



CHAPTER 2

Visual and Performing Arts



The visual and performing arts are as natural to young children's lives as language and play are. The arts build skills such as problem solving and critical thinking; they bring parallel opportunities for the development of language/communication, mathematics, and the development of social and interpersonal skills. The following activities are often referred to as children's play: scribbling with a crayon, pretending to be a pirate or a bird, humming bits of a tune, banging on a drum, or swaying to music. But, as the *California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 2* clearly points out, these behaviors in fact show elements of artistic expression and creation that support continuous development of artistic skills. They also show the hallmarks of children's abilities to express themselves through symbols and aesthetic images.



Such a developmental perspective supports this curriculum framework for the visual and performing arts. Making simple and repetitive marks on paper are a foundation for *visual art*; the simplest melodies and rhythms support learning in *music*; engaging in **dramatic play** by pretending to be another **character**, perhaps in a make-believe land, is essential to **drama**; and moving even slightly to the **beat** or mood of music becomes *dance*. This chapter of *Volume 2* points to environments, materials, and practices that can help children progress in their artistic skills and knowledge during the preschool years.

Much of children's development in the visual and performing arts during the preschool years proceeds naturally and needs only fertile soil, along with time, to grow. Children *initiate* many behaviors and routines when they simply go about their play. They practice many skills along the way, and supportive physical

and social-emotional development occurs as children progress from ages three to five. At the same time, their drawings become more mature and expressive, their **pretend** characters and **settings** become more complex and social, their musical expression skills grow with their muscular coordination and abilities to discern beat, tone, and **melody**, and the movements they coordinate with music or simply orchestrate in silence gain in surety and expressive complexity.

A primary responsibility of the preschool teacher is to let such natural developments occur. Child-initiated artistic activity is valuable not only because it is so enmeshed with a host of developments for children, but also because children cherish ownership of much of what they do. Children follow their hearts and minds to what interests them and to areas where they experience increasing mastery. They draw as they will and may not be interested in exactly what thing,



animal, or person the creation represents. They may hold firm to their idea of how to draw a tree, behave like a bear, or sing like a bird; it often becomes important for teachers and other adults to avoid critiquing such expressions (except where the child may solicit advice). Teachers would do well to let the child experiment with, and perhaps revise, her expressions as the need occurs or as maturing views of the world and its possible representations take hold.

Along with child-initiated art, a complementary perspective needs reinforcement. This perspective recognizes the ways that teachers can and should support young learners in their development. An element of this scaffolding is creating conditions in the preschool program in which interesting and important connections between the arts and other developments can take place. Capitalizing on language and communication opportunities is another example; placing children in settings where cooperation is important and where cooperative dispositions and skills may grow is yet another. Some art activities can help children become aware of and reflect on differences among people, become exposed to diverse art forms from different cultures, and create a common platform of learning for children between home and school. These considerations will set the stage for children's growth and interest in the arts.

Many vignettes in this chapter present examples of situations where child-initiated activities unfold and how teachers can best take advantage of them. Other situations involve teacher-planned actions for important purposes—to spark actions and reactions on the part of children, to ensure full inclusion of children in the early childhood setting, to bring about specific language learning in a formal, planned way, or to capitalize on an

organic development presenting itself no matter how it came about.

Two sections describe a productive context in which the visual and performing arts can be brought to the preschool. As with other chapters in this publication, this chapter describes what are considered *guiding principles* that apply to teaching preschool-age children and learning in the visual and performing arts. Some principles are drawn from knowledge of teaching and learning; others are directed specifically to instruction and learning in the arts. Guidance is provided about *materials and environments* that serve to support development in the arts in preschools. Clearly, the environments and materials should support the choices children typically make to pursue visual art, music, drama, and dance. Environmental conditions and material provisions also need to support what teachers wish to bring to artistic activities in their classrooms.

Finally, each of the four strands features discussions. A *research highlight* brings to life an area or topic in the research literature relevant to the strand—visual art, music, drama, or dance. A sample *developmental sequence* in children's drawing also illustrates the strand. Notes about encouraging *family involvement* in the arts with children and some questions for *reader reflection* close the sections.



Guiding Principles

This section describes general principles for preschool teaching and learning in the visual and performing arts. Each is applicable in some way to learning in any of the arts disciplines. Some principles are derived directly from contemporary theories of learning and child development. These include the importance of teachers “knowing” their children and providing instructional activities that tap into their prior levels of knowledge and preparation for those activities. Some principles, such as the first one below, point out general attributes of children as learners, particularly their keen, almost innate, enthusiasm for the arts.

The principles also include statements about the importance of exploration in pursuing the arts; after all, children’s creative expression will be more authentic when it is not dictated by adult rules or standards. When allowed this freedom, children will pursue not so much quests for right answers in art, but rather for expressions that are right for them or pleasing. This principle certainly does not suggest that teachers, parents, and caregivers are not valuable participants in the creative process. Their role is to scaffold learning; they do this by providing structure to activities, mediating potential problems, and inspiring and encouraging children’s progress. In this manner, adults can make the arts rewarding to all children, including those with special needs.

Beyond helping to build artistic skills, reflection and modification are important to the creative process. These opportunities in the arts also build skills such as problem solving and critical thinking; the arts bring parallel opportunities for the development of language/communication,

mathematics, and the development of social and interpersonal skills. In the same vein, the arts have applications to learning in many disciplines and to aspects of social-emotional development. Observant teachers can capitalize on the arts to foster such development.

The arts can be pursued even with meager budgets and free materials. Children benefit from high-quality learning experiences and high-quality materials—both as vehicles to encourage exploration and as symbols that demonstrate adult caring for children’s welfare.

► **The arts are inclusive of all children.**

The arts allow all children to participate in a meaningful and significant way and can help in developing a collaborative preschool environment. All individuals, including children with disabilities or other special needs, can find the arts satisfying and enjoyable. Accomplished artists with disabilities—Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Chuck Close (Wylie Coyote), Frida Kahlo, and Itzhak Perlman, among others—can serve as inspiration to all child artists, especially those with a shared experience of a disability.

► **The arts are a language that is common to all.**

Arts education is an opportunity to improve communication and embrace understanding between children of different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and between children with different abilities. Children will flourish from using the arts as a means of self-expression. Additionally, arts education may serve as a scaffold to help children build verbal language skills. A prop and shared experience can create a point of shared meaning among children and in teacher-child interactions.



► **The arts promote dispositions for learning.**

Most young children enter preschool with a love of drawing, pretending, listening to music, humming and singing, and moving. They have a natural curiosity about the arts and a desire to be involved with and play through the arts. Daily time devoted to learning in the arts, the learning environment, adult-child interactions, and the curriculum design support and develop children's dispositions for lifelong engagement in arts-related activities.

► **Children make their own meaning.**

Children are unique in their own artistic interests and abilities; they process, construct, and assimilate information and skills according to their own desires. Original, imaginative expression is a natural occurrence when children engage in the arts. However, appropriate amounts of adult intervention or scaffolding are often necessary to



reinforce, promote, extend, or redirect learning. When provided with time for exploration, an appropriate environment, modeling, and encouragement, children will grow to value their own expressions and interpretations.

► **Children are capable of creating original art in all its forms.**

Preschool children have an impressive capacity to be inventive and skillful in their creations. Often this is observed at play. A child may portray the character of a grandmother with powerful persuasion or create a sculpture from material found in the home. These are examples of natural, creative expression that can be nurtured in the school and home environment.

► **Children learn about human connections, beauty, and appreciation of the arts.**

The arts speak to human beings' need to make connections between intellect and emotion and to find beauty in the ordinary. The arts are critical in any educational program, as they present situations to children, families, and teachers in which there is no approved standard or answer; people can discover their own sense of beauty and order. When a child is exposed to the arts—when he or she comes to love the art object or art making because of a deep, personal knowledge of it—the child will appreciate and value the arts in a unique way.¹

► **The child's work is play.**

Children progress through various developmental stages and thrive in safe, playful environments. Well-designed arts curriculum accommodates children's developmental needs and provides various types of social interaction and play-oriented approaches to learning.

► **Children are active learners who thrive when challenged appropriately.**

Developmentally appropriate activities and materials are crucial to the young child. Art making can be messy, but children of all abilities progress in the arts through experiential, hands-on activities. An effective curriculum is therefore a container large enough to hold a broad range of methods, experiences, and definitions of success for all children, teachers, and preschool settings.

► **Arts experiences for preschoolers are more about process than product.**

If children engage in art, that is what matters—regardless of the end result or product. Predetermined performance goals or levels tend to hinder originality and potentially cause stress for children.² The process may sometimes seem messy and the result undistinguishable, but the child will likely take much joy in the experience and pride in her accomplishment.

► **The arts reinforce the integrated nature of learning.**

The arts are a unique way of knowing, but they also support learning across the curriculum. Engagement in the arts can be an effective means through which important early childhood skills and dispositions are developed—such as empathy and cooperation, curiosity in and knowledge about linguistic and cultural differences, ease with differences among people, vocabulary, symbolic understanding, and math-related concepts such as number, size and **shape**. Because children learn holistically, the arts should be presented in a way that is integrated with other domains of learning. Artistic

expression and products connect to other domains in the preschool curriculum, and these connections can be emphasized at strategic times during arts activities.

► **Cultural competence is approached through art.**

The arts are a part of all cultural traditions. The arts can help children reflect on their own cultures and origins as well as those of others. Some strategies included as part of this framework will aid preschool teachers in reflecting on the cultures and interests of the children's families and teachers. Through the arts, families and community members learn about and understand what goes on in preschools for their children and may devise at-home activities that embrace multiple cultures, abilities, and ways of learning. When children see and experience the artistic efforts and creations of families from diverse cultural backgrounds, it promotes positive connections between home and school. All children are empowered by sharing each other's family art traditions.

► **The arts are motivating and engaging for learners.**

Unique to the arts, for many children, is the feeling of success during the process of creation, which often results in the pursuit of art experiences. Success in the arts is not typically measured by a tangible product or a preconceived outcome, but through the experience and process. Early successes lead to future success and can create feelings of competency and confidence for children. The arts are a means to explore, take risks, communicate, and define personal perspectives and preferences regardless of culture, developmental status, or ability.



► **Art can nurture the nurturer.**

Learning in the arts provides the opportunity for teachers, along with the children in the program, to take part in artistic growth. The arts—especially in the preschool environment—are experimental, and teachers can enjoy the freedom and flexibility to offer arts experiences around interests that add to the feeling of joy and excitement in learning for all participants. Since children have a propensity for imitation, more than anything else, a teacher who is excited about the arts can potentially inspire children of any culture, language, or ability to become excited about art making.

► **The arts provide a unique means for families to interact.**

Parents and families, because of special bonds and trust, are in a position to encourage, enrich, and support their child's artistic opportunities, development, and education. They can contribute to the child's learning in the arts in many ways. This framework presents ideas for family activities in the arts in each strand. In addition, families are a rich resource for the preschool program. They have songs, stories, games, and many other talents to share. When children in the same early



childhood setting come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the gains from family involvement can be even more pronounced.

Environments and Materials

Most materials necessary to support preschoolers' learning in the visual and performing arts are inexpensive and easy to obtain and can often be shared across art domains. In fact, by rotating **props**, books, masks, and the like, teachers reinvent them in novel ways. Who would have suspected that the feather duster from the prop box would make such a wonderful peacock tail? This section presents possible materials for each of the four domains (a useful but not exhaustive list) and suggestions for creating a preschool environment to support learning.

There are basic needs in each art domain in order to create an exciting and enriching learning experience.

- Dance and movement require only space in a room and benefit further from music and **costumes** of modest scope and cost.
- Many things handy in a preschool environment can serve as props for dramatic play and drama,* where imagination can turn almost anything into something else.
- Visual arts largely involve drawing, painting, and creating **two-** and **three-dimensional** works of art. These

*In this chapter, the terms *dramatic play* and *drama* are used. *Dramatic play* refers to children's spontaneous engagement in play, whereas *drama* refers to guiding children's activity in a structured presentation or actually providing explicit instruction in which children act out a drama.

activities commonly make use of natural materials in addition to typical art supplies, such as, crayons, pencils, finger paints, watercolor paints, moldable dough, construction paper, and sufficient drawing or painting paper to provide the inspiration for children's creations. Children need flat places to draw and paint—tabletops, the floor, or outdoor surfaces, such as fences.

- ▶ It is important that music not be limited to prerecorded songs. Music is an active process. Music may be a little more demanding of specialized materials. A variety of **rhythm** instruments, such as wooden blocks, bongo drums, or hollow, hardwood boxes, can be used by children; little instruction is necessary. When these materials are not available, clapping hands and stomping feet can keep rhythm. Other musical instruments that may extend this collection include recorderlike wind instruments, shakers, stringed plucking devices, and so on.
- ▶ Adaptive materials may be necessary to ensure that activities are accessible for all children. (Examples of adaptive materials are provided in the “Suggested Arts Materials” on page 122, and strategies for their use are included in each domain.) These materials, along with good planning on the part of the preschool teacher, will allow children



with disabilities or other special needs to participate in art activities with a feeling of enjoyment and accomplishment.

- ▶ Materials that may serve as props for pretend play, or costumes that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the children in the preschool program, are good to have on hand.

Physical environments that support learning in the visual and performing arts begin with sufficient, appropriate space. The few basic materials described above, and space for the use of materials and movement of the children, are all that is required of the environment. For example, costumes, proplike objects, and art supplies, along with a designated workspace accessible to children, can help encourage learning while creating an aesthetically pleasing physical environment.

Scheduled time for arts activities, with an organized flow of necessary preparation and cleaning up (or possibly winding down of excited children), will also help facilitate learning. Teachers quickly learn—often through trial and error—the importance of allowing sufficient time for an art experience. The arts can also be woven into other areas of the curriculum throughout the day.

An effective environment for teaching and learning in the visual and performing arts for the preschool child considers:

- ▶ **The suitability, accessibility, safety, amount, and variety of materials.**

This precaution refers not only to traditional child-safe art supplies, but also to fabrics for draping and costuming, construction paper, tape, string, various sizes and shapes of blocks, pillows, and other child-safe items that can be imagined and used as props. The choice of materials is based on



their suitability and sustainability in relation to the multicultural makeup of the children and the abilities of the learners in the group. Families are often eager to contribute to the classroom. They may have cultural artifacts that will delight children or a musical recording that their child dances to at home. See “Suggested Arts Materials” (page 122) for ideas about materials that young children may use and enjoy in the arts program.

▶ **The aesthetics of the early childhood environment.**

The arts embrace aesthetics—the beauty of a drawing or painting, the pleasing sound of a musical passage or rhythm, the enticing look of fabrics used creatively in drama and dance. Children benefit from an aesthetic environment in which they can play or work. A well-organized room offers access to materials, sufficient open space, and walls and shelves in neutral colors, suited for displaying artwork.

▶ **Sufficient open space for movement, dance, and theater play.**

Space is also needed for group gatherings (e.g., on a rug) to reflect on works of art and performance activities. The child playing alone primarily uses objects, such as **puppets** or toys, to tell a story when engaged in **fantasy play**, and this can take place anywhere. A group of children engaged in fantasy play typically pretend as themselves rather than through objects. This type of play often takes place in a **role play** area with an open-ended theme, such as a market, bus, pizzeria, or train station. These children may want to travel around the room on their journey. When the teacher is involved in the fantasy play, a large section of the room and various props are often used.

▶ **Support for children’s drawing skills.**

Support for the earliest learners starts with providing a safe space, basic drawing materials and tables, and time in the day to create, experiment, and perform in a nonprescriptive, open-ended manner. Children learn to draw during times of independent interest in the action of drawing. For this purpose, an area with pencils, crayons, markers, and paper should be available during child-initiated play. Chalk and chalkboards also work well for beginning drawing. Easels placed in various positions can encourage different kinds of drawing and painting. Many children combine drawing and emerging writing in the writing center. As children progress, opportunities to draw from life or the outdoors using lapboards or large clipboards are valuable.

▶ **Indoor and outdoor environments for creating art.**

Children will find inspiration from variety. Can anyone imagine Monet painting his garden from a room with no windows? Choices of materials and settings will allow children an array of opportunities to paint in varying light or perhaps explore new movement at the park or in the auditorium.

▶ **Art that is displayed at the eye level of the children.**

The children’s own art, examples of visual art, or photographs of performing artists or children engaged in movement or musical activities are all displayed in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Children will likely enjoy being given the opportunity to choose their own works of art for display. An environment with a neutral background is ideal, so that the children’s art is highlighted. Digital photographs of children’s art can be taken and sent home or be used in a class art book.

► **A well-constructed environment for social and collaborative learning.**

The various abilities, cultures, and languages will provide valuable diversity for the individuals, as well as the class, as they share new experiences while learning in the arts. The children will draw ideas from each other and assist their friends. The teacher can facilitate a collaborative learning environment by designing the space for children to interact easily and find needed materials. It is important to have plenty of materials for all the children. They also need to learn the routines for sharing and cleaning up materials.

Art can include all children. A teacher will find families and specialists helpful in providing ideas on how to involve children with disabilities or other special needs in art activities. Teachers can also communicate with the children themselves regarding their comfort with trying an activity. Before beginning an activity, the teacher can say, “Sophia, do you want to try this?” just as naturally as asking any other child to try to write the first letter of his name.



Summary of the Strands and Substrands

The visual and performing arts domain is presented in four familiar disciplines or strands:

Visual Art. The visual arts domain includes the practice of drawing, painting, sculpting, and assembling collages in two or three dimensions. Preschool visual art is process-based and open-ended, allowing children to explore by using a variety of materials. The product is not the focus, though the children will likely view their creation as a masterpiece!

Music. Preschoolers love to listen to music as well as sing along and move with music. Music learning in preschool is a time to make new discoveries. Preschoolers can engage in music making, performing rhythms, musical sounds and passages with a variety of instruments, or simply sing along to a favorite tune.

Drama. For preschoolers, this domain involves both spontaneous dramatic play and teacher-structured drama, each of which inspires the other. Preschoolers are naturally inclined to engage in **solitary**, parallel, and group **play**, and draw on these experiences when acting out situations and using props (with teacher guidance). Similarly, engaging in drama feeds children’s imagination and inspires dramatic play. A goal in dramatic play and drama for preschoolers is unleashing the child’s imagination. Thus, the focus is on children’s creative engagement in drama rather than on actual performance or “the theater.”



Dance. The dance domain for preschoolers is interested in the creative and often expressive use of movement. Movement is explored in all its range (e.g., small and large, fast or slow, hopping or marching) and for various purposes, such as learning math or language skills, or for the joy of moving. Dance can be a nonverbal tool for expressing ideas, telling stories, or communicating emotions. It is often rhythmic and accompanied by music. Requiring thinking, social interaction, and physical exercise, dance is a motivating way for preschoolers to engage in learning.

The substrands appearing under each discipline, with one exception, are:

- 1.0: Notice, Respond, and Engage
- 2.0: Develop Skills
- 3.0: Create, Invent, and Express

The exception shown below occurs in the Drama strand. Here “Develop skills” and “Create, invent, and respond” substrands are combined into one substrand, namely substrand 2.0, *Develop Skills to Create, Invent, and Express Through Drama*.*

*In contrast to visual art, music, and dance, basic skills in dramatic play develop from the outset through acts of expression, invention, and creation. So these substrands are combined in the Drama strand.

Please refer to the map of the visual and performing arts foundations on page 118 for a visual explanation of the terminology used in the preschool learning foundations.

Curriculum Framework for the Visual and Performing Arts Disciplines

The four disciplines are treated in succession. The primary intention is to provide examples of children engaging in the arts or involved in activities where turning to an arts-related activity could enhance learning. The presentation model generally involves a rich situation described in a brief vignette, followed by the identification of a “teachable moment” implied or explicitly visible in the vignette. These descriptions are followed by specific teaching and learning strategies that could capitalize on the teachable moments identified.

These vignette, teachable moment, and strategy triads are presented alongside of, or embedded in, descriptions of more general strategies aimed at a considerable range of preschool learning goals.



Visual Art

Developing Curriculum in the Visual Arts

Preschool children often have a natural fascination with the process of creating visual art. Making marks, squishing clay, and using a brush to apply color are activities that attract most young children. In groups where children speak multiple languages and may not share common words, visual art can create connections and a way of communicating. Art can become a way for people to connect across cultures to their common humanity; an appreciation for it may begin in preschool. Inviting families into the environment to share works of art from the home is an opportunity to build a bridge to the home.

Young children are naturally creative. The visual art framework is designed to encourage creativity; open-ended projects emphasize the process of working with visual materials. In other words, the curriculum is not focused on encouraging a child to produce, for example, a specific painting, but rather to practice using a brush on paper without a set outcome.





1.0 Notice, Respond, and Engage

This strand describes children's interest and enjoyment in the visual arts (for example, in drawing, making sculptures, or painting). To notice is to orient attention to something. To respond is to interact with the materials and methods of an art form. This response may be subtle (for example, a glance, a smile, or stopping an activity). To engage is to sustain attention and interest over time.

Teachers should encourage beginning learners to discuss works of art and communicate feelings and opinions about them in their own language. Exposure to **abstract** and **representational** art by artists from different cultures and periods of history is important. Teachers show children pictures of art or actual works of art and encourage them to notice the shapes, colors, **textures**, feelings, and subject matter of the work. In addition, finding out about the children's likes and dislikes is helpful. Both "like" and "dislike" responses are accepted. Questions—such as, "How does this make you feel? Why? What is happening in the picture? Can you think of any words to describe the picture?"—may encourage discussion.

Children begin to notice and respond to shapes that are in pictures, paintings, and sculptures. In order to recognize shapes and orientations in visual art, children need to acquire the vocabulary of shape and perspective in their own language. Teachers can help children recognize and develop a deeper understanding of shapes by encouraging children to explore shapes and their attributes. Teachers provide them with opportunities to represent, build, perceive, and compare shapes. For example, parents and teachers can encourage children to use shape names in everyday interactions, engage children in conversations about different shapes, and provide them with opportunities to manipulate, create, and represent shapes in a variety of ways. In addition, teachers can create play situations in which children naturally learn and explore shapes. For more information about strategies related to shapes as well as positions in space, see chapter 6, "Mathematics," in Volume 1 of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework*.

VIGNETTE

Roberto and Minh, two four-year-olds, sit beside each other outdoors and draw on propped-up drawing boards. Roberto uses a black crayon to draw lines back and forth across the board, covering other shapes beneath. As he draws, he begins to make the sound of a siren. He says, in his home language, "Here comes the fire! Call the engine and the doctor! There's a person inside!" He then makes siren noises along with his marks, making darker marks as the sirens wail louder. Minh pauses, looks at his barely started sketch, and then softly adds siren noises of his own while scribbling red crayon marks. Roberto's drawing becomes a tangle of dark marks. Minh's drawing is a red-line rectangle of sorts.

**TEACHABLE
MOMENT**

Like many drawings by young children, Roberto's drawing is not about making a picture of an object or how things are supposed to look. His drawing is about actions and events that go through time, and the interaction between the children is an affirmation of their social bond. They are declaring to one another that they both know how to play at being sirens. The interaction is the pretext to more complex imaginative play: the beginning creation of a shared scenario via drawing. In addition, the children use drawing and art to explain and understand events that may be disturbing for them. The role of the provider in this case was simply to create a space with materials for drawing and to encourage the children to use them.

VIGNETTE

Ms. Cheng is showing children how colors can be mixed to create other colors. While pouring some yellow paint on the plate, she says "What is this color?" "Yellow!" shout the children. Knowing that some children speak other home languages, Ms. Lin asks "Milagros, how do you say yellow in Spanish?" "Amarillo," Milagros answers. "Samantha, how do you say yellow in Mandarin?" "Huang!" Samantha answers. Ms. Cheng pours out some blue paint and asks the same set of questions. As she moves on to mix the two colors, they turn into green. This time, without prompting, some children shout, "Green!" others say, "¡Verde!" and others say, "Lu!"

**TEACHABLE
MOMENT**

In this vignette, Ms. Cheng turns a color-mixing activity into a chance to learn and reinforce some color terms. More importantly, by asking Milagros and Samantha to name these colors in their home language, she drew them closer to the activity. For more information about strategies to support children who are English learners, see the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1*, chapter 5.



Interactions and Strategies

Encourage engagement with art at all levels. Recognize the “action drawing” that occurred in the first vignette and view it on the children’s terms. Make comments or questions that stress the different ways that similar or identical things can be represented through drawings and perhaps explore each child’s “thinking” about what they have drawn. Encourage mutual respect for the individual choices involved. In the first vignette, Roberto is creating a free-flowing and abstract representation of possible actions and events in time and space and is beginning to tell a story. Minh is participating in the experience with his drawing as well. To the children, the marks represent a complex, imaginative jumble of moments and objects, and they are working on extending their capacity to think beyond the concrete.

Provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own work and sometimes their own actions, through communication with peers and the teacher, and to reflect on the works of peers in encouraging and positive ways. Facilitate positive and respectful interactions. Encourage children to talk in their own language about what they have drawn. In describing or communicating about their work, children develop their vocabulary and perception of art. The use of terms to describe color, shape, relative size (e.g., *bigger*, *smaller*), and the positioning of objects in space (e.g., *in*, *on*, *under*) encourages children to think about their art with more depth. Encourage discussion of particular works by the group, especially with older preschoolers. The following vignette illustrates how a teacher might discuss the drawing experience with the children.

The provider observing Roberto and Minh waits until they finish drawing. She communicates to Minh, “You and Roberto really seemed to enjoy coloring today. Tell me about your drawing.” Minh replies, “It’s the fire truck. I saw fire trucks come to our street.” The provider responds, “Wow, that is interesting. Is that why you used the color red?” Minh replies, “Yes, and Roberto made the smoke.” Roberto claims, “That is not smoke. That is the siren sound.”

Respect individual developmental, cultural, and linguistic differences, and encourage children to respect them. Children may respond to art in a wide variety of ways depending on individual preferences, developmental differences, and cultural background. For example, a child who is from a house where messy projects are strongly discouraged may have trouble engaging in a finger-painting project. Other children may have sensitivities to different textures and need an opportunity to observe or participate in other ways. One way to encourage a group to notice and respect cultural differences in works of visual art is to invite families to bring a favorite work of art from home into the preschool. Model acceptance and respect for whatever families choose to bring.



2.0 Develop Skills in Visual Art

This substrand refers to the basic skills needed to invent and create through visual art. Examples of skills include the ability to draw a line or circle,

to use a paintbrush, to choose and mix colors, and to combine materials together to create an **assemblage**.

VIGNETTE

Maya, a five-year-old, and Carla, a four-year-old, have an argument over taking turns with the dollhouse. Maya calls Carla a name. Ms. Moniz, the teacher, talks to the children and asks that they draw a picture of what they think happened. Maya draws two figures with a jagged, zigzag line extending from the mouth of one figure and calls the picture “mean words.” Carla draws a figure sitting in a house.

TEACHABLE MOMENT

In this interaction, not only did the children develop their drawing skills and engagement, they also practiced their social-emotional skills. The practice of drawing an event charged with emotion allowed Maya to reflect on her actions calmly and to process the effect her words had on another child. In addition, she was able to take an event and express it in a single line. This develops her ability to imagine how to express herself in a creative and abstract manner. Carla, in her description of her picture, is focused on being “in a house” or in possession of the dollhouse.

Interactions and Strategies

Provide children simply with a means and place to make marks (e.g., a crayon and paper), and they will begin with the same basic images. Children progress through several stages of drawing in succession, regardless of when drawing is introduced. First, children make sets of vertical lines. They subsequently progress to repeated circles and crossed lines; then they typically begin to add lines that make their circles appear as tadpoles and then human beings. Children in a single preschool group typically represent a variety of these stages

when they enter preschool; do not expect all children to achieve the same level of representation in drawing at the same time. Encourage progression from mark-making to representational drawing by providing materials and undisturbed time to use them independently.

Encourage communication around shape and form to aid children’s drawing skills. Drawing from life can help children begin to represent things they see as drawings. Engage children in conversations about the shapes of different parts of an object or design to increase their knowledge and awareness of different shapes. It may encourage them to use



and combine different shapes in creating their own picture or design. For example, children may learn to draw a beetle after seeing one and noticing what shapes make up the form of the beetle. See the “Developmental Sequence of Drawing” on page 56 for more information. Naming shapes connects with curriculum in the mathematics domain.

Help children acquire painting skills through practice with the tools. In the beginning, simply show children how to make a mark with paint and a brush without dripping paint in unwanted places. For example, show the child how to remove excess paint from a brush before touching it to paper. Learning how to grip and manipulate tools for visual art reinforces skills that prepare children for writing.

Stimulate children’s interest in color and application of paint through other forms of painting. Teach children about colors and paint by spraying color onto a mural wall or providing paint-stamping activities. Encourage children to try mixing colors. Isolate the skill of using a brush to make marks by giving the children time to paint with only water; children often find this fascinating.

Create opportunities for children to work with dough, clay, or wet sand. Creating sculptures begins as a **tactile**, sensory experience. Children will naturally find ways to ball-up or flatten sculpture materials or roll them into coils using their hands. Demonstrate the skill of rolling coils against a table or rolling clay into a ball. Encourage communication about the different designs that emerge (that the coil looks like a rope, green bean, noodle, or a snake!), and name the two- and three-dimensional shapes they form (e.g., rectangle, circle, pyramid). Children may want to



make multiple shapes and squeeze them together to create a work of art, representational or abstract. Strength gained in the hand muscles by learning to sculpt reinforces fine motor skills needed in kindergarten for writing.

Provide only the malleable material, without tools, during children’s initial explorations of sculpting so that children have a chance to explore through touch. Activities that encourage open-ended creativity and exploration by using clay and hands can be prepared. A good example of a tactile clay activity is a push-pot. Prepare several Ping-Pong-sized balls of clay for each child. Then, demonstrate how to push the center down with a finger and pinch the sides to open the “pot.” Set the pot down on the table until the bottom is flattened and the pot stands. Encourage children to experiment with different fingers, and then allow them to discover different ways of stacking pots or sticking them together.

Communicate to a group of linguistically and culturally diverse children through sculpture techniques by using nonverbal methods. Some key beginning sculpture techniques can be demonstrated easily using body language. *Opening a solid* is the technique of poking the clay or dough simply made from flour, then pulling apart, and smoothing until

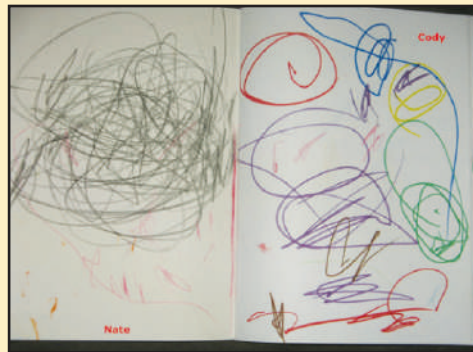


there is an opening through the sculpture. *Pulling protuberances* means gently pulling the clay or dough out to varying lengths and in different curves, then smoothing them. Encourage children to experiment with these techniques. Showing children photographs of abstract or nonobjective sculpture (i.e., sculpture that does not represent a particular object) may allow them to view the techniques they are mastering with greater pride and purpose.

Introduce tools after observing that children have had many “hands-on” opportunities to explore clay and dough sculpture. Children enjoy using basic tools or other items to imprint or sculpt dough or clay. For example, using a crayon to poke eyes into the coil-snake may interest them. Or simply creating repeating patterns by pressing an object (e.g., fork, comb, potato masher) into clay or dough may also intrigue preschool children. Provide time for children to become absorbed in this type of activity; then engage them in open-ended conversation about their creations. A slightly more advanced tool is a roller of some kind. For example, demonstrate how to roll a slab of dough or clay with a small rolling pin, and then the slab can be picked up and folded, bent, or wiggled into a wave or another shape.

Developmental Sequence of Drawing

When provided with tools and a supportive environment, children from ages three to five progress more rapidly in the visual arts than during any other two-year period prior to adulthood. Creativity and imagination are at their apex at age four-and-a-half years; most experienced preschool teachers will attest to this. The arts are a natural outlet for the creative thinking of a preschooler, and learning is rapid.



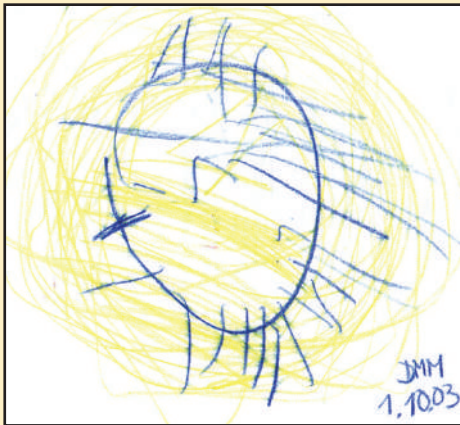
Early, nonrepresentational mark-making

The progression of children’s drawing ability is the most documented in the visual arts. When children are given a means and a place to make marks, they begin with series of vertical lines and move on to *mandalas* (i.e., repeated circles). The mandalas soon sprout legs and arms, then faces, and more detailed features such as hair, fingers, or eyes. Harvard University Professor Howard Gardner refers to this process as “the birth of the potato person.”³ This research has become so well-known that medical doctors will now check on children’s intellectual progress by asking the child and parent how detailed the child’s human-figure drawings are (rather than asking about letters and numbers)

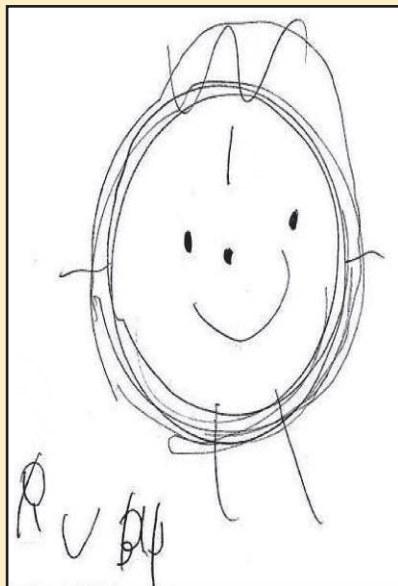


Developmental Sequence of Drawing (continued)

at the four-year and five-year checkups. Because children speak multiple languages and progress differently around writing skills, the question about drawing is more relevant and telling for this age group.

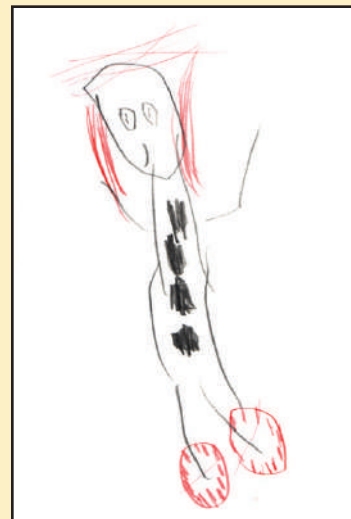


A mandala becomes an early representational drawing of a sun.



The emergence of the "potato person": a first effort at representing a person

The painting progress of children is not as well-documented as their drawing progress. In general, children begin by simply experimenting with brushstrokes and the process of applying paint to a surface. Children's first paintings are usually solid sections of a single color, two colors, or three colors at the most. The brushstrokes begin to change directions, and shapes emerge. Finally, children begin to attempt representational paintings. The subject matter of such paintings varies depending on the child, the teacher, and the environment.



A more advanced drawing: person wearing "sparkly shoes"

In general, experts agree that the first sculptures made by children are flattened media, coils, and balls. Progression from that point depends on the tools provided and the experiences the teacher chooses to emphasize and encourage.

3.0 Create, Invent, and Express Through Visual Art

This substrand describes how children use their skills to participate, express, invent, and create through the arts.

Preschool children spend much of their time creating, inventing, and expressing themselves, and they use various means and approaches to do so.

A strong preschool art program encourages creativity by allowing children to choose what they want to make (i.e., content), how they want to go about making it (i.e., process), and what it will end up looking like (i.e., product). For some children, simply keeping a safe, neat, accessible art area available is enough. Others need subtle encouragement; for example, teachers may communicate, “Did something special happen this weekend? What was it? Would you like to paint that?”

Planning art activities with a predetermined product robs children of the opportunity to explore, discover, invent, and creatively experiment on their own.

Whenever possible, activities should be open-ended. This is an area where communication with families is important. Some parents want to see craft products made by children rather than open-ended, child-directed drawings, paintings, and sculptures. Inviting families into the preschool space for an art show and stressing the learning goals of the program may be helpful. See the “Research Highlight” on page 59.

Visual art activities should capitalize on young children’s need for sensory-motor exploration and physical development. For example, when working with sculpture, children need space to pinch, pound, pull, roll, flatten, and punch the clay. When painting, children need a large stand-up easel for sweeping arm movements. Children with different physical abilities may need spaces to create art that accommodate their needs and make the work comfortable for them.

VIGNETTE

*Cecilia is four. Cecilia’s provider, Nate, has set up red paint and white paint for the children to mix together and experiment with **tints** of red. While finding out about different shades of pink, Cecilia wonders about other colors. She asks Nate, “How do you make yellow?” Nate shows her all the paints she can use and suggests that she use small amounts as she experiments. After mixing several different colors to try to make yellow, Cecilia tries yellow and white and makes several tints of yellow. Finally she reaches a conclusion and says to Nate, “To get yellow, you only mix yellow.”*

TEACHABLE MOMENT

In this example, the provider, Nate, allowed Cecilia to discover the concept of a primary color through her own curiosity and experimentation. Nate did not simply tell her at the beginning, “Yellow is not made by mixing other colors”; he allowed her to discover this on her own so that she could really learn the concept. The activity, to begin with, was process-oriented, as the children were not being asked to create a specific product. As the children experimented, the provider simply set up an interesting process to engage the children in their own exploration.



Research Highlight: Visual Art

Is it art? What is the difference between “art” and a mere scribble? Preschool parents may be as interested in this question as the puzzled adult viewing modern, abstract art at the local gallery. One sense of art stressed in this curriculum framework is that the visual and performing arts aim at the joys of free expression and the pleasures of seeing and creating images. Art instruction at the preschool level is also concerned with basic, first steps that can lead to more advanced artistic skills.

Differing views prevail concerning the *child artist*. One approach seeks *artistic significance* in a child’s work—perhaps a *genius* or a *prodigy* is emerging. A contrasting view dismisses the child artist by labeling his artwork “haphazard” and its occasional glimpses of clever expression and beauty as “accidental.”

Over the years, the work of Nelson Goodman and Howard Gardner at Harvard University’s Project Zero has helped to demystify children’s art. Those scholars view art through the lens of *cognition* rather than through a value-driven critique of aesthetics. Art is a cognitive activity, requiring thinking, problem solving, communication, and intent. And learning in art is frequently tied to learning in language as well as culture.

For Goodman, the classical question *What is art?* is transposed into a less-familiar question: *When is art?* As Goodman suggests, art “occurs” when its *symbols* are functioning aesthetically.⁴ The aesthetic functions of symbols include expressiveness (conveying meaning or feeling), susceptibility to multiple readings, and repleteness (full or abundant rendering). These ideas de-emphasize judgments of beauty or merit; Goodman’s *artistic creator* is the individual with sufficient understanding of the properties and functions of certain symbol systems to allow her to create works that function in an aesthetically effective manner.

And what of preschool-age children? Rhoda Kellogg’s documentation and classification of hundreds of thousands of children’s drawings from 30 countries testify to children’s ability to use symbols at an early age, often depicting qualities of the artist as defined by Goodman. Children’s art is frequently expressive, conveying emotion, feeling, action, and story. Children’s art may be more or less replete—with abundant renderings of objects or symbols at times, with vague, sketchy treatments at other times. Young children are not very likely to plan and create works with multiple readings—this ability belongs to more mature developmental stages and can emerge in adolescence.

Appearing commonly in drawings of children, especially those of two- or three-year-olds, is the *mandala*, a term used to designate symbolic representations that include a circular motif typically incorporating a crosslike figure.⁵ For the child, the mandala is a well-balanced, pleasing form that lies en route to genuine representation. The contrasting, superimposed elements of the circle and cross are precursors to the figure’s metamorphoses to rounded figures with legs, arms, and facial details.⁶

According to Gardner, the conditions suggested by Goodman, though helpful in thinking through the puzzles of children’s art, nevertheless leave the debate about art created by children *in a state of relative limbo*. The preschool teacher’s role is to introduce children to a range of constructive symbolic media and provide them with the *faith that the child’s own vision and ability to give form to vision are worthy*.⁷ The preschool teacher can view children’s art without an eye or plea for realism; rather, the gaze might borrow from Paul Klee, who, when discovering his childhood drawings, described them in a 1902 letter to his fiancée as *the most significant ones* he had yet made.⁸

Interactions and Strategies

Support exploration and discovery.

A fundamental strategy applicable to teaching and learning in widely differing contexts is shown in the interaction of Cecilia and Nate in the previous vignette and teachable moment. It illustrates the importance of “discovery” types of learning—letting children experiment or muddle through a problem or issue to find answers for themselves. Nate provides support, or scaffolding, when Cecilia comes to an important conclusion that has a more general application: some colors may behave like yellow, as a primary color.



Give children the time and space

needed to explore creativity. Ample blocks of time are needed to encourage sustained involvement with the artistic and creative processes. Some children will not be able to complete their work in a single block of time and will want to continue into the next day. Create a safe place for works in progress. Some children will impulsively finish in a few minutes; encourage these children to continue their involvement. Children also benefit from frequent and repeated experiences.

Provide a comfortable environment in which children can practice art.

Interesting visual art activities capitalize on young children’s need for sensory-motor exploration and physical development. For example, when working with sculpture, children need space to pinch, pound, pull, roll, flatten, and punch the clay. When painting, children need a large stand-up easel for sweeping arm movements. In addition, teachers and providers need to be open to any creations children produce, as children with diverse cultural backgrounds make meaning in diverse ways.

Furthermore, teachers need to take children’s cultural backgrounds into consideration when trying to interpret children’s creations. A child’s free creation can be misinterpreted if teachers look at it devoid of the cultural context. It is important for teachers to know the cultural context, and the curriculum framework is probably the most effective venue for this message.



Bringing It All Together

It is springtime. The children have returned from a walk outdoors with handfuls of yellow flowers. The teacher places the flowers in a cup in the middle of the painting area and asks the children the color of the flowers. Then he asks, "What shapes do you see in the flower?" The children say, "Circles!" "Lines!" "Squares!" The teacher says, "Really? Where?" The children point at different parts of the flower. The teacher brings out brushes and paint and asks the children if they would like to paint the flowers. Many of the children sit down and begin to work with the materials, producing all kinds of images. When a child has too much paint on the brush, the teacher assists in showing the child how to wipe paint from the brush on the side of the paint container. As the children finish, the teacher encourages the children to talk about their paintings and then places them in the drying area. Some children finish quickly, and others become absorbed and work for a very long time. Some want to try several times on new paper. A few children attempt to represent the flowers in their paintings, and others experiment with the movement of the brushes and the mixing of color on the paper.

Visual art activities bring opportunities for the development of language and mathematical concepts. By asking children what shapes they see in the flowers, the teacher encourages children to observe and describe the flower (before painting it) and to recognize the shapes of leaves, petals, and stems. Opportunities to talk about shapes of objects and describe their attributes develop children's ability to identify and know the

names for different shapes and to use shapes in creating their own drawings.

One of the most important ideas implicit in the curriculum presented here is that making crafts with children is not the same as teaching visual art. Activities in this strand should be open-ended. There should be many possible results or outcomes to the children's work in this area; teachers should focus on the process of doing the activity, not on the end product. An art lesson is not the same as having all the children make an object that looks the same. An art lesson focuses on, for example, what happens when paint is applied to paper of different textures, not on having everyone paint the same picture. Activities should be experimental and exploratory for the children, allowing them to create.

Programs serving children who may not have equal access to the dominant language or customs can create culturally inclusive curriculum by offering arts-based activities across the curriculum.

In general, children will be excited about visual art if their teacher is excited about teaching it. Providers should be empowered to structure their own creative activities in this area. When in doubt about where to start a visual art program or activity for the day, simply bring out paint and brushes, or crayons and some paper, and have the children give it a try; then communicate with the children about the images they create.

Research shows that creativity in humans peaks at approximately 54 months of age (four-and-a-half years old). Encouraging the practice and development of visual arts capacities is one way teachers can extend and develop creativity in preschool children.