



## Encouraging Creativity through Open Ended Art by Debbie Gray

Creativity is defined as the ability to generate a new idea and product. Creative thinking is random and intuitive, meaning, exciting ideas appear from nowhere, unexpected connections occur, and solutions to different problems can reveal themselves. Creative thinking is as important as the analytical thinking which our society has traditionally emphasized. Creativity needs to be nurtured. <sup>i</sup>

Young children have the desire to create. Art is a means of self-expression, a way for a child to show his/her feelings and express emotions. It is important as educators that we take a child's artistic talent seriously and appreciate and value the process of creating open-ended art as well as the product.

Open-ended art allows the children to do "free art" and make independent choices on what materials to use and the outcome of the work. Open-ended art is focused on individual expression rather than on the final product. When a child experiments with open-ended art with a variety of materials, the child is learning initiative, problem solving, taking risks by showing originality, and expressing herself through representation. <sup>ii</sup>

In contrast, with pattern or teacher directed art work, the focus is on the finished product. This type of art work stifles the child's creativity and can hurt their self esteem if their picture does not look exactly like the pattern or their friends' work.

How do we as educators support and encourage open-ended creative art work?

- Provide a rich assortment of materials and experiences. To meet the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) criteria for Art 5.1 there must be at least 3-5 materials available from at least 4 out of the 5 categories. The categories are: drawing materials, paint materials, three-dimensional materials, collage materials, and tools.
- Follow the child's lead. Children generally learn from experiences that are an interest of their own.
- Expand on the child's ideas whenever possible by explaining other uses for the materials that are provided, and asking open-ended questions.
- Make objective observations. As the child is creating try to make descriptive, factual observations about the work, for example, "I like the way you used a lot of green and red." or "I see you have made a lot of blue circles in your picture." instead of statements such as "I like your picture."
- Encourage conversation by asking open-ended questions or prompts such as "Tell me about your picture."

Exploration and creative thinking are linked to meeting challenges throughout our life!

---

<sup>i</sup> Parents As Teacher National Center –Born to Learn Curriculum 3 years to Kindergarten Entry.

<sup>ii</sup> Zellich, K. (1996). Constructivist Art-Decoding the differences.