Chapter 3
The arts in the early years

Susanne Garvis

The arts are important in early childhood education. For young children the arts provide connections between play and learning. So what should teachers do in the early years (children aged birth to eight year-olds) to allow children to learn in the arts? How can we make sure children are able to use sound, movement, gesture, marks, form and image to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas? This chapter will provide a snapshot of current arts activities in early childhood settings throughout Queensland, Australia to help answer these questions. Three early childhood teachers share their experiences with implementing arts approaches. These vignettes of experiences explore arts appreciation, composing with voice and instrument and motivating children with drawing.

Introduction

Let’s begin with a story told to me by my friend Kate, a teacher in a local primary school. Kate teaches grade three and has been a teacher for a number of years.

The bell rang, creating a mad rush of students out the door for lunch. Miss Smith sat at her desk, exhausted after teaching an hour literacy lesson to her year three students. She slowly looked up to see one student still behind her desk. “Sarah, the lunch bell has gone, you can finish your literacy exercises later”. She knew the child struggled with reading and writing, and would often fail small class tests in literacy.

“Miss Smith, I have something for you,” said the girl shyly. She walked up to the teacher’s desk. “I have something for you … I drew you a picture” she exclaimed.
Miss Smith looked down at the paper and saw a sketch of a boomerang. “Oh Sarah, it is beautiful – you have used such wonderful colours!” ... “Umm, why did you decide to draw a boomerang?”

Sarah smiled. “Oh that’s simple Miss Smith, it is to show the changes in what I learn in school”. Miss Smith was puzzled, “I don’t quite understand, what do you mean Sarah?”

“Miss Smith, My learning has changed. We now do more reading, writing and maths. We don’t seem to do painting, drawing or singing anymore,” Sarah replied.

“That is true but why a picture of a boomerang?” questioned Miss Smith.

“Well painting, drawing and singing are the boomerang Miss Smith. You throw boomerangs and they come back. We have thrown art learning away, but one day it will come back. I can’t wait ... I’m good at that type of learning” (Garvis, 2010).

In the above story we recognise that Sarah is aware of the importance of the arts in helping her learn. As a young learner she enjoyed painting, drawing and singing. What is Kate, the teacher, to do? What do we expect from arts education in the early years (for children aged birth to eight years)?

In answering these questions, this chapter consists of three sections to help provide an answer. In the first section, expectations about arts education in Australia are discussed. Next the chapter explores practical ideas in the classroom to promote the arts in the early years. This includes the organisation of the learning environment and documenting arts learning. The final section consists of three practical experiences (vignettes) of early years teachers implementing the arts in their classrooms. The practical experiences provide a snapshot of the arts in early childhood education.

**Expectations: Current policy**

The teaching of arts education in the early years prompts us to consider questions of expectations before we can consider practice in the early years classroom. While we cannot teach a child to be an artist, we can help the child develop their senses for the arts. Before we can examine what occurs in early years arts classrooms we must first understand what the expectations are of policy and curriculum in the Australian early years context (birth to 8 years old).

The expectation of arts education was made public by the Australian Ministerial Council on Education Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) releasing a statement entitled the National Education and the Arts Statement (2005). Building on from the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (1999), this statement was designed to foster a culture of creativity and innovation in Australian schools. It acknowledged that an education rich in the creative arts maximises opportunities for learners to engage with innovative thinkers and learners, emphasising not only creativity and innovation, but also the values of broad cultural understandings and social harmony that the arts can engender. This is similar to UNESCO’s Road Map for Arts Education (2006), with arts considered a necessity for skill development in the 21st century, allowing nations to develop the human resources necessary to tap their cultural capital.

In the Australian National Education and Arts Statement (2005) it acknowledged that arts experiences enhanced all phases of schooling. All students, irrespective of their location, socio-economic status or ability should have equal opportunities to participate in arts-rich schooling systems (MCEETYA, 2005). School-based arts experiences should be diverse, based on models of effective practice, and embedded from the early years through to graduation in order to unlock the creative potential of young people (MCEETYA, 2005). In order to foster this crucial change in arts education, the statement acknowledges the necessity to foster the skills and knowledge of teachers to teach arts education.

From this statement it is clear that arts education is the responsibility of early years teachers. Arts experiences are expected to be embedded in learning to help develop the creative potential of young children. Early years teachers across Australia in various locations, types of school and differing grades are expected to provide arts-rich opportunities.

In 2009, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009) was introduced across Australia to enhance children’s learning and transition to schooling. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is part of the Council of Australian Government’s reform agenda for early childhood education in Australia and is an important component of the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. A child centred approach is advocated in which planning and programming occurs from the child’s interests. The document also recognises the importance of social and emotional wellbeing of children.
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wellbeing of children.
Expectations: The role of the teacher

Artistic learning and the best way to teach arts to young children have been the subject of debate among many art educators and theorists, including Derham (1961), Eisner (1988), Gardner (2004), Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970), Seefeldt (1999), Wright (2003b) and others from varying perspectives. The place of arts in the curriculum and the best way of teaching arts to young children are at the centre of this debate. Arts education itself lacks a unified organisational structure which adds complication to the matter (Eiland, 1990).

What is the role of early years teachers? The role of an early years teacher is to help children make meaning and sense of the world they lie in. Part of this role includes allowing children ways to learn to manage the personal and social realities that exist. Children first make sense of the world through their senses, when using the arts. This includes:

1) Seeing (visual arts);
2) Touching (visual arts, music);
3) Hearing (music);
4) Moving (dance and drama);

Early years teachers try to provide arts learning experiences that allow children to explore the world around them. By using combinations of the various senses, children gain a greater understanding of themselves, other children, their family and the greater community.

All of these senses can further be combined with technology to create new artistic inputs. Recent studies suggest children are capable users of video, taped sound, computers, internet, mobile phones and MP3 players (Parrett & Quesenberry, 2010; Plowman, Stephen & McPake, 2010).

To create suitable arts activities, teachers need to also identify what it is that artists do, and then create an environment where young children are supported in these artistic behaviours. Such an approach respects the child as an artist. This stance ensures that children have control over the subject matter, materials and approach they will use in their arts activities.

But are children able to make decisions about arts experiences? Literature on early years education in relation to children's rights (Ikeda et al., 1997; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Edwards et al., 1993; Mayall, 1994; United Nations, 1991) strongly supports the finding that children like to make choices about arts. For example, choice of material, type of arts activity and creation of the arts. Recognition and respect for children's rights and experiences are components of many early years educational settings (Edwards et al., 1993; Malaguzzi et al., 1998). However, the act of facilitating children's decision-making requires negotiation and willingness on the part of the adult (Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Danby & Farrell, 2004).

It is liberating for a child to be exposed to a variety of art forms across a range of different time periods. It allows time for the child to free themselves from anxieties about their own work. The problem arises when children are not given the freedom of expression in art work. Today, many people have negative beliefs towards arts education based on their early feelings of inadequacy (Garvis, 2010). As a result, adults exclude themselves from arts opportunities that allow communication, self-expression and appreciation.

Practical: Creating the learning environment for arts activities

In an early years classroom, teachers become architects as they think of ways to use space, resources, and lighting. Designing suitable space for the needs of all children is a complex task. With careful planning however an engaging environment can be achieved. According to Crowe (2002), a well designed centre is a three-dimensional lesson plan. The space designed can not only be a hub for materials and tools but also indirect teaching tools.

Organised arrangement of materials for children is key to providing a productive learning environment. Topez and Gandini (1999) recommend clear plastic containers for arranging material. The contents become appealing in plastic containers and are easily distinguishable.

It is important to consider the learning environment established in a classroom as a work in progress. The classroom space needs to be fluid and continuously open to change with arts activities. Children can become actively involved in the planning (Topez and Gandini, 1999). When young children are included in discussions about the shape and direction of the learning environment they start to feel part of the ongoing development of the space.
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Below is a check list to help teachers reflect on the organisation of their learning environment for the arts. It consists of five quick questions to improving the organisation and quality of the arts in the classroom.

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**Practical: Understanding pedagogical documentation**

Part of the role of the early years teacher is to document children’s learning in the arts. One way to do this is pedagogical documentation. Pedagogical documentation of the arts is a process and product. As a process it documents the learning process in the arts. As a product it is used to communicate elements of the learning process to others.

The idea of documentation is a summative technique in the early years to assess the learning process that will later inform teacher planning. The documentation is continual and regularly informs the teaching-learning process. As a documenter, the early years teacher becomes the active participant in shaping the story about the observed learning process.

There are many techniques for documenting children’s arts experiences. These include:

- Maintaining portfolios;
- Anecdotal and formal observation of the processes involved in the creation of the work;
- Learning stories;
- The use of photographs, digital and audio files; and
- Collecting plans and drafts of the work.

The collection of various parts of the learning process helps the child and teacher understand what is being created in the arts. The recognition is sometimes considered motivating for the child, with the child recognising that adults can grasp meaning of what they are trying to represent and express meaning from.

**Practical experience: Three vignettes from teachers**

In learning about suitable activities for young children in the early years it is important to create a snapshot of current practice within the arts in early childhood classrooms. The three snapshots presented below capture the daily life of early years teachers in three settings; a Montessori classroom (children aged 4-6 years), a kindergarten (children aged 3-4 years) and a prep classroom (children aged 4-5 years). These snapshots provide the reader with evidence of practical examples of activities with young children.

**Vignette 1: Aesthetics and arts appreciation in the early years classroom**

*Eva has been a Montessori educator for over 25 years. In this account Eva discusses the importance of aesthetics and arts appreciation before describing current situations from her classroom. Eva suggests...*  

*Why is aesthetics important in my classroom? What do I tell parents?*

Aesthetic practice is an important element in early years arts education. In the twenty-first century however, practicing aesthetic development with young children holds many implications and barriers. Part of the misconception comes from differing perspectives of the value and importance of aesthetic education. For example, creativity is now seen as a goal and art is seen as a means of achieving it.

Montessori believed that the child would only produce art when he had a need to. If the child was engrossed in creating art, he could repeat the same task over and over without tiring. Observing the child engaged in an arts activity also reveals to teachers what children have gained from the exercises of the senses and what activities for the senses to offer next.

*John Dewey’s book (1934) ‘Art as Experience’ is the culmination of his lifetime work. In it he attempts to put forth his ideas on education and the relationship between the arts and human experience. Dewey asserts that the aesthetic experience is something that everybody passes through in childhood. He believed that children have four basic instincts namely;*
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constructive', 'expressive', 'communicative' and 'inquiry', which they integrate into their everyday work/play (Lin, 2004, Mooney, 2000).

Why is it important to have an appealing environment?

The role of aesthetic education is to nurture the child’s “rich poetic, pictorial and imaginative consciousness” (Lin, 2004, p. 477). He also noted that the period up to age seven was the richest time for aesthetic development. His ultimate goal was to relate our innate aesthetic potential to the beauty in the world.

Other educational methods share this view. A carefully prepared and aesthetically pleasing environment is integral. Something teachers can take from this is examining critically the equipment and materials they have in their classrooms and create functional as well as beautiful environments.

Children in Montessori classrooms also benefit from having a variety of art materials available at all times. It is important that art materials are the best quality that can be afforded. These include pencils, crayons, clay, paper, brushes and paint. Part of arts appreciation through aesthetics is also teaching children how to use materials and care for them properly.

How do I document aesthetic experience for parents?

It is generally accepted as appropriate practice that teachers document children’s thoughts, stories and help to articulate their ideas. We also promote aesthetic education through our dialogues with children about their work. Teachers can use rich language and questioning to stimulate children’s imaginations and concepts.

Why is this important for teachers to know?

Our attitudes, values and beliefs as teachers and how we define our roles will reflect on our relationships with children and a subsequent practice. I am reminded that by assuming students are capable and unique and accepting our role is to facilitate interests, passions and talents we will better be able to give the freedom necessary to develop an aesthetic understanding.

Using picture cards

There are also specific materials that have been designed to aid the teacher in presenting young children the foundations of art appreciation and aesthetics. Aline D. Wolf designed a set of art postcards “Mommy it’s a

Refrair” which I have used for many years. Children as young as 2 are introduced to art through the use of postcard sized prints of famous artists. The postcards are used to match pairs, recognise styles and technique and starting discussions. The set provides a systematic and interesting approach to art appreciation starting with matching identical paintings that have different subjects, colours and style. The second set compares companion paintings of either the same subject matter or the same artist. The third set groups four paintings by one artist which have either similar subjects or styles. As the series continues it offers children the opportunity to learn the names of artists, paintings and schools of art. This is always a popular activity and one which invites discussion, observation, language and judgement in addition to cognition.

Reflections

In this vignette the Montessori educator, Eva, reflects on the importance of aesthetics and arts appreciation in the early years classroom. The set-up of the environment is at the core of developing a classroom that promotes aesthetics and arts appreciation in the early years. Classrooms require a variety of arts materials that are of best quality for children. You should always try to buy the best quality for what can be afforded within the budget. Children can learn about touch, smell and sound of the different arts materials. They can also learn to provide proper care of the materials as part of appreciation.

The teacher’s views and beliefs influence their relationships with children in early years classrooms. If we want to provide young children with the freedom to be creative and allow aesthetic understanding, we needed to acknowledge that children are capable and unique. Children have interests and talents that they can pursue through the arts.

The picture cards provide smaller versions of many of the famous art works of different periods. A close friend has used similar cards with her two year old. She said her young child would stare mesmerised into the pictures of Monet, Van Gough and Kandinsky. The child’s grandparents were shocked when they took the two year old out to a restaurant and the child could name the artists of some of the pictures on the wall. This child is not a genius but has been encouraged in arts appreciation. By the age of six her favourite hobby was to go to arts exhibitions.

The practical experiences of Sue, the kindergarten teacher, are presented next.
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The practical experiences of Sue, the kindergarten teacher, are presented next.
Vignette 2: The Patch Project: Musical play in Kindergarten

Sue has been a kindergarten teacher for twenty years. She is an early years music specialist and often runs workshops for teachers and parents. In this account she shares her musical play project. Sue writes...

Music in Kindergartens

Traditionally music in community kindergartens is offered in teacher led sessions on a daily basis, typically for 15 to 20 minutes. Whilst these sessions are valuable in promoting foundational musical skills they are usually dominated by teacher initiated and controlled activities. As a teacher of kindergarten (3.5 to 5 year old) children, I was interested to see whether music could be used as a topic for investigation in a play context where children could take ownership of the learning experience.

The Patch Project

The project that these children engaged in over a term was initiated by the introduction of small soft toy, Patch, our music bear, was introduced to encourage children’s engagement with music in play contexts. Whilst children were happy to explore and experiment with instruments, they tended to persevere and engage more deeply in musical play when an audience was present. This was sometimes difficult, particularly in outdoor sessions when adult supervision was required for other play areas. “Patch” provided an audience, someone for the children to sing and play to.

Initially much of the musical play centred on pitched and unpitched instruments, however I was keen to see if we could encourage the children to create their own songs. I was inspired by the work of Margaret Barrett in recording children’s spontaneous singing experiences in kindergarten settings. She believes that children’s invented songs are the foundation of creative thought and activity in music (Barrett, 2006). Whilst children at kindergarten engage in many musical experiences, including singing, very few spontaneously sing their own created songs. The first challenge was to build the children’s confidence in solo singing. Whilst the children playing instruments were creating their own music, they generally did not both play and sing. The instruments in fact hindered rather than stimulated children’s singing. To encourage singing we asked the children to bring in “song books” from home. We built a library of picture books that were illustrated renditions of popular children’s songs and nursery rhymes.

Many of the children delighted in “reading” and singing these familiar texts. Some children expressed interest in creating our own song book so we set about making a collaborative picture book based on a favourite number rhyme set to music. This illustrated song book provided another text that was “sung” to Patch.

Unstructured songs

The challenge remained however that whilst children were solo singing with increased confidence they were not creating their own songs. Spontaneous song making was not something that these children were familiar with. The process had to be modelled by an adult. It was surprising how difficult it actually was to sing an unstructured song about nothing in particular! Having books and pictures helped provide a focus for songs, and the children started to create their own versions of the songs in the song books. Once children developed confidence in creating their own songs, spontaneous song making started emerging in other areas of play. We began to hear these songs as children waited for their turn at games, during transitions and on the swings. More confident children started “performing” their songs for the group, however these sometimes were needed cutting since without a structure they could go on for considerable lengths of time, accompanied by serious signs of boredom from the audience!

Whilst some children engaged in singing, other children preferred to build elaborate constructions for Patch using blocks and collage. These children were not music making in the true sense, however they were using musical resources such as instruments and song books to furnish Patch’s buildings. In this type of play children were gaining a sense that music is part of what we do at Pre-Prep, not just in group sessions but also in play contexts. This broader notion of musical play integrated a wide range of learning outcomes and built positive dispositions toward music.

Kindergarten is an ideal time to engage children in music. With less emphasis on literacy and numeracy outcomes there is time, space and resources to engage children in creative play that allows children to have ownership of the learning process. The “Patch Project” showed us that children could bring their own ideas and thinking to musical play and engage in music as a creative rather than re-creative process.

In this snapshot of experience the importance of providing children with opportunities for creative musical play are considered. Rather than having
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teacher directed music (traditional approach of a 15-20 minute lesson), children are encouraged to create their own music by engaging in musical place and inventing their own songs throughout their day at the community kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher, Sue, wanted the children to take ownership of the learning experience they were encountering. Sue is allowing the children to 'make', 'present', 'respond' and 'evaluate' through composing and performing.

Children's invented songs draw on the musical repertoires they encounter as singers and listeners (Barrett, 2006, Young, 2004). Musical generative behaviour of children is most pronounced around 18 months to 6 years. Songs can be about daily activities, feelings, emotions, events, anything! Below is a recent invented song from Margaret Barrett's study (2010, p. 16) of Beatrice:

Beatrice, seated in her high chair, starts to sing a song about 'I love'. She turns to her brother to sing. Me...you love me, I love you and we all love toast.

Sue tried to encourage singing and creative song writing in all parts of the daily routine at the kindergarten. Patch, the musical bear, became an audience member for the children to sing and interact with. It is important to have an 'audience' when children are performing their own musical compositions. Children from an early age understand the importance of an audience for musical performances. They become audience members from watching television shows, attending musical concerts, even watching people gather to listen to street performers. Performing to an audience also helps build a child's confidence for public performing. As Sue notes however, sometimes performances need to be shortened because children could perform for a considerable length of time! In this particular instance, early years teachers can encourage children to continue their performance at home with parents, relatives, friends and pets.

As an early years teacher it is important to build into the program opportunities for inventive songs and creative musical play. Sue provided an inquiry based approach in the curriculum for children to explore singing. Children were able to negotiate their learning experiences as they created musical experiences that were relevant to their interests. For example, some children in the vignette created their own songbook that provided a 'text' that were 'sung' to Patch.

Music enters all areas of the kindergarten and play with numerous opportunities provided for pedagogical documentation. Sue could have used the creation of 'song books' to also document a child's learning in music. The song book could be easily linked to relevant curriculum documents and be a resource to show parents.

Kindergarten is an important time for children to engage in music. In the 'Project Patch' children are able to bring their own ways of knowing and understanding to engage in creative musical processes. Children are able to build their foundation in music as they make their own meaning of the world through their senses.

The last vignette of practical experience in the early years is with Di, a prep teacher (children aged 5 and 6).

Vignette 3: Ways to Encourage Children to Draw

Di has taught prep and preschool for over 30 years. In this account she shares a successful experience about a drawing program. Di writes...

Children's drawings

Children draw and something magical happens. Young children draw at first to begin to make meaning from their world. Long before written language begins, children can put their ideas on paper through their drawings. They only need supportive adults who provide them with the necessary equipment and who are there to write their words for them, for their drawings to become their pathways to literacy. How then, can we assist parents and teachers of young children encourage and foster drawing?

Finding suitable resources and stimulus

We need to make sure there are lots of easily accessible materials, paper, cardboard, pens, coloured pencils, lead pencils, crayons, craypas, chalks, charcoal, and so on. In a classroom situation provide enough clip boards for the whole class (perhaps across two classes if budgets are tight) so you can take the children into the playground to draw. Keep a drawing scrapbook per child so staff, children and parents can see the distance travelled as children's drawing skills develop. Keep a supply of blank books (pages stapled together) so children can begin to draw and have teachers or parents write their stories, and later begin to write their own.

Use both fiction and non-fiction books as stimulus ideas for drawing. Expose young children to famous art by bringing prints and art books into the classroom. Learn about real artists together. The illustrations in good picture books are also worth studying with children and can provide great stimulation and new ideas to extend their drawings.
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Use both fiction and non-fiction books as stimulus ideas for drawing. Expose young children to famous art by bringing prints and art books into the classroom. Learn about real artists together. The illustrations in good picture books are also worth studying with children and can provide great stimulation and new ideas to extend their drawings.
Explore indigenous art together – perhaps have an Aboriginal artist and story teller visit, maybe in NAIDOC Week to learn about Aboriginal symbols in their art and encourage the children to try using these symbols in their own art.

**Asking open-ended questions**

The questions parents and teachers ask children about their drawings will determine the success of our efforts. Rather than asking children what a drawing is, ask them open-ended questions such as, “Can you tell me what’s happening in your picture?” We then create an expectation that there is something happening and children will begin to turn their drawings into stories. Of course, creating class story books together will model this for young children and how exciting for them to become a community of writers and illustrators through class books which can then be shared with parents and the rest of the school community.

**Sharing artwork**

Encourage a classroom that is supportive of each other’s art by sharing drawings. Make time after each drawing session to look at the drawings of all the children in the class and find something positive to say about each one. Encourage children to share and observe each other’s work, and talk about their ideas as they draw together, and become a community of drawers. It is not “copying”. It is scaffolding and celebrating achievements. Commemorate their drawing efforts by mounting exceptional drawings or providing frames in the classroom to hang special pieces of work. Don’t draw for children but if they need help provide a photo of the object they wish to draw, or a toy, or the real thing to copy. Always be respectful of the child’s agenda – when we help children with their drawing it is not to provide a “better” piece of art, rather it is to help the child move forward when they think they are stuck. Encourage their efforts but don’t forget to scaffold and make suggestions to take them one step further.

**Thirty Days of Drawing Program**

A drawing program that I have used for many years very successfully is the “Thirty Days of Drawing Program”. This program covers a number of weeks and involves the children drawing daily. If there is not enough time in our crowded curriculum for daily drawings it still works well by setting aside an afternoon each week. Each drawing they do is a result of one of the following – observation, memory or imagination. As a teacher I found this program to be of great benefit in a number of ways:

- The children:
  - Became more confident as artists but more accepting that we all draw in our own way.
  - Developed their language skills as they talked about their ideas.
  - Became more aware of elements of art – line, shape, pattern, colour, shading and perspectives.
  - Practised and strengthened the fine motor skills needed to hold a pencil.

**How does the program work?**

- Set aside “daily drawing” (drawing as language) time, into part of the day (20 - 30 minutes).
- If this is not possible set aside this time once a week in the afternoon.
- Materials – A variety of media should be used. Ball or fine point pens work best for the flow of ink and cannot be erased. Also charcoal, craypas, lead pencils, crayons, chalks, felt pens etc.
- Need a balance of free drawing and teacher directed.
- Children share drawings and discuss the main features and elements of their work.

**Planning**

Drawings fit into three categories – Memory, Imagination and Observation. Plan over a 30 day period, what medium, category and topic you will cover. It is fun to negotiate this with the children.

**Motivation and strategies**

When drawing from Imagination and Memory children require help to visualise. They need to develop the ability to see images or make mental pictures in their mind. Encourage the children to close their eyes and focus on the details they can “see”.

With Guided Imagery the teacher reads or tells a story and the children are asked to create a mental picture. Discuss afterwards with attention to detail.

With Observation Drawings, children are given real life objects such as shells, flowers, leaves to draw at tables. Take the class outside with clipboards to draw trees, clouds, buildings or other features of the school.
Explore indigenous art together – perhaps have an Aboriginal artist and story teller visit, maybe in NAIDOC Week to learn about Aboriginal symbols in their art and encourage the children to try using these symbols in their own art.

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Benefits of the 30 Days of Drawing Program

Children use drawing as language and the content is more complex than their verbal equivalent. Drawing stimulates literacy and adults engage children in conversations to motivate their drawing. Their finished work provides opportunities for beginning writing. As the children draw they create from imagination, and recreate life experiences through memory and respond to their visible environment.

Reflection

Children love to draw. Have you ever known a child who does not know how to turn a blank piece of white paper into their own art work? In this vignette we read suggestions to encourage children to draw. As Di notes, drawing ideas is the first step before written language begins.

Di suggests having easily accessible resources for children to draw and the use of a drawing scrap book that could again act as a form of pedagogical documentation. The scrap book allows the teacher and parent to document the child’s drawing skill development. It is part of the process of drawing development as well as forming part of an overall product.

The ‘Thirty Days of Drawing Program’ is based around three areas: observation, memory, and imagination. Each day the children are involved in one of the three areas of development. Drawings are then evaluated in terms of four areas: intellectual development, learning and growth, mental health and economical use of time and materials. This evaluation allows the teachers to provide critique of the process and also parents to recognise the outcomes.

Imagination is an important element of the program. In Releasing the Imagination, Maxine Greene (1995, p. 3) argues for the fundamental role imagination can play, “as a means through which we can assemble a coherent world”. Greene stresses the importance of imagination, stating that “of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (1995, p. 3). It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions.

To Greene fostering imaginative thinking is vital to the educative process. Imagination is the key in helping “students to realize their deep connection
to and responsibility for not only their own individual experience but also for other human beings who share this world” (1995, p. 57). Education is therefore positioned as the means through which multiple meanings can be constructed, thus allowing social action to occur (Greene, 1995). In this vignette we note the importance of encouraging imagination in the early years classroom.

Conclusion

The arts are important in the learning of young children, providing opportunities to make meaning and sense of the world where they live. Expectations have been stated in Australian policy documents. The early years teacher’s role is to provide arts learning opportunities that encourage children to use their senses to make meaning. In the chapter we have read three different vignettes of experience from early years teachers. We are able to see the ways the arts are taught and lived in the classroom. By acknowledging the importance of arts education for young children and developing an understanding of the learning environment, we can embed effective arts practices in the daily learning of young children.
environment. Motivation is important and pre-drawing discussions centre on salient features. The children are then left to draw as they wish.

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