Teacher guidance: Art and continuous provision

How and why

Child-led learning plays a large part in the Early Years curriculum, and rightly so. Supporting children in following and exploring their own interests allows for a greater depth of learning and understanding and much higher levels of well-being and involvement.

As the adult, it is your job to support children in their use of art and design as part of child-led play, whether painting pictures, building models, looking at artists and their work or experimenting with abstract creativity. While certain elements of art and design are almost unwritten staples of continuous provision and child-led play, it is important to make sure that pupils have independent access to a wide variety of different mediums and creative provocations. Supporting pupils in this way will allow them to express their creativity and emotions, build skills and reach a deeper level of artistic understanding.

The aim of art and design in the Early Years should be far away from creating 30 identical pictures that do not allow pupils to express themselves, their feelings or explore artistic techniques (all fundamental parts of Development Matters and the EYFS curriculum). The temptation is often to ensure that pupils are producing 'beautiful' or easily identifiable artwork - think firework bonfire paintings or handprint ornaments - however, these opportunities do not allow pupils to build skills in the same way as open-ended artistic creation. While it may sometimes be pertinent to create with a specific purpose in mind, this shouldn't make up the majority of the artistic creation in the Early Years classroom, and certainly not when a child is in free-play.

Rather than creating an artificial learning opportunity during these times of child-led play, instead wait until you observe that a child or group of children have shown a particular interest in a topic. Offer to help them enhance their chosen area of exploration by providing additional resources, demonstrating how to use existing resources or even using the computer. This could mean:

- Providing encouragement and support.
- Introducing new vocabulary through informal conversation.
- Encouraging children to create together as a group.
- Starting to create on your own, encouraging others (pupils) to join in.
- Scaffolding the planning, designing and creating process.
- Using familiar, everyday objects to create art.
- Learning about different artistic techniques from around the world.
- Looking at books that showcase different types of art.
- Learning and practising new techniques together.
- Using a safe search engine to find out more information or facts about particular artists or techniques.
- Finding out about different art relating to customs and festivals that are important to the children.

The children can then use the information you have given them, or that which you have discovered together to further their project or to influence a new idea. Learning in this way often sparks curiosity in the other children in the class, leading to potential large group projects or even whole class projects.

Print off any relevant pictures and/or use a camera to take photographs of the children's project and record the learning in a class book, make a display or to present to the other class members.

It is also important to note that often, adult support is simply not needed for pupils to have meaningful artistic experiences. Choose when to interact and when to step back and allow pupils to explore independently.

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Resourcing your continuous provision

If possible, it is best practice to have art materials and tools available as part of your continuous provision. This means that it is accessible to children at all times and stays the same throughout the year. You can enhance the provision by adding additional resources to support projects but the foundation resources should always be available. Often you may find that the resources needed for Art and design and D&T overlap, so you may be able to create one workshop area that suitably serves both purposes.

Use the list below as a guide. Include:

- Wax crayons, HB pencils, pencil crayons, chalk, felt tips etc.
- Junk modelling resources such as: cardboard boxes, fabric scraps, foil, empty bottles or cartons, lolly sticks, corks etc.
- Loose parts (see our loose parts guide for ideas).
- Coloured paper, white paper and craft card.
- Clipboards.
- Left and right-handed scissors.
- Joining materials: paper clips, tack, tape, split pins, treasury tags, string, ribbon, glue sticks and PVA glue.
- Glue spreaders and pots.
- Paint (see paint station below).

Enhanced provision may include:

- Seasonal materials or those related to a special festival, for example, snowflake sequins at Christmas.
- A provocation to create, for example: a daffodil in a vase with some paper, paintbrushes and watercolours surrounding it.
- Materials chosen to develop certain skills or enhance an interest such as clay, papier maché or charcoal.

Enhanced provision is normally provided to either encourage consolidation of learning after a lesson, or in response to children's expressed interests. It is up to you how long you leave the enhanced provision in your classroom but as a guide, you would normally expect this to be taken away after a week or when the children are no longer using the resources.



Creating a painting station

If you have the space, a self-service painting station is a hugely beneficial resource for all pupils. A station such as this will encourage creativity, problem solving, independent thought and will encourage even the most reluctant of mark makers to have a go.

What you need:

- Paint pots and brushes (you may like to provide enough brushes for one per colour).
- Pot stoppers or lids (useful for keeping paint fresh throughout the week).
- Pump bottle dispensers to hold paint (try reusing old liquid soap bottles).
- Access to water to wash brushes or a pot of water and small towel.
- Aprons and a damp cloth/towel for wiping hands.
- Art easel.
- Paper.
- A drying rack to store wet paintings while they dry.

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When you first set up your station, work alongside the pupils as they discover how to use the materials and explore the skills needed to work independently such as decanting the paint or cleaning up spillages. The aim is to foster as much independence as possible but in order to do this, you may need to begin by demonstrating certain skills or ideas.

Allow the pupils the freedom to be creative. This isn't a time for them to paint anything specific (although they can if they want to), it is about experimentation and exploration of colour, colour mixing, brush techniques and even finger painting! Remember that if pupils choose to paint their entire piece of paper one colour, they are exploring the envelopment schema and working within an important developmental process.

While we want to foster creativity, it is ok to set rules, just as you would for other areas of the classroom. These may consist of: no painting anywhere but the paper, wash brushes when you are finished, always wear an apron etc.

Useful prompts for learning

When talking to the children about their project or interests, try using some of the following open-ended prompts to encourage thought and conversation.

"I wonder why...?"	"What if...?"	"How could we...?"
"I wonder how...?"	"What do you think?"	"What can you...?"
"Tell me about..."	"What might happen if...?"	"How can we find out about...?"
	"What might happen if...?"	

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