

Effective display of children's artwork

Why display children's art?

"Children are very aware of whether or not we cherish their work ... The attention we pay to creating and documenting displays of children's artistic work promotes visual and verbal messages." (Pinciotti 2001)

"There is nothing like seeing a child realize that she has caused a mark on a paper, or watching a toddler discover for himself that mixing blue and red makes purple." (Copple et al. 2013)

Art explorations have a strong positive impact on young children's development, and intentional displays of the work maximize and extend that impact. *"Seeing concrete reminders of their own work prompts children to recall and reflect on what they and their peers have done. It can also lead them to expand on their ideas and pursue an interest or a project on subsequent days."* (Epstein 2014)

Display for the children's benefit

Plan art displays in the classroom that engage the children.

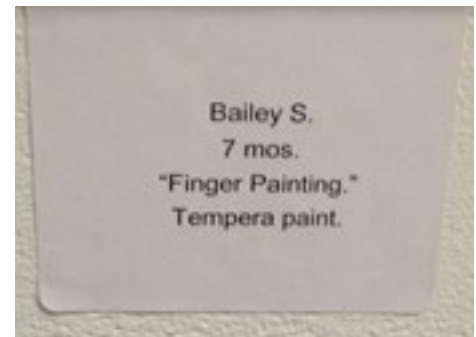
Lie on the floor and look at the space from an infant's point of view. Sit and see what a toddler or preschooler sees as she stands and scans her surroundings. Is it interesting, or cluttered, or beautiful? Does it celebrate the children in the room and their explorations and creativity?

Tips for effective displays:

- Mat two-dimensional works on colored construction paper with at least one inch or larger on all sides of the art piece. Choose a complementary or neutral color. Mat board or other types of paper also make suitable frames. ↓

- Hang work at the child's eye level, within reach. Remember that babies may spend a lot of time on their backs, looking up. →

- Art displayed within reach of infants or toddlers can be protected behind clear acrylic panels, slipped into clear photo sleeves, or laminated. Clear contact paper and clear packing tape can also protect work that will be touched and explored by the youngest art critics. As children mature, less durable protection is needed. →



- It is more respectful to make a separate label for artwork than to write directly on the created piece. Place the label at the side or underneath the displayed work, as a curator would in an art museum.
- Interview verbal artists about the feelings or thoughts associated with the art. "Tell me about this," or "Tell me how you made this." Write the dictation on a tag. For non-verbal children, the tag can simply list the child's name, age, and tools/techniques used. With highly verbal children, it may be helpful to audio record their description so that each detail is captured and can be transcribed onto a label.
- A wonderful thing about process-based art experiences is that if a piece of work gets ripped or ruined, another one can be created in its place.



Toddlers, intrigued by spiders and their webs, explored making their own webbed creations from yarn. The staff carefully arranged several yarn webs near a laminated spider poster reference on a child-height window where children might have a chance to view real spiders at work.



- Make displays interactive, if possible. For infants, some displays might be mounted using hook and loop tape, so infants can grab and hold a laminated, painted card and then restick the item. A flannel board display is another option for rooms where children may want to touch or play with art pieces. First, get the artist's agreement to having his work enjoyed in this way.
- Include photos of the children creating the art alongside the finished art pieces.
- Limit the number of items displayed. This is especially important for the youngest children who need uncluttered spacing to focus on the work that is posted. Find the "just right" balance between too much and too few displays.
- Change displays so that children see new creations. Keep the environment fresh. Children stop attending to displays that have been up for a long time.
- With a display of several items, the teacher should think about a simple order to the display. Try to communicate a particular message or theme about the experience that the artwork captures. Displays of artwork may document "a particular idea, artistic style, technique, the efforts of a small group, or an individual project" (Pinciotti 2001).
- Some programs offer an art reference (a print, a flower arrangement, a set of blocks) to children and then the children create their own expressions based on that inspiration. It's interesting to include the original reference or a photo of the reference in the display of the artwork.

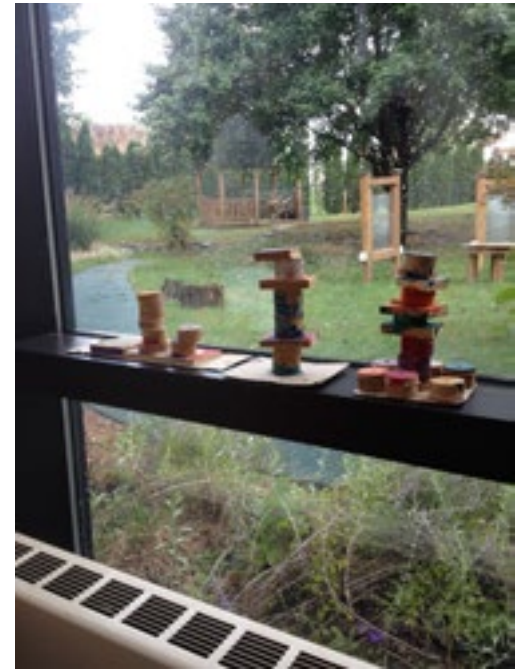
NOTE: Be aware of and follow local fire codes. The National Fire Protection Agency Codes state only 20% of walls can be covered with any type of combustible material in a space without sprinklers. This can be increased to 50% if a school is protected by a fire sprinkler system. The main intent of this code is having separation between these materials so if a fire starts, it cannot travel from one wall to another around the entire room or down the entire length of a hallway. (Wisconsin.gov 2013)



3-D displays

- A “tokonoma,” found in traditional Japanese homes, is a small space that holds a display of something beautiful. Early childhood educators can create their class’s own tokonoma for either created art or an art reference (Pinciotti 2001). An enclosed case or photo cube may be an option for protecting 3-D creations in an infant-toddler room.
- 3-D hanging objects help infants to develop eye muscles. They are also easy ways to add interest to space.

These sun catchers, hung near low windows, remind infants and toddlers of the fun they had smearing and swirling leached colors and clumped tissues in watered-down glue.



Displays for guests

Make learning “visible” for families, guests, and even for other classrooms to enjoy. These displays should be uncluttered and communicate a message about the process that the children experienced, and the inspiration or goals behind the art exploration.

These displays might be set up in an entryway or shared hallway at adult-eye-level. Like art displayed in the classroom, label works with the child’s name and helpful descriptions. These displays serve a different purpose from the artwork that is displayed in the children’s classroom.

Consider displaying a limited number of children’s works at a partner agency or business. This is a great way to gain visibility for your early care program and brighten a local work environment. Options to consider: the local children’s library, United Way, local banks, pediatrician’s offices.



Once displayed

Through art, teachers have a window into a child's experiences and thinking. There is a great opportunity for learning (both by the adult and the child) as people interact around a piece of art.

- If a child is gazing at art, a teacher can capitalize on that curiosity. "That sun catcher caught your attention. It's colorful; isn't it? Would you like to touch it? Oh, it twists when you touch it..."
- Talk about the displays with the children—recall the experience, describe the work, point to specific features, describe skills that a child demonstrated as she worked. Use rich vocabulary. "The more complex and different words you use with children, the bigger their vocabularies grow!" (Dombro et al. 2011)
- Play "I spy" with the artist or another interested child. "I spy a really long, wiggly blue line. Can you find it?" or, "I spy a blotch of paint that looks like a pink puddle." Be sure to watch the child. If the child breaks his gaze or turns away, he may be done with the conversation. Respect that signal.
- If several similar works are displayed together, ask an interested child to find some "green" in this one, then "Can you find any green in this one? ... How about this one? Which one is yours? Can you find your name?"
- Extend the art conversation for toddlers and preschoolers by introducing children's books that encourage looking closely and imagining. Two classic board books—*It Looked Like Spilt Milk*, by Charles Shaw, and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, by Eric Carle, are a great place to start. For a more contemporary selection, check out *Press Here* or *Mix It Up* by Herve Tullet.
- What about the worry that young children will tear the art that is displayed? That may happen. Clear contact paper, clear packing tape, plastic sleeves, and photo page protectors can all be used creatively in younger children's classrooms to protect artwork. If children enjoy tearing paper, provide intentional times for them to do that. Tearing paper develops important finger strength and eye-hand coordination that is crucial to later painting and writing skills. Encourage the children to explore the torn paper and glue, making their own mosaics or collages. It's a great transformation of a problem into a solution.

"That sun catcher caught your attention. It's colorful; isn't it? Would you like to touch it? Oh, it twists when you touch it..."

"Can you find any green in this one?"

[Photos provided courtesy of Northampton Community College Children's Center, Bethlehem, PA]

References

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