefits of Incorporating the Arts

A family child care provider is reading a non-fiction book about how plants grow and notices one of the 3-year-old girls moving her hands in a weaving pattern up over her head as the book shows the seed sprout and begin to grow. Another girl next to her notices what she is doing and pretends to pour water out of a watering can on her and giggles. The provider suggests that the children who would like to could come up with a story about a little plant and act it out or maybe even find some music that they can all move with as though they are plants that are growing .



The Arts Every Day

There are opportunities to incorporate the arts throughout the day with young children and many developmental benefits to exploring the arts for young children. The arts can offer children an important way to express their ideas and feelings in a way that captures them better than their words are able to and allows them to connect with one another as well.

The arts include:

- visual arts (drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, etc.)
- music
- movement/dance
- drama
- poetry
- storytelling
- and more...

The Arts Support Development

Cognitive: When a child creates a representation, they grow in their understanding of symbols and symbolic thinking. As children explore art materials they learn what materials can do and how to use them for a variety of purposes, which supports planning, problem solving, and decision-making.

Physical: Using a variety of art media and tools supports children's large and fine motor skills, and their accuracy and precision increases with practice. As children explore movement they gain an sense of themselves in space and what their bodies can do.

Social and Emotional: Children's artistic creations prompt communication with adults and peers and are an opportunity for relationships to grow through better understanding of each person. Children explore and express ideas, feelings, and senses through the arts. They learn more about themselves through expression, and build a positive self-concept by finding areas of the arts that they enjoy.

Art or Craft

To truly be considered art there should be opportunity for creative expression. This means that every child's artwork or performance can and should look different if the intention of the activity was to engage in the creative arts. With crafts, the end product for each child tends to look identical and the goals might include following directions or practicing motor skills, but not using imagination or planning and carrying out an original idea. An art activity usually is open-ended, meaning that there are many possibilities. An art activity might result in a product or it might just be about exploring the process.

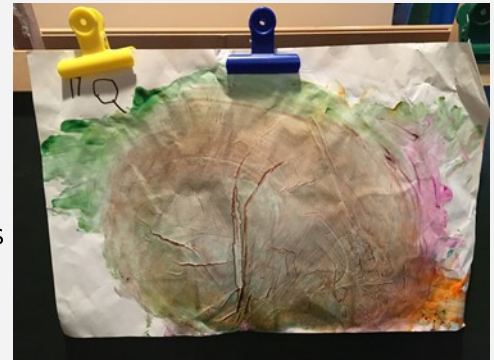
Exploring the Arts:

- **Time for children to engage in exploration of materials or media is important** for constructing an understanding of how to use the materials or media at some point with intention. This does not mean that you should never offer guidance or suggestions, particularly if a child is experiencing frustration in an activity. Offering guidance with a technique or verbal suggestions or encouragement is supportive, but taking over the activity or doing it for a child may ultimately discourage a child by sending a message that they are not viewed as capable.
- **Children should also do as much of the activity as possible themselves.** It can be tempting to cut out all the pieces for a child, or do the gluing for them, or direct the dramatic play, but it isn't always necessary, and your understanding of each child's development and the kinds of individual supports they need will be part of the decision making process.
- **Children should have access to arts materials and be encouraged to explore the arts every day.** It is one of the best ways to get to know the children's interests and strengths and communicate to them that there are many different ways to communicate ideas and that their ideas are important.
- **Talk with children as they are in the process of exploring or creating with the arts** to better understand what they are thinking and expressing as they work. Often the end 'product' does not reflect all of the meaning behind what they explored during the process and trying to guess what the child has tried to represent can be confusing or frustrating to the child. Try asking an open question about the experience to better understand what the child was doing during the process.

A two year old stands at the easel and hums to himself as he dips his brush into the red and makes a vertical line on his paper, then into the blue and makes another line next to the first. He continues dipping his brush in each color and adding

lines. By the time he runs out of room on his paper the paint is turning muddy brown and he starts

to cover over all of the lines with the brown paint. The provider has been changing a toddler's diaper nearby, but has not seen the whole experience and only can see the large brown blob that is now on his paper. She says to him, "Tell me about your painting". He points to the paint and says "The kids" and moves his hand holding the brush over the paper as though he is painting lines. She says, "The kids?" and he nods and smiles. While she can't see what went on during the process, she is able to validate that the process was meaningful for the child.



Resources:

Isbell, R., & Raines, S. C. (2012). Creativity and the arts with young children. Cengage Learning.

Rinaldi, C. (2006). In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning. Psychology Press.