



DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE CHILD CARE, Inc.
237 N. Arch Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-659-0515

SPRING 2011

So What's the Big Deal About ART?

I once heard a five-year-old say, "I don't want to be a grownup because grown ups don't do art work." We cultivate this passion for artwork at DBCC in each of the children (although, hopefully, not at the expense of adulthood!) Most young children are naturally drawn to art materials and just love to mess about in paint, play-doh and markers!

The children at DBCC are exposed to a variety of art mediums at an early age. Younger children have materials and activities set out for them. Older children, with enough art exposure, are ready to go to the well-stocked art area and decide for themselves what to do. Creating their own art projects is a big deal for them. It gives children a chance to make decisions, play, plan, develop those motor skills, problem solve, experiment, create, be inspired, and, most importantly, do their own thinking.

Teacher initiated projects rob children of important opportunities to think. Once children have the confidence to use their own ideas there is no stopping them. In fact, I actually had one four-year-old child say to me, "Susan, we don't need your ideas any more. We have our own." [I

tested this statement the next day by putting out materials for string painting. Not one child string painted but the string pieces were eventually put to good use in a child initiated art project!] Once the children are at this stage, the teacher needs to keep the art shelf well stocked, to be constantly on the lookout for unusual art materials (tree branches, wine corks, odd styrofoam pieces, etc.) and to stay out of their way.

Children have more creative ideas than the stiff adult brain can imagine. What begins as painting at the easel with several colors grows into a wild collage with paper towels, tissues and a chunk of wood for good measure. I turned around one day and a child had actually incorporated his own sock into his collage! The children start thinking creatively and combining mediums. As a result, we often find the children creating the most phenomenal artwork.

Often in a classroom we see a "variation on a theme." One child will start an art project and another child will be inspired by the work and attempt to duplicate it. The product rarely looks the same as the original and often is more

developed. Other children may be inspired as well as a theme develops. One classroom had rolls of 3" brightly colored gummed paper in their art area. A child created a small basketball player using the rolls of paper to create legs. The other children became interested and the idea took off. Many of the children started making basketball players and they got larger and larger until they stretched from the floor to the ceiling. The children needed a ladder to put their creations on the wall. The classroom eventually had giant colorful basketball players on every wall. It was an amazing sight!

Another classroom had a child who was very interested in creating a police officer hat out of paper. It started very crudely with a flat piece of paper taped to his head. This idea was picked up by the other children and after a few weeks of working every day on the same theme, some of the children were actually creating an entire uniform out of paper. The hat became more refined until it had a band

and a bill and looked like a police hat. There were sleeves in the shirt and long pants-all out of construction paper.

The children worked together and continued to make needed adjustments and improvements. Projects such as these create a wonderful sense of excitement and purpose in the room.

Artwork is so important for a young child's development. One of the best presents a parent can give a child is art supplies and plenty of them (rolls of tape, dozens of markers, stacks of paper, etc.) along with lots of workspace and uninterrupted time to create. Confidence increases when a child is comfortable taking artistic risks. This self-assurance spills over into all other areas of his/her life so the next learning risk (reading, swimming lessons, etc.) is approached with fewer reservations. Put the videos and Leapfrogs away and encourage your child to think, create and learn through art. Help cultivate this passion in your child!

By Susan Sandstrom



Tips for encouraging artwork

- Never draw for your child. That's right! Simply refuse. If you draw for your child you will eventually discourage your child from drawing; despite your best intention. If you want to demonstrate, that's okay as long as you draw in your child's current developmental level. If your child is scribbling, then your drawing needs to be scribbling.
- If your child shows you her work, try very hard not to say, "That's beautiful!!" or "What is it?" It is more encouraging to say, "Tell me about it," or "Now that is a lot of work! Or "I love that little bit of blue peaking over the brown," or "That squiggly section right there makes me feel like dancing!"
- Gauge the amount of art supplies by your child's age. A two-year-old might be able to handle paper and markers only. As your child grows, so grows the amount of art supplies.
- Try and keep the art materials organized and tidy so they are inviting to use (this can be a reasonable expectation for older children.)
- Coloring books? More like busy work than art. They don't help children grow in artistic competence!