

"It's No Picasso!"

[A Dad's comment about his daughter's work!]

A Guide for Parents on What to Expect and How Best to Respond to Your Child's Art Work

Making art can play an important part in your child's development. But what is art and how does it contribute to your child's progress? This guide attempts to answer these questions.

What Happens When Your Child Makes Art

When making art your child is exploring the materials, discovering how they can be manipulated and thinking about how they can use them. This process helps build a bridge between their inner and outer worlds which will give them a way to express themselves.

Importantly with an art activity the outcome is unknown. This is what will distinguish a piece of art from a piece of craft where your child is reproducing a pre-formed idea and following instructions.

Valuing the Process over the Product

Through the process of making their own art your child will **learn, discover and develop** more than if they were simply following instructions of a craft project. **This is why educationalists place great value on the process** rather than the finished piece. However, the finished product will reflect the learning and creative process and it will be totally unique to your child at that time.

What Your Child Will Learn Through Making Art

Physical Skills

Hand-eye co-ordination

Large motor skills

Fine motor skills



Thinking and Reasoning

Problem solving

Trial and error

Planning and organising

Estimating and measuring

Sequencing, matching and patterning

Spatial relationships

Language Skills

Communication

Symbolic representation of ideas

Vocabulary

Memory

Emotional Development

Self-expression

Purposefulness

Self-worth



Transferable Skills

Creative thinking

Innovation

Lateral Thinking

Intuitive Reasoning

Thinking outside of the box

What to Expect at Each Stage:

There are some broadly defined developmental stages to children's drawing. However, these stages often overlap and it's quite usual for children to switch from a more advanced stage to a previous stage.

18 months to 3 years of age

Pictures will be made up of lines and colour – more commonly known as scribbling or fanning. The child will be enjoying moving their arms and making marks on the surface of the paper.

As the child discovers the relationship between the movement and the marks they start to control their mark making.



3 to 4 years of age

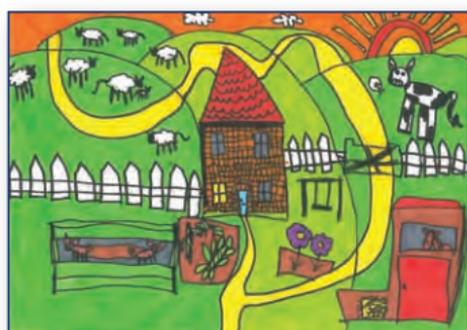
Figures start to emerge using circles and lines. At first they'll just be a circle and a line. But

as time goes by fingers and toes, bodies and faces start to be added – though not always in the correct anatomical place!

5+ Most children have developed a range of symbols to represent things around them – a house, a tree, a person. These you'll see repeated in their paintings and drawings.



A baseline starts to appear in drawings to anchor objects into place.



8+ Children start to add more detail to their drawings wanting them to look more 'real'. An awareness of space within the drawings start to

show items overlapping and landscapes have a horizon rather than a baseline. Children start to compare their work with others and become critical of it.

12+ This marks the end of spontaneous art activity as the young person tries to make their work look more representative of the real world. They can become frustrated when they're not achieving the desired results. This is where a teacher is needed to help them develop their skills.

Why So Many Pictures?

Often very young children are unconcerned with their finished piece, moving on quickly to start another one. The experience of exploring and the process of making is where the value lies for them.

Plus, children will often repeat and remake the same thing time and again manipulating the materials to give themselves a variety of experiences and outcomes. This is why you may be handed several pieces of work at the end of an art session.

How Best to Respond

Take the time to look carefully and you'll soon discover that your child's art is amazing. All you need do is let go of your preconceptions about what art should be and not compare it with the work of adults and certainly not with the work of grand masters. Child art cannot be the same as an adult's because:

- they don't have the skills to manipulate the materials
- their emotional and life experiences are limited
- cultural stereotypes haven't been learnt

but, that does not mean it is not worthy of careful consideration.

Your Response is Important

A positive response to your child's artwork will help to reinforce their own discoveries and learning. Simply saying 'that's nice dear,' isn't going to cut the mustard though. And please don't ask, 'What is it?' as it might not be of anything.

The best sort of response is to be considered, non-judgemental but specific.

For example you may say:

'Your line moves up and down the paper.'

'You've used two yellow triangles and one red square.'

'I see lots of coloured dots and wiggles.'

By making descriptive comments about the processes your child has used, you will show them that you appreciate their work and consequently they'll feel a sense of achievement which will encourage their enthusiasm for making more.

Their Thoughts are Important Too!

Remember to listen to what your child has to say about their art work – their comments are just as important – and, who knows, you may just learn something.

Display Your Child's Work

A great way to show your child you value their work is to display their pictures at home. The kitchen is often the favourite place to do this. You don't need to display every picture but one or two being shown will really please your child.

Further Reading:

http://www.artjunction.org/young_in_art.pdf

www.earlyarts.co.uk

The Art of Teaching Art to Children in School and at Home – Nancy Beal with Gloria Bley Miller

Teaching Art to Young Children 4-7 – Rob Barnes

Teaching your Children Art a handbook for Teachers and Parents series – Nigel Meager

Teaching Art at Key Stage 1 – Nigel Meager