

BETTER · KID · CARE

Topic: Arts and Creativity

Introduction

During the preschool years, young children blossom in their ability to experiment with new ideas, including new ways of creating with art materials. Preschoolers gradually develop a sense of ownership and pride in the objects they create. As their minds and bodies develop, their creations become more complex and detailed. As they gradually develop an understanding of representations (that a picture or model can represent a real object), they become more intentional about creating realistic drawings, sculptures, buildings, etc. During this period, children are also growing by leaps and bounds in their understanding of other people. By the end of their preschool years, children are beginning to understand that other people can have different perspectives, opinions, thoughts, and feelings than they do.



Creating Representations

What children are doing:

As preschoolers gain more practice with creative art and building materials, they become less interested in the material itself and more interested in what they can make with it. Because they are also getting a much better understanding of how a drawing or model can represent a real thing, caregivers see children being more intentional about creating works of art that look like something and paying more attention to details.

What caregivers can provide:

- Basic art materials (media, such as paint, and tools, such as scissors) that are available and accessible for children to use every day, enabling children to become very familiar with them. The collection should be well-stocked, in good condition, and organized in a way that encourages children to use them without adult help. Examples of media: markers, water color paint sets, colored chalk/pastels, modeling clay, colored pencil sets (for older preschoolers).
- Examples of paintings, drawings, book illustrations, etc. that depict a wide range of realism in representations.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Allow children to save their artwork and continue working on it over time, if they like.
- Encourage more detailed representations by making comments and asking questions that help a child focus on one part of the object they are representing, noting the color, shape, etc.
- Display and talk with children about examples of artists' and illustrators' representations. Ask questions that encourage children to think about different ways of representing objects with various art media (paint, clay, etc.).

Developing Persistence and Problem-solving Skills

What children are doing:

As preschoolers become more skilled at working with art materials and more intentional and invested in their creations, you also may see more frustration when they aren't able to create the effect they have in mind. Creating involves a lot of trial and error – or more accurately, disappointment. Children vary in their ability to tolerate situations that don't turn out the way they expected. Some preschoolers are risk-takers and don't seem to mind at all. They just try something else! Other children seem to be born perfectionists and become very upset when they don't succeed the first time. Most children fall someplace in the middle, and need a little support in developing persistence and problem-solving attitudes.

What caregivers can provide:

- Books with photos of specific objects, animals, etc. that the children are interested in or exploring at the moment.
- Real examples of objects that children are interested in, when possible. Separate the objects from other toys and materials and let children know that they are for observing – for looking at carefully. Drawing a representation of a caterpillar will be more successful and engaging for a child if he or she has a three dimensional caterpillar or two to observe! (By the way, this type of observing and drawing is a key element of scientific investigation.)

What caregivers can say and do:

- Sometimes children become frustrated or reluctant about getting a representation just right. Instead of creating it for them (which caregivers may be tempted or asked to do), help them figure out how to deal with the situation themselves. For example, if they don't know how to draw something, adults can help them find a picture to refer to. If they can't get a sculpture to stand up, they can be helped to brainstorm a solution to try. But more important than a specific solution to a situation is conveying the message that creating is trial and error and very often it doesn't turn out the way it is hoped. Creating isn't about perfection, it's about trying something new or different, seeing what happens, enjoying when it turns out well and

trying something else when it doesn't. Caregivers can let children know that that is what artists do. Or, better yet, adults can invite a professional artist to come for a visit, or take children to their studios, if possible, and ask the artists about failure.

Recognizing and Creating Patterns

What children are doing:

A couple of related concepts that show up more and more in older preschoolers' artwork are design and pattern. These decorative elements are different than representational art: they don't represent something else but are, instead, uses of line, color, and form that are interesting and appealing in themselves. Some elements of design incorporate mathematical concepts that preschoolers can grasp as they get older, such as symmetry (where two sides are mirror images of each other) and repeating patterns.

What caregivers can provide:

- Stamp set and ink pads: Once children are familiar with these, they often begin spontaneously making repeating patterns.
- Shape stencils, rulers, drafting templates, and other tools that enable children to experiment with line, shape, and form designs. Be sure to include pencils and markers with relatively fine points for older children.
- Paints, large paper, and objects for printing: If children have had plenty of previous experience becoming familiar with these materials, they will eventually start experimenting with designs, symmetry, and patterns.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Talk with children about repeating patterns and designs in their environment (patterns of colored floor or wall tiles or bricks; patterns or designs on clothing and other fabric).
- Use transition times to play simple verbal games where you chant a pattern ("Blue, blue, green... blue, blue, green...blue, blue, what comes next?"). The repeated rhythm of chanting emphasizes the repeated pattern of the words you say, making it easier for children to catch on.

Appreciating Art

What children are doing:

When it comes to artistic expression, older preschoolers not only are developing opinions and feelings about their own creations, but they are beginning to look more closely at and thinking about other children's and adults' artwork. Part of growing in social skills for fours is understanding that someone else's idea is as worthwhile as your own, even if it's different than yours. Understanding that individuals can think and feel differently about what is aesthetically beautiful or interesting, and that those personal preferences should be respected, is very challenging for preschoolers! But with encouragement, adult models, and practice, by the time they head off to kindergarten, they will be familiar with the attitude that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

What caregivers can provide:

- Opportunities to examine a variety of art or illustration styles. The group may do a "study" of several favorite children's book illustrators with distinctive styles (such as Eric Carle, Tana Hoban, Lois Ehlert, Ezra Jack Keats). Copies of individual illustrations/pages can be made available for children to examine closely. A similar study can be done of famous artists with very distinctive styles.
- Set apart an area to display individual children's choices of their favorite creation made that day or week. This encourages children to think in more depth about their own work, learning that evaluating one's own work is part of the creative process. It also demonstrates that other children can also think deeply and have opinions about their work and that those opinions can be very different from each other but they are all valuable.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Talk with individual children about their own preferences, choices, and feelings during and after the creative process. Ask things like: "What do you think about your painting? What is your favorite part? Is there any part that you wish would have turned out better?"

- Chart children's preferences and record their comments as part of the study of professional artists or illustrators. Talk positively with children about having so many different viewpoints.
- Invite children to offer thoughts about one another's work, asking similar questions: "What do you like about Jenny's sculpture? What does it make you think of?" Emphasize that people don't all have the same thoughts and feelings about the things they like, just like they don't all have the same face. Convey the message that different isn't wrong or bad...it's just different, and that each of them has the freedom to create art that he or she likes, even if someone else doesn't like it.

Keep in mind

Don't limit creative expression to the art corner. Creativity in general, and artistic creativity specifically, can be integrated throughout the curriculum. The key is for caregivers to recognize opportunities for children's creativity in many different places. Invite children to offer their ideas and skills in decorating, designing, arranging, and so on, to incorporate beauty and visual interest in different parts of the room. Create classroom books using children's illustrations (alphabet or number book, or a book on a topic the children are exploring). Invite children to help design and decorate a puppet theater, a dinosaur cave made from a large box, or traffic signs for use with the trikes outdoors. Suggest to block or Lego™ builders that they draw their design on paper, either before or after building. Ask individual children to draw pictures to represent special days on the month's calendar, such as birthdays, holidays, field trips, or special visitors. Add books with pictures of beautiful and interesting architecture to the block area and support children as they recreate and modify the designs. The possibilities are endless, once adults start looking! And the more opportunities and encouragement children are given to be artistically creative, the more confident, inventive, and skilled they become.



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