

ECH131

The Arts in Early Childhood Contexts

The structure of this unit is different to most others. Students watch the lecture corresponding with their tutorial rather than the week it was recorded. Hence, the notes are categorised by topic.

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VISUAL ARTS

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS ART?

- Art as a concept is very subjective – there is no clear definition of art
- ‘Art is a discovery and development of elementary principles of nature into beautiful forms suitable for human use.’ – Wright, 1957.
- Important to ask what counts as knowledge.
 - o Do artistic ways of knowing count as knowledge?
 - o Are they as important as literacy and numeracy?
 - o Can art be taught?

Your approach to visual arts

- The approach you take to the arts will reflect your understanding of art, and also of children and your ‘image of the child.’
 - o What you think children are capable of.
- Should art stem from children and their interests or is it teacher planned and directed?
- It’s important to understand ways to support children’s artistic development and encourage creativity.
 - o Should we intervene or allow them to express themselves without intervention.

Art, education and society (2 dominant historical perspectives)

- **Self-expression:**
 - o Children are innately creative and adults have no role.
 - o E.g. a teacher asking the children to draw their own bunny, then decorate it.
 - Each bunny will look slightly different.
- **Teacher directed or school art:**
 - o All the thinking and planning comes from the teacher and children follow directions.
 - E.g. a row of 25 identical coloured butterflies.
 - This is also known as bunny-bum art.
 - o Sense of following instructions and creating something in a way that conforms to a particular model.

- Current teaching of art is often to create something from a template, and then put up in a display.
 - These templates often aren't as creative as what children may produce themselves (e.g. a basic teddy bear outline to colour in).

Visual arts in ECH- some questions, tensions and history

- Tensions between:
 - 'Free expression' or 'natural unfolding' and 'mastery of technique.'
 - E.g. In the renaissance if you wanted to be an artist you would be an apprentice (like a tradie would).
 - Scientific/rational view
 - Emphasizing teaching techniques, master/apprentice approaches).
 - Mastery of technique
 - Romantic/self expression view
 - Emphasizing exploratory, intuitive, spontaneous approaches)
- This doesn't necessarily have to be a binary opposition. They are both importance.
- **Frances Derham (1894-1987)**
 - Key thinker in ECH
 - Book about 'best practice' in art education for young children, published in 1961: *Art for the child under seven*.
 - With a list of do's and don'ts.
 - Advocating for children being able to explore art without adult intervention.
 - Shaped way art has been implemented in ECH in the past.
 - Very definite and descriptive.

Histories and tensions: the shift

- Shift towards views of art education for young children informed by socio-cultural theories of learning (co-construction, scaffolding, ZPD, collaboration); theories of aesthetics, creativity and symbolic meaning making.
- **Educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Vea Vecchi, Carlina Rinaldi, Loris Malaguzzi)**
- **Ursula Kolbe, Australia**
- **Anne Pelo, USA**

WHAT IS OUR IMAGE OF CHILDREN?

McArdle and Piscitelli (2002)

- 'At the site where a young child is learning about art, there are points where ideas about the child, art and teaching meet, sometimes connecting, sometimes colliding, sometimes competing.'
 - o Image of art and image of the child come together when you're teaching children.

Image(s) of the child

- Connections between approaches to visual arts teaching and image of the child/childhood.
- Current dominant images of childhood that may influence teaching:
 - o Children as incomplete, ignorant, empty vessels.
 - o Children as innocent and natural.
 - o Children as wild/monsters
 - o Children as artists

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT YOUNG CHILDREN AND ART?

- Teachers need to notice what children are paying attention to and identify the links they may be making.

CREATIVITY

THEORIES OF CREATIVITY

- Risk, messiness, jumping into the unknown, going beyond rules
- Imagination, originality, intervention, playfulness (divergent thinking and problem creating).
- Immersion in the experience, focus, flow, intensity, joy.
- Effort, diligence, perseverance through frustration, productiveness, discipline, and calculated building using techniques and skills.
- Unexpected connections, combinations, diverse experiences, movement across disciplines, techniques, history, a 'collision of ideas'.

AESTHETICS

THEORIES OF AESTHETICS (Greek aisthetikos – perceiving through senses)

- Aesthetics is the way we, as humans, respond through senses, feelings and emotions.
- Aesthetic appreciation.
- From the earliest days, babies begin to understand their world aesthetically: through touch, taste, smell, sound and feel.
- Nearly all the responses of human life that shape our reactions are aesthetic in character.
 - o It is all perceived through our senses.

MAGIC IN EVERYDAY THINGS

- Kolbe emphasizes the importance of ‘unhurried and unstructured time’ to take a long look, really see and understand the visual arts.
- ‘Time to stop and stare, to touch and listen, time to explore and make choices, and time just to be’ (Kolbe, 2001).
- This is essential for children to engage in sensory exploration of the beauty and magic of everyday objects and events.
- In summary, time is vital for connecting in a sensory way.

THE LONG LOOK

- Art is about engaging with and exploring content.
 - o E.g. people in galleries.
- Encourage children to see the world with a deeper gaze.
 - o E.g. exploring with a curious eye suggests possibility of discovering something new.
- Finding things in the environment.
 - o E.g. feathers, autumn leaves, spider’s webs.
 - o This begins with babies and is the basis of rich experiences.