

## How can educators support children through the arts?

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What counts in making art, is the actual fit between the contents of your head and the qualities of your materials. The knowledge you need to make that fit comes from noticing what really happens as you work. (Bayles & Orland, 1993)

Art for children is very personal, it is open-minded and has to be voluntary as well as an everyday option, not a special occasion.



I share the view that children who are artists actually have a sense of themselves as an artist, or perhaps they may have different ideas at quite a young age. I see them daily and there is a sense of braveness and curiosity in a child who is tipping the paint across the floor, or pushing their whole hand in a pot and squealing with delight when the colour is pushed to the top and the outside of the containers.

I invite you to really think about such reactions from the child's point of view.

The location is an open, inviting space, and there are no boundaries to the availability of materials: you can see that for a creative child, this is an invitation to make art.

An artist will not accept just one single use for any given medium. An artist will look for a whole variety of uses, a whole new view point. An artist will be curious, engaging and tactile. This is the sort of participation which educators must encourage.

If seeing such experiences creates a fear of mess, a need to control the situation or, worse, a reaction that scatters the participant in the direction of the nearest door, then it is your role as a facilitator with children in the arts to grow your own relationship with creativity.

I believe educators must be willing to confront their fears and learn to understand their controlled reactions.

Fear is one fierce emotion and by confronting it we can create a great space from which to start understanding children and their experiences with art. Art provokes an emotional response, art provokes a judgement and the more you are able to learn about your own fears and judgements then the more able you will be to get on track to support children with their own emotions in art.

You may be surprised to find out that the fears you are experiencing can be linked back to your own bad experiences in art-making.

If that is the case then it is your duty to overcome the emotions and memories of your own bad experience so that you are not teaching them on.

Doubt is an intrinsic aspect of human nature and the quote above resonates with me, because there is little dialogue with someone who is 100% certain they are right. There is limited narrative; it is more a statement, and as far as conversation goes, not much follows after a statement.

Human beings are perhaps never more frightening than when they are convinced beyond doubt that they are right.

(Laurens van der Post)

It can be the same with art, since knowing exactly what you are doing in art is potentially quite limiting.

Because if you are 100% certain of what you are going to achieve, then you are really just thinking about the outcome and that takes all the playful possibilities out of the way before you have even begun.

Fear and doubt often accompany each other: fear of what you have started and fear of not knowing if you are teaching any kind of respect or care for materials.

Rest assured children who have creative and visual expression are masters in enquiry and, if you let them guide you, and by this I mean really relaxing about your own ideas about the use of resources, then your awareness of the possibilities will also grow and be nurtured.

An artist does not ask you to make the choices, nor does he or she work to control the situation. Instead, the artist invites you along for the journey, and looks to you to be the foundation of their learning, the reliable voice, the provider.

The artist looks to you to be the voice of calm in times of chaos, the voice of reason in times of indecision.

The artist looks to you to offer braveness in times of fear and to show understanding in times of despair, and, when the creative impulse is in its standing period, the artist just needs to know that someone is there, someone has their back and accepts them as one of the crowd.

The secrets of creativity, a power of mind that doesn't become clearer to anyone through knowing that it stems from the right or the left side of the brain. Innovation comes through trial and error, experimenting with new ideas until something that is both distinct and personal is developed.

(Grant, 2002)

### From thinking to action, from hesitation to productivity ...

My advice to educators who want to start supporting children as artists is to start noticing more, and to start bringing in the language of art, because language is the key to saving every situation.

Now, if you are an educator who needs there to be boundaries with resources, then by all means try this out, but notice what happens as a consequence and be prepared to negotiate and adapt.

Being adaptable with your areas of control can have the most beneficial consequences for our children.



How can educators support children through the arts? Kerri Iwaskow, Play and Learn Early Education Centres ([www.playandlearn.net.nz](http://www.playandlearn.net.nz))

Take, for example, the child who will only draw on the table; it is not the drawing on the table that is the problem, it is the medium they are using, because they will only learn what is erasable and what is permanent through trial and error, and in that way mistakes can become quite positive.

Educators of young children using the arts may believe they are making mistakes, yet perhaps they have instead actually found an honest place to start; mistakes lead to adaptability and reflection.

Making sense of children's artwork will take time, but I believe if we look at progress in terms of noticing the dispositions children show while they are being creative, such as being interested, engaging with the mediums, participating in the arts, being inventive with the resources, and with visual expression and overcoming reluctance, we will be able to monitor the learning that is actually happening for children using the arts.

#### **References and recommended readings:**

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