

Embrace art in the classroom Discover art is not scary Become capable and confident

Debra Bryant



Debra Bryant is the creative director of Tiny Art – a Brisbane-based art school for children aged two to twelve years. Debra has a BA in Visual Arts in Fine Arts and a BA in Education. With over 14 years' experience teaching the very young right up to secondary, Debra has enjoyed practising her own art making and sharing her passion for art making and appreciation with others. Debra's goal is to instil in children, at an early age, the idea that everyone can 'do art' and to teach skills and knowledge that can be used throughout their lives.

Importance and benefits of art for children at an early age

Art making and appreciation should be encouraged at an early age. The benefits of art are endless. Art develops: confidence, self-expression, creative thinking, problem solving, language development, academic performance, fine motor skills, social and emotional skills, relaxation and enjoyment. Art can be linked to other learning in and out of the classroom and can complement the journey from childhood through to adulthood.

The physical environment

When considering and creating an environment for children in which to create art, try to offer various places and spaces. This will provide loads of fun and inspiration. Here are some ideas to keep things interesting:

- Stand at an easel.
- Sit on the floor.
- Lie on tummies.
- Lie on backs under a table looking up – tape paper under the table surface and draw looking up.
- Cover a table with a sheet and create a secret area underneath.

- Create on different surfaces – use the surfaces as a background (rubblings for an interesting start).
- Paint or draw outside *en plein air*.
- Create in different places outside and inside, such as the art gallery, beside the herb garden, in book corner or next to the shoe rack.
- Try close-up or distance drawing of still life.
- Give children another perspective of life and art by adding them to their art.
- Take photos and draw from them.
- Create collaborative art in close proximity – in pairs or groups.
- Sit on a chair and use a drawing board on their lap.

Timing

Be aware when to engage children in an art experience. If children are tired or hungry, or a project is dragging on, they may lose interest. It may be wiser to cut the activity short or change to another task and attempt the learning experience another time. Timing will soon become second nature.

Routine

Whatever your schedule, try and create a designated time for creating so children see it as part of their regular routine. Involve children in the process of setting up and create a rotation of child 'monitors' to assist at different stations for example, to wash brushes, wipe tables, put away aprons. Take photos of the children doing these set tasks and place a photo each station. This will remind children of tasks and engage them in the appreciation of setting up and packing away an art experience.

Achievable arts activities and rich learning experiences for children aged five and under (discover media and techniques)

Young children thrive on experimentation and enjoy discovery. Here are some ideas for thinking outside the box.

Paint without brushes

Feed children's imaginations by giving them a range of tools to explore, paint and make marks with. This provides sensory experiences, develops fine motor skills, encourages problem-solving and inspires creative thinking. Paint with the following tools to create texture, colour and layers:

- Newspaper – scrunch, fold, twist
- Bubblewrap
- Make your own texture stamps – use pegs to grab items and dip in paint, e.g, sponges, leaves, grass, cardboard, spaghetti
- Wrap rubber bands around cardboard and dip in paint and then print (these could also be pressed into clay and playdough).
- Paddlepop sticks
- Cotton tips
- Cardboard – fold, rip, scrape
- Fingers
- Cotton wool
- Plastic bottle tops – roll, stamp
- Mix sand in paint
- Mix flour in paint



No mess painting

No-mess painting

These activities are great for colour mixing and are great for the 'clean' creators who don't like to get messy!

- Place paint in zip lock bags and tape to the table and then move paint with finger tips.
- Place two primary colours in one bag and allow children to experiment by mixing the colours to make secondary colours. This can also be done by placing a sheet of paper on the table, adding two or more colours of paint and then a sheet of plastic on the top. Tape down the sides and have fun by squishing and squeezing the paint. Children can use: fingers, cotton tips or paddlepop sticks to mix, draw and make marks on the plastic.

Play with clay

When given a piece of clay children instinctively squeeze, poke and pinch it. It is a fantastic



Play with clay

medium for children to experiment with making marks and changing the clay's response. Clay can be played with on its own or tools can be used to mark and poke or collage the clay.

- As a group or individually – poke, squeeze, flatten, pinch, make holes, break, twist, knuckle or roll the clay.
- Use tools to make marks in the clay – plastic knives and forks, paddlepop sticks, toothpicks, old toothbrushes.
- Press collage items into the clay – e.g. buttons, beads, pipe cleaners, sticks.

Threading

Threading is great for developing fine motor skills as children love the bright colours of wool, string, beads and buttons.

- Thread beads and buttons on pipe cleaners.
- Bend and twist pipecleaners and poke them into styrofoam shapes to create sculptures.
- Thread wool, string, ribbon and material strips through hessian pieces and let them hang.

Create with collage

Scissors are great for children when creating with paper for collage but also offer different ideas to encourage creativity:

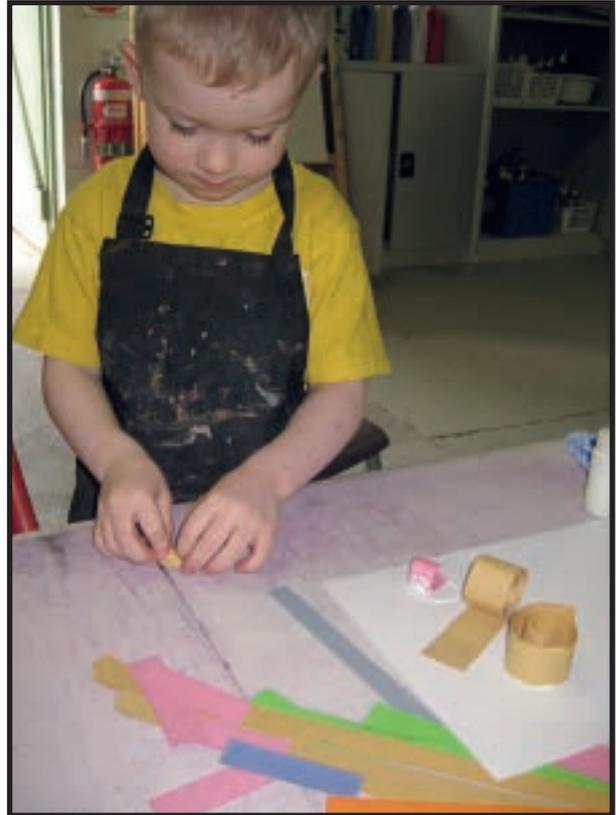
- Tear, rip, fold, twist, scrunch, layer, curl, roll, glue and roll paper.

Link activities to everyday learning; explore themes and activities based on children's interests

If a child expresses a particular interest in a subject, and other children embrace the idea, explore it further and discuss:

'Jack found a caterpillar in the garden. Let's look at caterpillars on the interactive whiteboard. Let's look at the life cycle of the caterpillar. WOW they change into butterflies! Let's look at artists who created butterfly artworks and create a butterfly in a garden artwork. What do we need? Paint? How do we make antennae?

Children and their teacher can bounce ideas off each other, problem solve, and create an activity together, giving inspiration to the teacher to think about what materials they have



Creative collage

to use and what is on hand. With a child-led activity you may not always have the items you wish to use at hand, so improvise, and come up with a new idea – e.g. use paddle pop sticks instead of pipe cleaners. Collect, re-use and recycle everyday items such as cling film, foil, boxes, bubble wrap. Cut it up, sort it and store it for later use.



Creative collage



Van Gogh sunflowers

Use external resources for inspiration

View Pinterest on the interactive whiteboard with children for inspiration. Adapt and modify to suit your needs. Create a 'Kindy board' with the kids, pin weekly and revisit when looking for an art project.

Talking to a child about their art

It can be tricky sometimes to find the words to talk to a child about their creations. Here are some helpful tips to talk with a child about their art.

- **Make encouraging comments.** Describe what the child is doing as they create. Introduce new words to build vocabulary and understanding. Comment on colours and the types of lines being made. Ask children to describe to you what they are doing and bounce off that conversation, e.g. 'Tell me about your artwork?' and other open-ended questions. Stir imaginative thinking with questions such as 'What sound do you think this animal would make?' and 'What does the paint feel like?' Open-ended questioning will allow children to use their imagination and help gain skills which will allow them to express their ideas visually and orally with confidence.
- **When to step in.** When a child gets frustrated, lacks confidence, or needs

direction, ask questions about what they are making, materials they are using, and techniques they are trying. Try to avoid touching the child's artwork if demonstrating a technique. Work together or on a separate piece. Encourage children to offer a different perspective or idea for using media and show you a technique you had never thought of – this allows for shared experiences and learning from the child.

Drowning in children's artwork? Ideas on how to store it.

If you are inundated with many artworks made with love from children and not quite sure what to do with them, here are some ideas that can be used in the early childhood setting and can also be shared with children's parents. Show children that you value their creativity by using thoughtful ideas:

- **Display child's creations.** Frame children's favourites. Have a dedicated 'art' frame, wall or space that can be rotated once a week/fortnight/month with the new favourites. Ask children to provide a description of the artwork and scribe for them. Display this next to the artwork.
- **Save artworks as keepsakes.** Put them in a display folder or scrapbook. Write down the child's age and their description of each artwork. Do this activity together once a month and share the task of gluing and taping. This in itself is a fun activity to share.
- **Share artworks with family and friends.** Ask a child to choose to whom they would like to give them so they can save them for a birthday or Christmas gift.
- **Be functional.** Use some artworks as a birthday card, or wrapping paper for a family member or a friend's birthday. This is thoughtful and original.
- **Take photos** of children's artworks and display them in an 'art photo album'. This way if an artwork is damaged you still have a photo of it. This can work really well when the child has constructed a sculptural box or Lego piece. Capture it forever before it is crushed or falls over.