



# Developing Visual Art Education in Early Childhood Education

Lang Bai, Yonghong Liu, Zhuoya Li

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## Developing Visual Art Education in Early Childhood Education

Lang Bai, Yonghong Liu, Zhuoya Li

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The aim of this thesis is to highlight the importance of visual arts education in early childhood education and to create a manual to inspire early childhood educators to focus on visual arts education in their daily teaching, helping children to achieve cognitive, physical development, self-expression, and creative and imaginative development through visual arts.

The data was collected through interviews with early childhood educators from our working life partners - two day care centers in Helsinki and Vantaa, Finland, respectively. Through a semi-structured interview format using pre-prepared questions, the aim was to understand the educators' past experiences and pedagogical barriers to visual arts education. The theoretical background of the thesis is based on the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018), where visual arts is divided under the area of Diverse forms of expression. We will exploit the theory of children's artistic development by Viktor Lowenfeld (1957) to and Howard Gardner's theory about the artistic curve to discuss our topic. Howard Gardener's idea about the artistry curve and the concept of children's artistic developmental stages proposed by the renowned Austrian art educator Viktor Lowenfeld are the main theoretical background of the paper.

The interviewed teachers also evaluated the manual and gave relevant feedback on its usefulness in kindergartens, which suggests that the aims of this thesis have been successfully achieved. Although the research shows that there are still many aspects of arts education that need to be developed in current practice and understanding, this thesis and the arts education manual offer some possibilities for addressing approaches to visual arts education for children.

Keywords: visual arts, early childhood education, manual, art & aesthetic

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## 1 Introduction

Austrian art educator Viktor Lowenfeld put it this way, " The goal of education is not the art itself, or the aesthetic product, or the aesthetic experience, but rather the child who grows up more creatively and sensitively and applies his experience in the arts to whatever life situations may be applicable." (Michael, p. xix). Therefore, visual art education should play a significant part in kindergartens. As per Article 31 of Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children have a right to engage in play and activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. States must respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activity. The aims of early childhood education and care referred to in the Finnish Early Childhood Education Act (2018) include but are not limited to: "carry out versatile pedagogical activities based on the child's play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage, and enable positive learning experiences". The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018), (Hereinafter referred to as VASU) also points out the importance of art education in early years. Artistic experiences provide children with multiple forms of expression, which is regarded as one of the tasks in early childhood education by VASU.

The topic of our thesis comes from our confusion about art education in early childhood education during our internship and, our interest in art education. Due to cultural and educational influences, there are different pedagogical designs and pedagogical uses of visual arts practices in early childhood contexts between China and Finland. All of us three students have done 10-week internship periods between year 2020 and 2022 in nine different kindergartens in Finland and China. During our internships we noticed that the implementation of art activities varied greatly from one kindergarten to another, and that the thinking and specific guidance of visual arts varied from one teacher to another.

Therefore, this thesis is to find out the experiences and views of early childhood educators about art education and to develop a guide for early childhood education that supports art education that strengthens a child's creativity. It will explore what early childhood practitioners can do to protect children's creativity and imagination through visual art to keep the door of artistic expression open. The outcome of this thesis is a handbook for early childhood practitioners, in which we will include a brief presentation of theoretical approaches as well as practical suggestions for guiding skills and techniques about visual art education in early childhood education context.

## 2 Theory of art and art education

The classroom in early childhood education is considered an important environment for providing a broad view of art, and it is encompassed by rich visual conditions. Children can experience the so-called art visually and auditorily and gain a deep understanding (Gazme & Sakire 2018.) Artistic and aesthetic experiences in early years offer an atmosphere where children acquire an appreciation of beauty, express themselves, develop creativity and use imagination of themselves (Gamze&Sakire, 2017). Meanwhile, educators need arts-related educational support in their teaching careers (Twigg & Garvis, 2010). However, research by the Finnish Education Evaluation Center (FINEEC) (2019) has emphasized that one third of staff at ECEC centers reported that visual arts education was offered every month or less frequently. Ozkan and Girgin (2014) illustrated that most of the teachers didn't get enough art education study during their university period. Much data and research indicate that arts education in the early years is imperative, but how it should be implemented is still in the exploratory stage. When early year teachers do not have enough visual art abilities, know-how and courage to support children in visual art study and participation, children's study in visual arts may be limited, which will lead to a negative consequences cycle and the right of visual art for children will be deprived (Gai Lindsay, 2021).

Also, art education in daycare centers has also been critical of being too adult-oriented. The inherent merits of art should not be ignored, and high levels of art should be encouraged. (Rusanen, Kuusela, Rintakorpi & Torkki 2014, p. 60; Nevanen 2015, pp. 8-13 & 41-45; von Brandenburg 2008, p. 17-20.) Numerous early childhood education (ECE) teachers commented on their lack of knowledge of the arts and expressed a lack of confidence in their visual arts skills and knowledge (Smyth & Davis, 2016; Lindsay, 2015a). McArdle (2016) specifically pointed out the necessity of transforming the visual arts paradigm of research from the "why" of art education to clarifying the "what" and "how" of visual arts education.

Art has been an essential part of human development for a long time. From a historical perspective, works of art have existed for almost if human beings have (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). Art can hardly be defined in a single way. It includes a variety of media such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, drawing, decorative art, photography, installation, etc. (Britannica, T, 2020). Merriam-Webster (2019) defines art as: skill acquired by experience, study, or observation; the conscious use of skill and creative imagination by the aesthetic consciousness, especially in the production of aesthetic objects skill acquired by experience, study, or observation; the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects.

In the past, art was once considered to have 'little to do with the question of knowledge' (Eisner, 2008). Today, however, education and the arts are closely linked, and the arts are seen as part of education. Art education consists of four important elements: art making,

aesthetics, art evaluation and art history. The principles and aims of art education are designed with the aim of enriching the lives of students by enhancing their ability to use their senses and their minds in an enjoyable and confident way as they experience their environment. Art education should also enable students to develop personal life choices and their sense of responsibility for society. (Herberholz & Hanson 1995.) One of the aims of ECEC, as mentioned in the Finnish Child Education and Care Act (2018), is to create positive learning experiences through educational activities based on play, physical activity, art, and cultural heritage.

For early childhood education, the impact of the arts on children's development is significant, but the goal is not necessarily to develop this skill. As mentioned in VASU (2018), artistic experiences and artistic expression promote children's learning potential, social skills and positive self-image, as well as the ability to understand and construct the world around them. The development of art in children's education aims to focus more on children's understanding of the outside world and self-expression than on making children very good at the skill of drawing. According to Levinson (2003), Lev Tolstoy saw art as using indirect means to allow one person to communicate with another. The development of art education in kindergartens also provides a means of communication between children and educators in a 'new language'.

## 2.1 Art education and significance of art education in early years

Art education in early childhood has a significant impact on the development of children. Never neglect actions related to the art which is beneficial to children's early year progress that contains their development in creativity, communication skills, intellectual and emotions (Belz, 2011). According to the Brain and Learning (2008), Eisner states that the experience, explanation and thinking progress for kids are supported by the arts. The arts are the essential basement for developing children in many aspects when they are young, and it promotes their ability in cognitive, communication skills, coping difficulties and individual capacity, together with developing children themselves in body, language, and emotions (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2007; Barton, 2015; Duh, 2016). Also, Dissanayake (2009, p. 165) proposed that the experience of appreciation and art is the important condition of human beings and their society, which means it is harmful without appreciation and experience of art, especially for kids. Therefore, children should be given a lot of art experiences and chances since arts education is the main resource for helping children to get comprehensive study and development (Burrill, 2005; Duh, 2016). The impact of arts activities on all aspects of children's development will be briefly described next.

### 2.1.1 Cognitive development

When making art, children are exposed to different materials, such as brushes, rulers, scissors, clay, crepe paper etc. Experimentation and experience with materials helps children understand and feel the outside world. Kamii and DeVries (1993) suggested that exploring is

very important, and it leads children to build an understanding of the outside world. In the point view of cognitive, visual arts is used to explain the outside world around children, and its procedure is how children understand the items in their hands so that they get a reflection for them (Cohen & Uhry, 2011). Creative artistic activity is not a single activity; it involves the processing of multiple processes. This learning skill of art and science sharing includes observing, conceiving, considering, speaking, and discovering (Winner, 2007). Medved, Cupchik, and Oatley (2004) suggested that visual art is good for the function of cognitive, due to the method we used to handle information.

Research also shows that arts programs can have a significant influence on the scholastic exam results of both primary and high school students (Young, 2005). This may be because art encompasses different subjects such as color, math, shape, language, senses, etc., all of which help children construct cognitive styles. Goldberg (2005) reported that 3rd year students found improvement in metacognition after being trained on a specific art task. Goldberg found that participation in a varied collection of art tasks that inspired more metacognitive thinking allowed pupils to enhance their skills in gaining an understanding of the thematic relevance of art components, as well as to develop solution to problems associated with the fundamentals of art. Since arts are an essential component of schooling and can boost academic performance along with results that include endurance in scholastic assignments (Darby 1994).

### 2.1.2 Motor skills

The development of fine motor skills is particularly important in early education. Drawing, finger painting and doodling are all good ways of developing fine motor skills. Fine motor skills state that children is capable to use their hands and fingers of minor muscles together with enhancing the ability of visualize and knowing for themselves (Crawford & Weber, 2013, p. 99, cited in Tiffany 2019). Motor development is one of the quickest procedures that developed in children's initial stage (Hurlock, 1956, p.136, cited in Tiffany 2019). Furthermore, the art activities related to using scissors and collaging will finally improve the fine motor ability through enhancing hand and fingers 'muscles. (Gruetman, 2017, p. 48). Children experience art through experimentation, experience, and touch. Montessori thought children can figure out characters, classification, essential conceptions which includes colors, capacity, and pattern through operating items (Montessori and Gutek 2004, cited in Wendell 2013). Art making activities such as beading, collage, gluing pieces of paper together will give an opportunity to practice children's coordination skills. The collaboration between eye and hand is developed by the progress of art making (Koster, 1997). Good hand-eye coordination will help children to participate in a wide range of activities, especially in the future school time, and will be even more helpful in the writing process. When children have fine motor skills, they are undoubtedly able to put more attention and cognitive power into more complicated study (Rule & Smith, 2018).



### 2.1.3 Self-expression

Art is a form of self-expression for children. Because children are young and still developing their language skills, most are unable to express themselves accurately through language, especially infants and toddlers. Children show off themselves through different ways of art and get the definition from the surrounding world. Accordingly, visual art as a medium enables children to express their thinking and feeling to the outside world (Anning 1999). However, young children do not have as many ways to cope with their emotions as adults do. The only way to do this may be through drawing, which is how the visual arts are first encountered in early childhood. The procedure of making art is the tunnel for children to express their emotions in positive and negative ways (Dyer-Friedman & Sanders, 1997). Children express themselves differently from adults by doodling, drawing, coloring, making, or creating. For certain children, compared with words, it is easier to use drawing to display and enlarge movement and action of items (Pat & Justine 2011). While adults have many ways to express their emotions, the only way children do so is through drawing, and it becomes the earliest form of exposure for children in their early years.

### 2.1.4 Self-esteem

Art education helps children to build self-confidence, which is important for children's self-assurance. Self-esteem means that people trust themselves and clearly understand their advantages and disadvantages, to assure themselves to deal with different circumstances (Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, & Soderman, 2006). Through participating in different activities related to arts, children's communication ability, self-confidence and self-assurance are expanded (Schirrmacher 2002, cited in Asuman 2013). With children self-managing the items that they used and the self-decision they made, the sense of achievement arises (Schirrmacher, 1998; Seefeldt, 1993). A confident child is exactly what we want to nurture, because with confidence, children can rise to challenges and move forward, and arts education becomes an enabler for developing children's early self-confidence. Children's unique along with achievement and performance that they present to promote intellectual wellness, which belong to a factor of soundness of self-image (Kohl, 2010).

Art production allows children to establish their self-respect through a chance to show their thoughts and feelings that are given (Fox & Berry, 2013). When the work is completed, it gives the child a sense of inner satisfaction when he or she presents the work to others for recognition and praise. Since creative events are essential and significant mechanisms as far as permitting children to show themselves to achieve dignity (Asuman 2013). Feedback from peers or teachers during the artwork also has a positive effect on building a child's self-confidence. Sautter (1994) illustrated that when children work with their peers in the art activities, the feedback between peers allow them to establish self-respect through classmates' objection and appreciation they give each other. Moreover, a precise evaluation

is essential to kids' studying procedure for they proceed to explore and broaden their know-how and ability apart from what they owned (Mulcahey, 2009).

### 2.1.5 Creativity

Creativity is referred to as the method of resolving problems for today and outlook (Leggett, 2017; NACCCE, 1999). Art activities in the early years allow children to create works of art to their own liking, with color combinations and choice of materials, all of which are concrete expressions of their imagination. Children can present any object they imagine in their minds in their artwork. In the children's environment, the educators must admit that art education is a place of imagination which allows children to research their identification and recognize the world and promote their comprehensive growth at the same time (Grierson, 2011). The importance of art for the development of children's creativity cannot be overstated.

According to the article in the United Nations Convention on Human Rights points out art as a self-expression for creative and imagination of people with entire cultures, hierarchy, and generations. Visual arts events are amongst the standard opportunities to undertake creative tasks and are important for the development of children's cognitive and imaginative activities (Koster, 2012). It is logical to believe that both creativity and art are connected, because they both enhance the stimulation of the cerebral cortex (Cupchick, 1994; Runko & Sakamoto, 1999), which means they need deeper and more thinking.

### 2.1.6 Social skills

Artistic activities are often a collaboration on a project and participation in the event is a form of socialization. Strengthen group awareness through take part in art program of big group, so that the development of community abilities will be promoted (Fox & Schirmmacher, 2012), which give rise to the capability of studying collaboration and sympathy (Brouillette 2010). The process of making art allows children to learn to work independently or in collaboration with peers, and social skills such as sharing ideas and evaluating the work of others occur naturally in real-life situations. The key part of social skills developed by art is partaking in space and items, following in sequences, collaborating with others, in charge of tidying up, and choosing right in personal actions (Kyoung & Su-Jeong 2017).

## 2.2 Visual Art education

Encyclopaedia Britannica (no date) defines visual arts as "the arts that meet the eye and evoke an emotion through an expression of skill and imagination. They include the most ancient forms, such as painting and drawing, and the arts that were born thanks to the development of technology, like sculpture, printmaking, photography, and installation art". The national curriculum for ECEC (2018,42) has described five learning areas as: "rich world of languages, diverse forms of expression, me, and our community, exploring and interacting with my environment, I grow, move, and develop. Within the learning areas, 'diverse forms of

expression' (2018,45) describes: "artistic experiences and expression promote children's learning potential, social skills, and positive self-image as well as their capacity to understand and structure the surrounding world." As Chinese pioneering artist Feng Zikai (2015) claims science education brings knowledge, moral education enlightens spirit, and art education cultivates perception towards beauty.

Lan (2011) asserts that art education is all about the development of the ability to feel. Through the development of feeling, what children love becomes more integral to them, and is integrated into their own development, temperament, and personality. The goal of art education is to cultivate children's ability to perceive beauty and express emotion, story, or an idea. Music, drama, painting, poetry, etc. are all means of promote children's artistic ability. In addition to beauty perception, among all the artistic forms, music can teach children what rhythm and melody are, and know how to appreciate classical movements; poetry can let children feel the charm and regularity of words. Visual art is known to be an aesthetic stimulus that arouses an emotional response (Tan 2000, cited in Hagtvedt et al. 2008).

### 2.3 Artistic development stages of children

Viktor Lowenfeld, the famous contemporary art educator from Austria, has studied children's art for many years. He (1957) divided children's development into six stages according to the characteristics of children's mental growth. Although each child develops differently and at different paces, it is generally similar. Children basically must go through one stage to get to the next. In early years, children experience two artistic development stages.

#### The scribbling stage: 2-4 years old

Children's scribbling is a product of their visual experience, body and finger muscle movement coordination, and also a performance of instinct. Lowenfeld believes that when young children start scribbling, it is their unconscious reflex, and they have no creating intent. They just enjoy the feeling of muscle movement, and the feeling of pen on paper. But gradually, children can find some correlation between the lines on the paper and their own movements, so they continue to scribble, and gradually develop hand-eye coordination, muscle control and other scribbling processes related to physical and mental development. Specifically, there are three stages in the period of scribbling.

The first stage is disordered scribbling. It happens around 2 years old. In this stage, they have a fistful grasp of the crayons. They use the shoulder to control the movement of the crayons across the paper. Moreover, their eyes are not necessarily on the paper while they are scribbling.

The second stage is longitudinal or controlled scribbling. It happens around 2.5 years old. In this stage, children scribble with repeated movements, a certain level of hand-eye coordination and control ability, often with repeated horizontal lines. Children already have some control over the elbow joint.

The third stage is naming of scribbling. It happens around the age of 3 to 4 years old. In this stage, children tend to name the drawing, linking the content of the drawing with the visual world. They develop from simply enjoying moving fingers on the paper to scribbling with fantastic imagination. They love to give meaning to their scribbles, but the image is still difficult to recognize. The name is changeable, for example, they might claim what they are drawing is a rocket but change it to something else after finishing. You can detect the connection between the drawing and the objects that they draw, but not the spatial relationship of the objects. They name the scribble and use different colors to distinguish different meanings.

The pre-schematic stage: 4-7 years old

As children's exposure to the environment expands, they love to explore the world rather than controlling their own body. They realize the representational possibility. They start to discover the relationship between reality, thoughts and painting, and constantly accept new concepts, so they often change their painting concept and image. This period is obviously different from the scribbling stage. At this time, painting has a purpose and is a behavior of consciously expressing their own thoughts. They advance from scribbling simple lines to preliminary shapes of people, animals and objects. These symbolic drawings don't look very realistic, but for children, it's a qualitative change in thinking.

In pre-schematic stage, they tend to draw tadpole-human figure to represent human. Tadpole-human figures comprise of common circles and lines. There is no spatial order and objects are scattered all over the place. The relationship between color and image in the picture is determined by children's preference. The children probably have ideas of what they want to draw before he or she starts writing and have the awareness of telling emotions in their world with circles or lines.

### 3 Artistic curve theory

Preschool children are curious, adventurous, and unfettered. Early childhood is commonly regarded as the most creative period. Torrance (2018) believes that children at the age of 4 are most similar in personality traits to highly creative adults. However, in his book *Art, Mind and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* (1980), Howard Gardner mentions that children's artistic abilities do not increase with age, but rather show a "U-shaped curve". The top of the U shape indicates a high degree of creativity in preschool children, and the middle

bottom indicates a period of lack of imagination, followed by a rise and explosion of creativity. However, not all children will be able to rise again, and some children may stop developing artistic ability and show "L-shaped" development pattern.

The team divided the children roughly by age. Generally, children aged 0 to 5 art state is very good, but gradually presents the downward trend, as the growth of the age, children's self-requirement also rises. They begin to pay attention to opinions of others. The artistic ability of children at the age of 6 to 11 years old started to decline to the bottom. With appropriate guide, it is hopeful to rise again after the age of 11. Based on our observation, children before the age of 4 usually do not need much intervention from teachers. When given paper and pencil, they do not hesitate and draw whatever they want. Even simple lines and graphics are full of passion and meaning. But after the age of 5 or 6, the situation is not the same. Eisner (1988) held a similar point, which is early exposure to the arts is critical and can be difficult to recover if not nurtured. These studies suggest that guidance for children toward various artistic activities are necessary and responding to the developmental needs of early years.

#### 4 Supporting children's creativity in art education

Therefore, from the artistic development stages and artistic curve theory, the fundamental issue of children's art education lies in how to protect children's creativity and maintain their interest in expressing their experience and feelings through art. So, from what aspects should we establish a sustainable and high-quality arts education program for children?

Herberholz& Hanson (1985) repeatedly emphasize the importance of artistic creation in the planning of art education and holds that artistic creation is the center of children's art education. That is to say, in another important thing in early childhood art education is to expose children to sensory experiences and foster children's aesthetic perception and observation. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987: 11) state, 'It is only through the senses that learning can take place.' The world is full of beauty. What we need to do is to take children to experience it. The park or forest has natural beauty, the gallery has artistic beauty. We can often organize a trip to perceive and experience various beauty. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) point out that only through proper education for sense, could the slightly difference be seen, the gradual change be felt, and our environment be recognized. It is better if we can help them to distinguish art elements in the natural world and artificial things. As facilitators, teachers must provide many ways for children to develop their skills and refine their sensory perception, thereby facilitating the formation of concepts and more emotional awareness to ensure that each child's potential is fully developed (Herberholz& Hanson 1985). The teacher's task is to assist children in understanding themselves and to encourage and inspire them to develop sensitive, rich, and resilient relationships that stimulate creativity (Lowenfeld

At the same time, the educators should distinguish between art activities and art making experiences. An art activity does not contain the procedure of education, children following the instructions step by step and there are no changes in their art progress. However, art making experience will not only including communication and encouragement, but only requires getting continuously support from teachers and variably based on children's demands. Only by understanding this distinction can we strike the right balance and do a good job of supporting the process of inspiring art education for young children (Eglinton & Kristen Ali, 2003). The connection between children and education potential for art requires teacher to participate in subtly, entirely engaged in, and take part in children's art exploration in some certain cases (Brittain 1979; Eglinton 2002; Kindler 1995; Kolbe 1993). What is more, children's interests do not arise randomly, nor do they suddenly become interested just because a new material is introduced. Early childhood teachers need to understand the reasons behind motivation and its types so that they can find ways to motivate and add to the betterment of art education.

The younger a child is, the fewer channels and expressions there are for emotional release, so every expression channel used to relieve tension is extremely important (Lowenfeld 1954), Therefore, it is necessary for early childhood practitioners to know about the artistic development stages and understand characteristics so as to avoid over-intervention, which might lead to children's diminished enthusiasm about art. For example, for children in scribbling stage, we should not use visual images to inspire children, since the experience of scribbling is related to movements. Lowenfeld (1957) claims that children at this stage enjoy movements on paper. Repetitive movements are important for children. Giving them recognition and confidence are meaningful for them because they feel they can take control of the situation. They do not want to associate visual images with the activity of painting. Besides, too many colors and teaching them to use the right colors for children in scribbling stages are merely interferences and distractions (Torii 2010).

Therefore, we should respect the law of children's artistic development, holding an objective expectation for children's work. we can't expect that a 3-year-old can create a drawing of a 6-year-old, and a 6-year-old can create a drawing of a 10-year-old. Lowenfeld (1957) pointed out that if a child can draw characters or things before the age of 3, it does not mean that he is a talent, instead, he may not scribble enough. If the children are still scribbling at the age of 6, it does not mean developmental delay. They may need more time to build creating confidence. However, all the 7 years old should have the capability to establish the connection of drawing and thinking, so it is suggested to consult the psychologist if a child of 7 is still scribbling.

There are many ways to initiate art, but teachers still need to take advantage of every opportunity to have a dialogue with children. Discussions with children are particularly important through the art experience, as any unintended word can have the effect of facilitating or hindering a child's art experience. Discussion is treated as an integrated part of all artistic experiences and it can inspire, instruct, stimulate, and offer critical response,

extending and/or enhancing participation in the procedure (Eglinton & Kristen Ali, 2003). At the same time, the teacher needs to give the children appropriate guidance, just as a ship on the sea needs a captain. ).

#### 4.1 Environment setting

We should provide children a safe environment that encourages experimentation and creativity, which is regarded by Herberholz & Hanson (1985) as the top priority to ensure children's positive artistic experience. If the environment given to children is warm and tolerant, they will happily indulge their emotions, generate novel ideas on various objects, and use a variety of tools and materials for artistic creation. As young children engage in artistic opportunities that permit them to freely experience and explore in a failure-free environment, no boring, exhausted, or uninvolved feeling was felt since the surrounding is easy-going and the imagination and they do not feel bored, exhausted, or uninvolved because of the relaxed atmosphere, and let children for imagination and express themselves willingly, as if they were free to play (Kim Jenson, 2018). So, such environment should include both psychological and physical dimensions. Firstly, we give children "sense of autonomy" by encouraging them to create whatever they feel like. They can decide what to draw or make according to their own ideas. Torii (2010) asserts that in the world of drawing, nothing is more important than freedom.

Secondly, we can make the different suitable materials easily accessible. American psychologist Benjamin Bloom said that the greatest motivator for learning is interest in the material being learned. Just as with a child with a poor appetite, parents always vary the food pattern and cooking style to help the child enjoy the food and increase appetite, teachers can increase interest in drawing by trying to get children to use different drawing materials. Children should experience different materials as much as possible. Materials of different texture and density will enhance children's tactile sensitivity (Lowenfeld 1954). For example, children in scribbling stage need to exercise upper limb movement and control of movement, so crayons especially bigger crayons that are easier to hold are suitable for them. The children can play with paint by looking at it, by touching it, by experiencing the texture of the paint, whether it is smooth or rough, whether it is a shade of one color or a mixture of colors, whether it seems to be a simple mass of color, but in the children's world it brings them a thousand different sensations. Therefore, experimenting with different painting materials will inspire children to explore the unknown and thus satisfy their curiosity, and with curiosity comes the desire to learn. Thirdly, nature can be a source of artistic creation for children, and at the same time, every plant and tree in nature, spring, summer, autumn and winter, all provide materials for children's creativity. All these activities are constantly exercising the imagination and creativity of the children, while helping their gross and fine motor skills.

## 4.2 Positive pedagogy in art education

### 4.2.1 Praise and comments

In the daily interaction with children, early childhood educators praise frequently to reinforce children's behavior. Words like "good job" "well done" have been commonly used in early childhood settings. However, praise to children should not be limited to this. Inappropriate praise can cause harm (Brummelman et al. 2017). Firstly, using various praising words indiscriminately can be counterproductive (Henderlong & Lepper 2002). Inflated praise lower motivation and sense of self-worth for children with low self-esteem (Brummelman & Bushman 2016) and cultivates narcissism for children with high self-esteem (Brummelman et al. 2016). Secondly, overpraise reduces intrinsic motivation affecting children's desire to learn or to overcome failure (Corpus et al. 2006). Besides, the praise itself is not the problem, the key is the method of praise.

Praise can be an extremely complex dialogic way, which requires a lot of efforts from teachers to focus on many things such as how, when, and why etc. that used in praise on children. For example, praise can be given for brave attempts at the beginning stages of drawing, or for liking a child's color scheme when they are using a mixing color on paper to express themselves. Praise can't be given all the time and continuously because the tone is becoming boring and the words is useless, which made their experiences pointless. It will cause children to focus on the praise and ignore the process when they are experiencing arts, and the words will seem feeble and redundant. In addition, praise can be used not only to encourage the child, but also as a form of feedback on the process of the child's artwork. However, special care should be taken to give children more positive feedback and to avoid using negative feedback. For example, like "the way you are doing is not good", it is negative, whereas words such as "I like the way you colored the animal" or "You held the pencil correctly", which focus on the process and details, are positive feedback. Any ineffective unfavorable evaluation could not help improvement but hamper the advancement of art, however, effective and productive evaluation can enhance and prolong the child's experience in art substantially (Eglinton 2003).

Praise must be sincere and honest. Praise the efforts and process, not children's achievement or ability. The way we attribute events affects how we view and react to future events (Graham 1991). Praise should be specific and descriptive. Noticing small details suggests we have paid attention and we really care. They have been found to be more effective in promoting desirable behaviors (Chalk & Bizo, 2004). We should avoid the comments like "it's well drawn, it resembles the objects, it should be drawn that way". Such words are misleading the children into thinking that the purpose of doing arts is to copy what they see with a pen or materials. Preschool period is the time for children to pursue imaginary reality, so teachers should encourage, and praise children's paintings drawn by impression (Torii 2010). If we try to draw another "model" for



them, we are telling them that there is a standard answer to art. No matter for children or adults, artmaking should be a very creative thing. Children's art making process is a way to freely express their emotions, stories, and ideas.

#### 4.2.2 Discussion to stimulate divergent thinking

Through discussion, they can discover new possibilities in their artworks and develop the divergent thinking skills to add more unexpected contents to their work. Schaefer and Cole (1990: 6) mentioned about 'teachable moments' is that under the circumstance when adults consider course target, providing an extra study chance. Educators then use this opportunity to engage in dialogue with young children, helping them to solve problems, gain new knowledge, or extend their experiences, etc.

Firstly, the discussion can take place before or after the work, using a stimulating dialogue format. Combine the drawing with the children's emotions and feelings. However, it is noteworthy that we should avoid making conjecture based on children's work. We should wait until they tell us what they made or drew, because our false assumption may hurt their feelings (Lowenfeld, 1953) and discourage their motivation.

Secondly, we can inspire children to unlock their imagination from what they draw or make and help them link what they draw to their real feelings and experiences (Barnes 1987). For example, when a child draws a car, it may be meaningless, but the teacher can seize the opportunity to create and expand a story with the child, where to go by car, what to do, whether the car can only be driven on land, or in the sea or in the sky.

Thirdly, acceptance and encouragement from the teacher is one of the essential elements in early art education (Barnes 1987). When the artworks are not realistic, there is no need to "convince" them to correct it. It is better to use discussion to make him aware of the difference between their work and the guiding content, and inspire him to imagine the "difference", so as to foster divergent thinking. However, no matter they decide to modify their work or insist on it, we express our approval and trust.

#### 4.2.3 Documentation

Part of the teacher's job in everyday pedagogy is to make records of teaching. Pedagogical documentation is an important working method on how to plan, practice, assess and advance early childhood education and care, which is an extended procedure to observing, documenting, and interacting to build a recognition of projects in pedagogy (Vasu 2018). Therefore, keeping good records of teaching and learning during art activities will allow for more effective follow-up of children's art activities and promote their artistic development. Records include not only how to write observations, pedagogy experiences, but also children's artwork collections,

reflections on teaching and so on, and relationship among documentation files illustrated in Figure 1 (Eglinton & Kristen Ali, 2003)

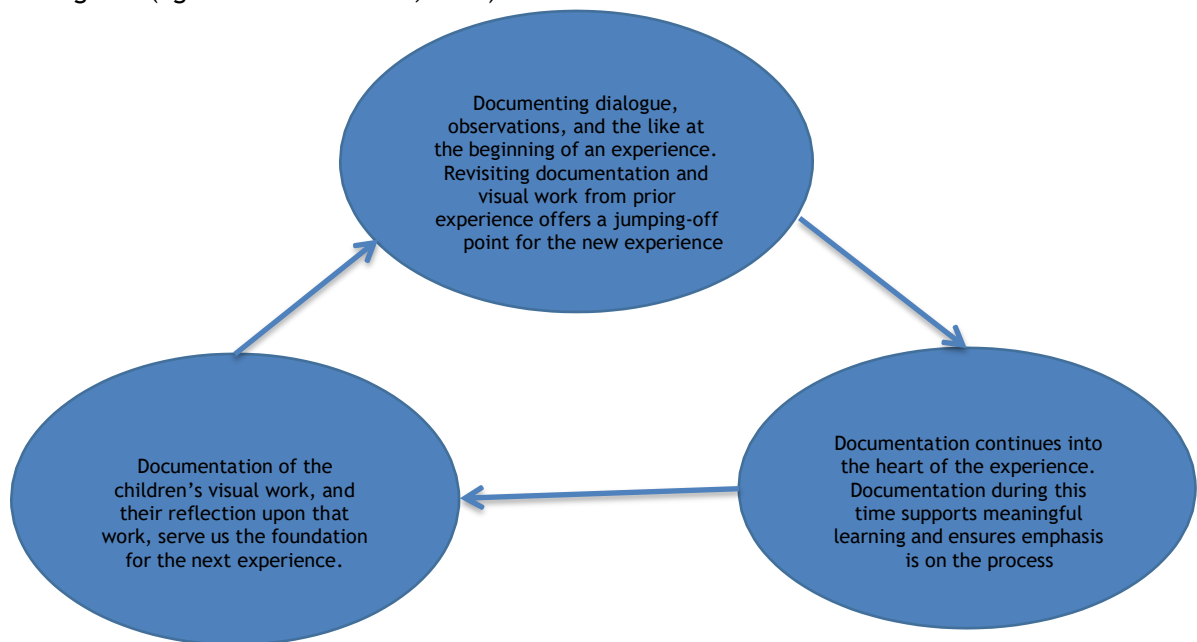


Figure 1. Basic Documentation ((Eglinton & Kristen Ali, 2003)

Through the documentation, teachers can assess the strengths and weaknesses of art teaching and to identify areas of development to continually improve teaching models and formats for children's artistic development. The assessment is very essential to help, booster, and become a portion of children's art effort (Eglinton 2003). More importantly, neglecting art assessment presents neglect of this subject considering the two are much critical to the development of children and procure making research (Barnes 1987; Eisner 1972, 1988; Gardner 1988; Wright 1994). Moreover, the assessment areas of visual art in early childhood education needs to be concerned about by educators, such as art material, learning environment, art journey, communication skills or procedure, children's motor skills and cognitive development in art during the visual art process etc. Detailed assessment scale reference to figure (Figure 2.)

Perceptual, aesthetic, and cognitive development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engages in discovery and investigation</li> <li>● Notices details</li> <li>● Exercises perceptual discrimination</li> <li>● Builds on prior information</li> <li>● Uses the senses to extract information from the environment</li> <li>● Uses the senses to extract information from works of art</li> <li>● Reflects on own works of art Reflects on own artistic processes Sees connections in artistic experiences</li> <li>● Connects encounters with art to own art making experiences</li> <li>● Sees similarities and differences in objects and works of art</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understands nature’s role as provider of media and inspiration</li> <li>● Develops and decodes simple symbols</li> </ul>
<p><b>Technical skill and use of art media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Uses two-dimensional media with purpose</li> <li>● Uses three-dimensional media with purpose</li> <li>● Can handle a selection of drawing tools with dexterity</li> <li>● Can handle a selection of painting media with dexterity</li> <li>● Understands and uses natural objects as art media</li> <li>● Chooses suitable media to task at hand</li> <li>● Consistently developing new skills and techniques</li> <li>● Is inventive with art media</li> <li>● Builds on previously learned skills and techniques</li> </ul> <p><b>Expressive and artistic development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is able to give form to expression</li> <li>● Overcomes obstacles in the giving of form to expression</li> <li>● Demonstrates progression through stages of artistic development</li> <li>● Understands art as a way to express thoughts and ideas</li> <li>● Uses creative thinking in the giving of form to expression</li> <li>● Is inventive in expression</li> <li>● Uses art as a mode of communication</li> </ul> <p><b>Social and personal development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engages in dialogue about art with other children and staff</li> <li>● Social and personal development</li> <li>● Engages in dialogue about art with other children and staff</li> <li>● Treats own art, art of others, art reproductions, and objects with care</li> <li>● Takes turn leading projects and allowing others to lead</li> <li>● Cares for art media, natural objects, and natural and constructed environment</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Measurable areas in art assessment (Eglinton & Kristen Ali, 2003)

#### 4.2.4 Enrich experiences and increase sensitivity

There are a variety of visual arts activities conducted in early childhood education. Vasu 2018 stated that “the goal of visual expression is to develop the children’s relationship with visual arts, other forms of visual and cultural heritage, that children have an opportunity to enjoy creating images and gather aesthetic experiences through art.” Gaspar (1995) illustrate forms of art experiences in ECEC: one is the conventional experience, including creating a physical

item through using art medium, another is utilized to discover, perceive, appreciate, or listen, which is indicated as the encounter art or beauty. Aesthetics is also an integral portion of any early artistic experience and can promote children's profound artistic creation and understanding of the world, using various experiences as the bridges needed for artistic creation and contact. Aesthetic experiences assist and change children's perceptions of the world, increasing and enhancing awareness and experiences, instruct children in their subsequent encounters with works of art and arouse children's sense of beauty in daily experiences and items (Eglinton 2003).

Enriching children's aesthetic experience can start from two sides. On one hand we can focus on the beauty of both artistic works and beauty in the natural world. Children's senses are awakened through the stimulation and influence of various aesthetic experiences. An example of this aesthetic might be taking children into the forest in search of spring, sitting on a rock and listening to the birds' songs, smelling the flowers and plants, feeling the spring breeze on their faces - all the senses are open at that moment and will make a lasting impression, even if it doesn't last very long. On the other hand, we can encourage them to be mindful of their own daily lives. However, it is very important to remind that even children contact the world with open senses and an environmental wish to discover, the educator's responsibility is to show children how, what, where and when to use senses in a manner of awareness, judgement and knowing (Gaspar, 1995). Educators also need to make the most of opportunities to help children engage in artistic experiences and multiple experiences. The more opportunities there are for experience, the more children's aesthetic abilities will be enhanced.

There is only one theme in education, and that is to live a colorful life (Whitehead 1967). Particularly, early education activities should be carried out around the theme of life. Life is the soul of education. The more sensitive we are to general experience, the richer our lives will be. We can continue to encourage and inspire students to develop sensitive, rich, and resilient relationships. Torii (2010) claims that adults should try to enrich children's life experience if children around the age of five always draw pictures of the same subject, content, or form.

In his book of creative and mental health (1953), Lowenfeld shared one of his experiences of guiding the children through drawing teeth. First, he prepared a box of hard candy in his pocket and shook it, asking the children to guess what were making the sound. Most of the children managed to get the answer. After that, Lowenfeld handed the candy to each child and nearly all the children chewed the candy loudly. At this point, Lowenfeld asked them to draw a mouth, there must be teeth in that mouth. When children have direct sensory experience, and personal emotional input, the content of painting comes out naturally. Through such perceptual training, children can discover beauty and features that are missing in new or familiar objects. Sensory shocks stimulate imagination and make connections with the real world around them.

## 5 Thesis implementation

In this functional thesis, we have conducted interviews with 7 educators in two kindergartens. The aims of the interview are as below. Firstly, it is to gain clearer picture of current practice about visual art education in early childhood context. Secondly, we can gain better identification of the educators' need of help regarding early artistic education. Lastly, from the interview, we can also draw insights and suggestions from experienced art pedagogy, so that we can utilize and combine into our end result-the handbook. We hope the manual will inspire and be helpful for early childhood educators so that they would be more mindful of the implementation of art education.

### 5.1 Working life partner

Our interview was conducted simultaneously at two kindergartens, a company with more than 20 years of experience in the field of child education for families with children living in Finland. It operates under the Early Childhood Education Act, the National Early Childhood Education Plan, and the municipalities' own early childhood education plans, and follows the same objectives, quality indicators, and educational requirements as municipal kindergartens and preschools.

The two kindergartens are a bilingual kindergarten and an English kindergarten. We wanted to investigate how visual arts education is practiced in different educational contexts. The first working life partner is a bilingual kindergarten in English and Finnish. The kindergarten is in Vantaa and has nine groups, three groups for children under three years old, five groups for children over three years old, and a preschool class. Here, the teachers provide a regular and balanced life for the children. Typically, Finnish and English are taught in a sequence. The teacher observes, records, and evaluates the children's learning and development, adjusts teaching goals in time, and plans the next stage of instruction. The classroom includes several areas such as a reading corner, role-play area, drawing area, musical instrument area, play area, and rest area to support children's play, learning, and relaxation, creating a comfortable and safe place.

The second partner is a kindergarten located in the city of Helsinki. It is a small kindergarten with four groups of schoolchildren, depending on their age, with leprechauns, unicorns, and dragons. The children come from multicultural or English-speaking families. The school has a rich routine and various parties to celebrate the holidays of different countries with the aim of exposing the children to the diverse world in this kindergarten. The teachers have a special respect for gender equality and allow the children to explore on their own, giving them equal opportunities to make a variety of choices. There is also a strong focus on language development, with a full English immersion approach that allows children to learn and speak English in English. There are also many outdoor activities. In addition to daily trips to different parks around the area for the children to explore their environment more, more

museums, theaters, concerts, and even cafes are among the choices the teachers have. They are constantly experimenting and updating our educational philosophy in hopes of better meeting the children's interests and needs.

Both of these work partners were very helpful in developing our thesis. Before we started our thesis, we had done or were doing a placement in these two workplaces. Both workplaces provided us with good opportunities to observe the daily activities of the kindergartens, which led us to the idea of developing a thesis on the theme of visual arts education. These two kindergartens acted as inspiration for us. The teachers in both workplaces were very supportive during the implementation phase of the thesis. We invited seven teachers to do interview activities, and we benefited from the participation of all of them, who agreed to our requests and answered all of our questions carefully. These interviewees were our helpers. After we finished the manual, they gave us objective comments and encouragement, which played an evaluative role.

## 5.2 Research method

Kothari (2020) has proposed that the research methodology is a systematic approach to solving research problems. It can be understood as a science that studies how to conduct research scientifically. For the purpose of discussing visual arts in children's education, the methodology was chosen as the research method in which the overall approach of the study is qualitative. Qualitative research is concerned with qualitative phenomena and aims to understand the study of how people feel or think about a particular topic or system (Kothari 2020). There are five common approaches to qualitative research: grounded theory, ethnography, participatory action research (PAR), phenomenological research, and narrative research. Of these, PAR is defined as the collaboration of researchers and participants at all levels of the research process to help find appropriate solutions to social problems that significantly impact underserved communities. (Creswell et al. 2007) In this study, we use Participatory Action Research (PAR) to link theory and practice to facilitate the implementation of visual arts in early childhood education to reduce the discrepancy between theory and practice.

We collected data through interviews in two different kindergartens. The two different kindergartens were chosen because they were English and bilingual kindergartens. We wanted to conduct research on how visual arts education is practised differently in different educational contexts and increase the study's sample size and comprehensiveness.

There were seven interviewees. Three were English kindergarten teachers, and the other four were bilingual kindergarten teachers. They were all certified as early childhood education teachers and had many years of teaching experience. Each of the three of us interviewed several teachers. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and one-on-one. Each interview lasted about half an hour. All seven interviews took place in the two kindergartens.

We made appointments with the teachers in advance to ensure that we had enough time to conduct the interviews and to avoid outside influences during the interviews. Also, the kindergartens were places where we were familiar with each other. Conducting the interviews in the kindergarten reduced the sense of unfamiliarity and allowed the interviews to go more smoothly.

We chose a semi-structured interview format. Prior to the interviews, we designed questions to learn about the educators' past visual arts learning and teaching experiences, their reflections, and barriers to teaching. Most questions were open-ended, thus gaining more information. The complete set of questions is included in the appendix (Appendix 1). During the semi-structured interview, questions could be added or omitted, or the order of questions could be changed if the situation warranted (Kothari, 2020). Such an interview-style increases the flexibility of questioning. We can adapt the questions to the actual situation of the interview, increasing the freedom of each other and creating the possibility of obtaining more content. However, such an interview style also makes the interview more difficult.

Before the interview, we changed the interview questions several times. In addition to considering how we could get valuable information, we also considered the interviewees' thoughts. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the first question should be broad and open, without being threatening. We adjusted the interview questions to give the interviewee time to adapt and think about how to answer. The beginning of an interview is always important. A semi-structured interview is more like an intimate conversation than a structured one, and we wanted to start the interview in a way that would set the stage for a friendly interview. During the interview, we tried to follow, as Kothari (2020) says, every effort to create a friendly atmosphere of trust and confidence. The interviewee feels at ease when talking to the interviewer, and the interviewer's attitude must remain friendly, polite, talkative, and unbiased.

### 5.3 Ethical consideration

Research ethics refers to the various values, norms, and institutional arrangements that help constitute and regulate scientific activity. Research ethics is the codification of scientific ethics in practice. A code of research ethics sets out the basic norms and values of the research community (NESH,2019). As part of the ethical factors, we showed our thesis plan to the working life representatives, and we signed Laurea thesis project agreement which outlines the purpose and methods used in this thesis. In addition, we asked the working life representatives if any research permissions are necessary and how can we apply for them. However, we do not need any research permission to do the thesis project because it is a functional thesis, and we will not collect personal information.

All participants in the project have been verbally informed of all relevant information about our project before the interview, including design and purpose, to give them a complete

understanding of the topic orientation. We told them of the purpose of the interview feedback: an evaluation of the project as a means of further development. The interviewees have been informed that their feedback is anonymous, that we would process the data in a non-identifiable form and that the information obtained from the interviews would not influence them.

Permission was given to all interviewees before the interview. All interviewees were ensured that they voluntarily agreed to participate in the interview and were free to withdraw if they felt uncomfortable. We adhere to Laurea's guidelines for referencing and using credible sources. We will avoid plagiarism and present our findings based on interviews and learning from sources accurately and objectively.

In the same way, as interviewers, we follow strict ethical principles of interviewing. We understand and recognize the value of each interviewee and look at each issue fairly. We focus only on the interview content, and the results are not subjectively assessed based on other personal factors of the interviewee.

#### 5.4 Data analysis

We recorded the interviews while following the ethical standards of the interview code during the interviews. The three of us each interviewed several kindergarten teachers and were responsible for transcribing our interviews in text. The textual presentation of the interviews made it easier for us to familiarize ourselves with the content of the interviews. The personal information of the interviewees and the interviews were only disseminated among the three of us and used for this research only.

Thematic analysis can be used in various paradigms or cognitive theoretical orientations for analyzing qualitative data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is an appropriate and powerful approach when trying to understand a set of experiences, ideas, or behaviours through a dataset. Thematic analysis most naturally falls between two poles - not only describing and classifying things in terms of them but not extending to the extent of developing a theory (Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L., 2020). Therefore, we chose to use thematic analysis to analyze the data in this study. To take thematic analysis more profound into the process of interpretation and data transformation, the researcher needs to develop organizational and categorical labels to describe the data in the analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). We will strictly follow the six steps of the thematic analysis method and implement them step by step to find answers to questions and actual meanings. In the summary of Kiger, M. E. and Varpio, L. (2020), the most widely accepted framework for conducting thematic analysis is the following six points, (i) familiarizing yourself with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the report. In Figure 3, we will further explain the process of generating themes.



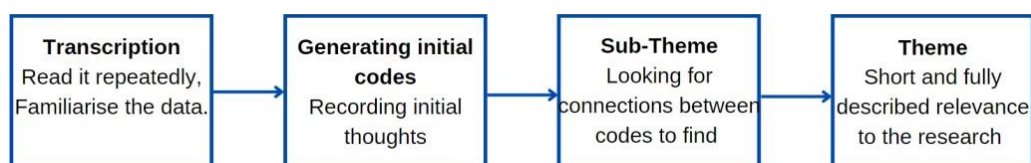


Figure3: Process of theme generation

In the first step, the main thing is to become familiar with the data, which is the basis for completing the subsequent steps. Constantly and repeatedly reading the transcribed version of the text makes it easier to identify valuable codes relevant to the thesis in the next step. The purpose of the second step is to generate the code. A *code* is defined as the most basic fragment or element of the original data or information that allows the evaluation of the phenomenon in a meaningful way (Boyatzis, 1998). Codes can describe categories of transcribed content, and once a code has been generated, themes can be searched for. Braun and Clarke (2012) once compared the entire analysis to a house then. The unique codes are the bricks and tiles, and the themes are the walls and roof. The researchers distilled the themes from the coded data so that the identified themes were tightly linked to the transcriptional data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 1 will show precisely how themes were derived from the transcribed text data step by step.

Responses from Transcribed Data	Coding	Sub-theme	Themes
<p>“Yes. I think it is everything, I think the more they had, they get all the senses activating.”</p> <p>“Visual arts education is important, and I think visual arts are great tools for nurturing and protecting children’s creativity.”</p> <p>“We often hold related activities. It’s more of a means of communication than saying that art is a skill. A good event gets everyone involved and enhances the children’s sense of participation...”</p>	<p>Role</p> <p>Inspiration</p> <p>Sensory stimulation</p> <p>Participation</p> <p>Creativity</p>	<p>The impact of art</p>	<p>The importance of visual arts education</p>
<p>“...but sometimes it depends on children’s interests, we don’t force children to do visual art activities...”</p> <p>“They are activities where each child expresses their emotions and lets their imagination run wild.”</p> <p>“Once a week...It depends on the age of the child. If kids are very small, we do something easier. If they are older, then we do something more advance.”</p>	<p>Respect the child’s wishes</p> <p>Teaching Plan</p> <p>Free Expression</p> <p>Communicate</p> <p>Suitable</p> <p>Competence</p>	<p>Pedagogical plan setting</p>	<p>Visual Art Education Implementation</p>

	Age Stage		
<p>“This year it has been complicated to carry out such outings because of the COVID, but we have tried to do them in class”</p> <p>“Sometimes we want to take the kids out, but you know, we don't have enough staff.”</p> <p>“...the transportation and distance away from the museum are the factor we considered about.”</p>	<p>Limitations</p> <p>Alternative solutions</p> <p>Understaffed</p> <p>Trip options</p> <p>Safety factors</p>	<p>The impact of Covid-19</p> <p>Preparation for a safe trip</p>	<p>Trip restrictions</p>
<p>“But I would say the most challenge part is how to encourage the interests of children who are not wanting to do it at all to try.”</p> <p>“One of the challenges is to get everyone to listen to me and to pay attention to what needs to be done.”</p> <p>“Teacher organizes and create learning environment for children that they can access any materials they need.”</p> <p>“If the plan is not arranged properly, instructional difficulties may occur, we usually divide the children into small groups...”</p>	<p>Stimulate interest</p> <p>Encouragement</p> <p>Attention</p> <p>Concentration</p> <p>Environmental role</p> <p>Creation conditions</p> <p>Problems</p> <p>Plan</p> <p>Groups</p>	<p>Encourage and support children to create</p>	<p>Guidance methods</p>
<p>“I have no professional training, but I read magazines or websites to get ideas and improve my teaching.”</p> <p>“I would like to get it (the manual). I want to get better for example to get art therapy and how it affects children.”</p> <p>“I did take a course on it in university, but more than that I was interested in doing it myself.”</p>	<p>Guidance Help</p> <p>Professional guidance</p> <p>Teaching</p> <p>Activity</p> <p>Learning Materials</p>	<p>Broaden educational knowledge</p>	<p>Study of visual arts education</p>

Table1: The process of how a research topic is created

This thesis aims to understand the perceptions and experiences of early childhood educators about arts education and identify current issues to develop a manual to support arts education. Referring to the table (Table 1.), we have analyzed five themes related to the thesis research based on interviews with seven educators: the importance of visual arts education, implementation of visual arts education, trip restrictions, guidance methods, and study of visual arts education. In the following analysis, all responses are considered, and specific conversations are shown. The conversations will be specially marked.

### 6.1 The importance of visual arts education

In the responses of all seven interviewees, we saw a positive answer to the importance of visual arts education in early childhood education. The reason arts education occupies such an important place in early childhood education is that the impact of the arts on children is very positive. The goal of developing arts education today is no longer to make children as skilled in the art as it is to build a bridge to the outside world through art, to increase children's self-expression and creativity.

*“We often hold related activities. It's more of a means of communication than saying that art is a skill. A good event gets everyone involved and enhances the children's sense of participation...”*

At the same time, visual arts stimulate children's senses and add to their artistic experience. Educators believe that art education is an important tool for developing creativity.

*“Visual arts education is important, and I think visual arts are great tools for nurturing and protecting children's creativity.”*

### 6.2 Visual art education implementation

While the implementation of visual arts education is essential, its implementation is a critical issue. As mentioned in VASU (2018), in ECEC, the child's past experiences, interests, and abilities are the starting point for learning. Educators should find an appropriate way to plan activities and organize them. The primary starting point for the educator before making plans is to develop the activities according to the child's wishes and to respect the child's ideas. The educator can guide the child in the activity appropriately but cannot force the child to participate, as this would be counterproductive.

*“We normally do the visual art activities once a week, sometimes it seems a little bit less, but sometimes it depends on children’s interests, we don’t force children to do visual art activities, but we tried to do it weekly.”*

When planning the content of activities, educators also need to consider the child's ability. Activities that are too easy or too difficult to set up can make them unattractive. Some educators say that they assign different tasks depending on the child's age before the activity begins.

*“It depends on the age of the child. If kids are very small, we do something easier. If they are older, then we do something more advance.”*

### 6.3 Trip restrictions

Covid-19 has created many restrictions on the delivery of visual arts education. Most of the interviewees said that before Covid-19 happened, they would take their children to visit museums, libraries, galleries, etc. This helped young children's artistic development, and during the visits, children accumulated exposure to beauty, developed the ability to understand it, and broadened their understanding of it. Today, however, only a minority of interviewees said that they still take their children out to organize visual arts education activities, but only rarely. Educators consider arranging such activities indoors, thus replacing trips.

*“Before corona, I was with small babies, and we went to different museums, libraries, Anna Anna Talo to see some baby things. Or atheneum, or winter garden. This year it has been complicated to carry out such outings because of the COVID, but we have tried to do them in class.”*

Another reason some of the interviewees said it was difficult to take the children out on visits was also the changed system. The new system has led to an increased need for staff and sometimes there are not enough staff in the kindergarten to support the educators in taking the children out with them, adding to the restrictions.

*“Before the law has been changed, one teacher can take their students to go outside by herself, but at present according to the requirements of ratio, when go outside should be always two adults, so sometimes it is difficult. Sometimes we want to take the kids out, but you know, we don't have enough staff.”*

What also affect educators travelling with children are safety issues and traffic problems. Of the two kindergartens we interviewed, one was close to the centre of Helsinki, and the other

was far from the centre. According to the interviews, the kindergarten near the centre of Helsinki was visited more frequently. The kindergartens far from the city centre were visited less frequently. However, the interviewees in both kindergartens said that they would consider transport. When transport is difficult or distant, these factors are considered.

*“...the transportation and distance away from the museum are the factor we considered about.”*

#### 6.4 Guidance methods

Fewer opportunities for outdoor visits mean an increase in indoor visual arts-based activities. Educators need specific guidance skills and methods to support and help children with their activities. The aim of guiding children in activities is to encourage them and support them to be creative. Educators have their own insights into directing art-related activities, but they also have some confusion.

The problems encountered in the process of directing were varied. One of the issues that many of the interviewees had unanimously mentioned was how to stimulate the children's interest. Sometimes encouraging children is an excellent way to do this, but not all encouragement will work.

*“But I would say the most challenge part is how to encourage the interests of children who are not wanting to do it at all to try. I always try to encourage them, but if they still don't want to do it, I don't force them.”*

Other interviewees also had difficulties in engaging the children's attention. Children sometimes became distracted in listening to instructions or carrying them out, and some children needed extra help in this situation. Children are different and there are differences in how well they can focus on the same thing.

*“One of the challenges is to get everyone to listen to me and to pay attention to what needs to be done.”*

The interviewees also made some suggestions for guidance. The environment in which children create is essential. When children are in an environment where materials are plentiful, they can create at any time. An abundance of art materials increases the ease with which children can create, and the chances of creativity happening are increased.

*“Teacher organizes and create learning environment for children that they can access any materials they need.”*

Respondents also pointed out that poor planning can also make for bad activities. When there are too many children within a class, the best advice is to divide them into small groups. Smaller groups can give each child enough attention and support during the activity.

*“If the plan is not arranged properly, instructional difficulties may occur, we usually divide the children into small groups...”*

#### 6.5 Study of visual arts education

Learning in arts education can be deep or shallow. Of the seven interviewees we spoke to, only one teacher had received professional training in the arts. Most of the interviewees said they had not experienced professional training but would experience art through other means, which was more of a personal preference.

*“I did take a course on it in university, but more than that I was interested in doing it myself.”*

In addition, most respondents indicated that they would like to have access to professional books or manuals from which they can obtain professional guidance. For example, guidance help, teaching help, learning materials, and the organization of activities and other content. They would like to learn from them and improve their teaching skills.

*“I would like to get it (the manual). I want to get better for example to get art therapy and how it affects children.”*

### 7 Creating a manual

Before making the manual, we reviewed many relevant materials and had enough theoretical knowledge to substantiate it. After getting the results of the interviews, we further defined the direction of the manual. The theme of the interview results ran through the entire manual. According to the interview results, we learned that most of the teachers had not received professional art training. Therefore, the leading target group for our manual is early childhood teachers who are in need of support regarding art education guidance skills. In the handbook, we gave a primary introduction to visual arts and the benefits of arts education for children. That explains why we need visual arts education in kindergarten. And we learned from the interview results that because of the Covid-19 impact, children had less trips and indoor art activities were increasing. Therefore, most of the content appears in our manual can be implemented indoors. During the interviews, we also received information about the educators' experiences in their past education and also heard their confusion about guiding arts education activities. For example, they had mentioned that they did not know how to

help children who were not confident and did not want to create. So, we have collected all these experiences and questions in a manual. This manual contains helpful content on conducting positive pedagogy, communicating with children, giving them feedback, stimulating their interest, enriching their experience, etc. The manual also contains some examples to facilitate implementation of art activities. Thus, educators can use them directly and increase the utilization of the manual. If educators would like to see more comprehensive knowledge about arts education, we have also prepared very professional arts activity resource at the end of the manual that educators can easily access.

## 8 Discussion and conclusion

By discussing the role of arts education in early childhood, investigating the characteristics of children's stages of artistic development in early childhood, and combining the results of interviews, we have concluded that adults need to support children's artistic expression and identified how we can support early childhood educators in the content of arts education. As art is a window into children's minds, art provides children with a different perspective. The material and procedure in the visual arts strength on making meaning, interaction, and play-based study possibilities (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2018; Churchill-Dower, 2020; Vecchi, 2010).

Therefore, rather than teaching children's certain skills or learning to draw something accurately, the preschool years really allow them to always discover and see beauty. As early childhood educators, we should inspire and encourage children to express their true ideas through creativity, sharpen their ability to recreate from their impressions, so that they learn to observe the world patiently and remain enthusiastic about what is around them. Moreover, educators need to constantly learn how to evaluate children's artistic processes and achievements more effectively and positively.

Thus, all things considered, the purpose of our functional document has been achieved. We distributed the workload equally, worked together well and ended up with a short manual for our work and life partners. According to the comments of the interviewees, our manual (Appendix 2) provided some useful information and was a practical reference for them. It addresses some of the common and basic challenges they encounter. However, in a broader sense, art education is about the appreciation of beauty (Feng 2015).

As beauty is a very subjective concept. the best education should be delivered in a transcendent and nuanced way (Feng 2015). When early childhood practitioners can appreciate beauty, they are able to influence the children around them, so further efforts can be made in the area of aesthetic education for educators and children. To develop children's creativity and aesthetic features can be helped through activities such as talking

about others creativity artwork and inspiring children to develop an understanding of such work (Senemoglu and Genc 2001). Aesthetic education is implemented as an aspect of the design of visual arts activities with the aim of improving children's aesthetic skills. The education of young children in the knowledge and skills of the arts also must be built on a level of aesthetic competence, otherwise arts education becomes a generalization because there is no 'aesthetic'.

## 9 Evaluation

Evaluation is a process of rigorous examination of procedures. It involves the collection and analysis of information about the program's activities, characteristics, and results. Its purpose is to make judgements about the program, improve its effectiveness, and/or inform program decisions. (Patton 1987.)

Effective evaluation will not only help us to understand the pros, cons, and outcomes of planning, conducting, and implementing an entire thesis. It will also enable us to correct, improve and refine it. In this way, the programme being evaluated will be more effective and will not only be a major achievement in our thesis work but will also contribute to the development of visual arts work in kindergartens to help more teachers plan and implement. The evaluation of our thesis includes the evaluation of others, i.e., our working life partners, as well as self-evaluation. Through self-evaluation, the three members who have completed the thesis will reflect on the process of writing the dissertation, communicate matters and raise issues to improve shortcomings. At the same time, we will invite the interviewed teachers to evaluate our results by setting up a questionnaire form including objective options and subjective opinions. As they are frontline practitioners of teaching and learning, they know very well what the challenges are they struggle with most in the Project Vision course, and they have the most say. Based on the results of the interviews with them and the manuals developed on existing problems, and then coming back to them for evaluation, this circular process also relatively enhances the value and applicability of the thesis research.

The thesis has succeeded in reaching a theoretical statement on the importance of visual arts, then, through interviews with frontline teachers to understand the problems and needs of arts education in practice, and the development of a manual to answer questions about the results of the interviews. Thus, the basic objectives of the thesis have been achieved, although there are still many points that could not be achieved due to time and space constraints.



### 9.1 Self-evaluation of this project

At the beginning of the project, since we were in different age groups of kindergarten, we originally wanted to design and conduct visual art activities in our own groups and record the results. However, due to the long implementation time of the project, after the teacher's suggestion and our group's discussion, we changed our original plan and developed a project manual, i.e., including relevant art activity materials. After completing the content of the manual, we also used a questionnaire to understand the shortcomings of our manual and to update it. We wanted this to be a practical manual that would be easy for teachers to refer to at any time through our data collection and specific methods of operation. However, since we were writing the manual for the first time, it was still confusing for us to construct the framework that would be most easily adopted by teachers. Therefore, through weekly video conferences and timely text messages, we communicated with each other as much as possible to complete each step of the idea update.

In the process of preparing the literature review. We invested a lot of time and effort to collect information and went through a large amount of literature, but it still made us encounter difficulties because the skills of literature search and analysis of the content were not yet mastered deeply enough. However, the process of searching allowed us to absorb knowledge like a sponge and learn about different educational schools and what our educational predecessors had dived into, like opening a window to us and illuminating our way forward. Since we all had jobs, we could only use our limited time to dive into the material, create mind maps, analyze the cause-and-effect relationships between theories, and constantly reflect on the search results to refine our papers.

In the process of writing the thesis, we learned a lot about the theoretical foundations of early childhood education, art education, and children's cognitive development. With these theoretical frameworks, we were able to analyze and understand our research findings more comprehensively and gain new knowledge that refreshed our once theoretical knowledge and further strengthened our orientation to our role as early childhood educators.

In creating the manual, it was like writing an instruction manual, hoping to give the reader more information while worrying that the content would be too cumbersome to understand in layman's terms. However, it is important to keep learning from mistakes to improve.

### 9.2 Working life partner Evaluation of the project

To ensure that our manuals are viable, we asked our working partners for their feedback. Our questionnaire contained three questions. Below are the answers to each of these four questions. The survey questionnaire will be included as Appendix 3.

1- What do you think of the manual?

*“Is a good summary of how Visual Arts can be more implemented in the everyday pedagogy, and how they can be developed within the early childhood education plan. I like that it's very well illustrated, with lots of examples, and a clean design with an intuitive.”*

*“Very good content!!A lot of presentational value feels more like a slideshow that is good for educating teachers than a manual. The font with filled letters is being used too excessively, especially in bullet points.”*

*“I like it. Very good and usable info in a "nutshell" for newbies.”*

2- Is it helpful for you to support children's visual art education?

*“It's helpful, especially thanks to the various examples and explanations included.”*

*“Very good presentation and would be perfect for a one-hour course into children's visual art education for educators.”*

3- Which part is the most helpful to you?

*“Both the feedback and the guiding techniques. I can think ways of putting in practice that knowledge with my own classroom. I also enjoyed reading about the enriching experiences; that shows how visual arts can be implemented as a transversal competence.”*

*“Answer would depend on what is the intended use case. Planning time is precious, so teachers want to have access to the resource as quickly as possible.”*

4- What could be improved or added?

*“I think the manual is quite complete and useful. Maybe in the future its authors can add their own experiences as teachers with their pupils, as a follow-up.”*

*“The fonts in bullet points should not have filled letters. This is very distracting for the reader(s).”*

*“To this part, I would add also bodily expression. Meaning it doesn't only strengthen the fingers, but also their whole body and therefore controlling the lines they draw the bigger the area they use for visual expression, the more exercise they get controlling their body.”*

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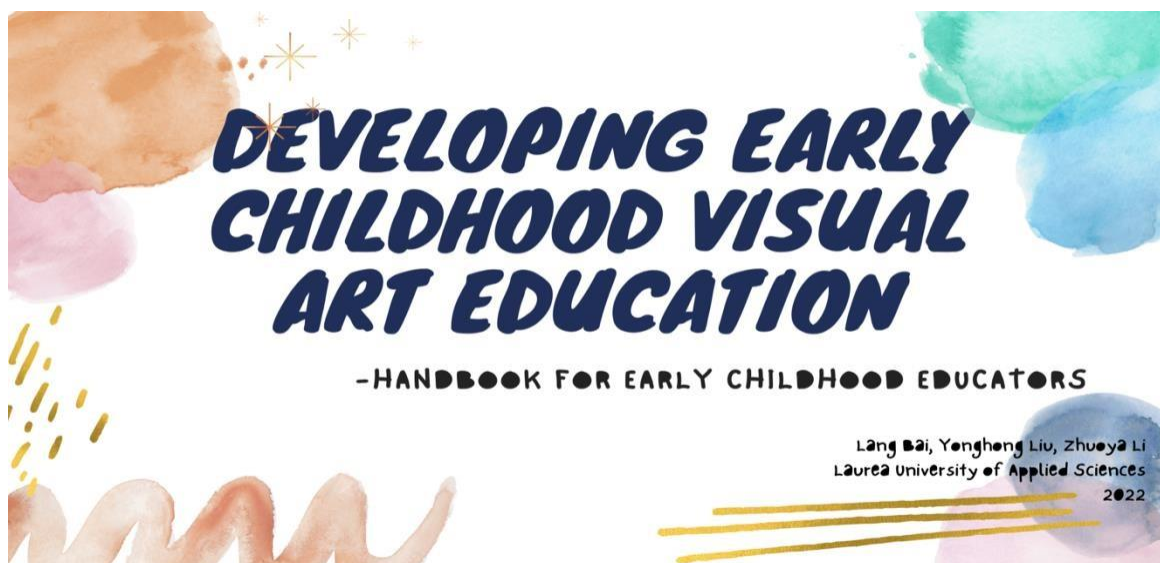
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## Appendix 1 Interview questions

1. How do you understand the role of visual arts in early childhood education? Do you think it is important?
2. How often do you implement visual art activities in a week?
3. How many times have you taken the children out for cultural services for example exhibitions, performances, or events this school year?
4. Based on your response in the last question, if children have **NOT** traveled outside for cultural services, then please identify one or more of the following barrios?
5. Have you done something to intrigue children interest into visual art?
6. Based on your response in the last question, if you have NOT done anything to interest the children, then please identify barrios?
7. When you are doing visual art activities with children, have you met any challenges in guiding the activities?
8. Based on your response in the last question, did you met any challenges in guiding activities, what seems to be the most challenging thing you have ever met?
9. Have your received any professional training in visual art?
10. Have you read any books about visual art education?
11. In the past year, did your kindergarten offer any of professional training in the arts?
12. Do you hope to receive any kind of professional training or handbooks about visual art guiding?





- 01** HOW'S ART EDUCATION BENEFICIAL TO CHILDREN
- 02** LOWENFELD'S STAGES OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT
- 03** ENVIRONMENT SETTING

- 04** POSITIVE PEDAGOGY
- 05** HOW'S TO COMMUNICATE WITH CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS
- 06** STIMULATE DIVERGENT THINKING
- 07** DOCUMENTATION
- 08** GUIDING TECHNIQUES-STORY SHARING

## WHAT IS VISUAL ART?



The visual arts are art forms such as painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, filmmaking, design, crafts, and architecture. It plays an invaluable role in our understanding of varied human experiences.

This manual is responsive to the answers of our interviewees. Our randomly selected interviewees are non-professional art pedagogy. One of them had received one year of professional arts training during her career, which is not enough for young children who have many arts education needs. Although the teachers were aware of the importance of visual arts, they were still confused about the exact way to guide them.

A basic handbook is therefore very practical for early childhood practitioners. At the same time, teachers generally report that the biggest challenge in supporting children's early art education is that they are faced with many children who do not know how to draw. In Manual, we have specific ways to guide them.

Thirdly, one of the teachers with an art background mentioned that a very important part of early art education is encouragement and praise. How to express encouragement more effectively and help children to build up the courage and confidence to try. In the manual, this is also expanded and refined.

## HOW IS ART EDUCATION BENEFICIAL TO CHILDREN

- 1. MOTOR SKILLS**
  1. Drawing, finger painting, and scribbling
  2. Strengthening the "muscles" of the hands and fingers
  3. Developing hand-eye coordination skills.
  4. Good hand-eye coordination is helpful in the writing process.
- 2. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**
  1. In relevance to the school achievements.
  2. Complex intelligence progress.
  3. Including different subjects.
  4. Reflection on the surrounding world.
  5. Experiment with the materials.

### 3. SELF-EXPRESSION

1. Medium of children's thoughts, emotions, and feelings
2. Establishing connection with the surrounding world.

### 4. CREATIVITY

1. Free selection of colors and materials
2. Artworks to present any object they imagine.





### 5. SELF-ESTEEM

1. Expanding communication skills, self-confidence, and self-assurance
2. Self-determination promotes a sense of achievement
3. Showcase their ideas and feelings to build their self-esteem
4. Positive feedback builds confidence.

### 6. SOCIAL SKILLS

1. Participation into cooperation
2. Enhancing the abilities to share thoughts and give feedback
3. Establishing connection with the surrounding world.

## LOWENFELD'S STAGES OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

			
<b>RANDOM SCRIBBLING- AROUND Y2</b>	<b>CONTROLLED SCRIBBLING AROUND Y2.5</b>	<b>NAMING OF SCRIBBLING Y3-Y4</b>	<b>PRE-SCHEMATIC STAGE Y4-Y7</b>
<p>a) Children have a fistful-grasp of the crayons. They use the shoulder to control the movement of the crayons across the paper.</p> <p>b) Their eyes are not necessarily on the paper while they are scribbling.</p>	<p>a) Scribble with repeated movements, with a certain level of hand-eye coordination and control ability, often with repeated horizontal lines.</p> <p>b) Have some control over the elbow joint</p>	<p>a) Love to name and give meaning to their scribbles, but the image is still difficult to recognize. The name is changeable</p> <p>b) Use different colors to distinguish different meanings.</p>	<p>a) Tadpole-human figure.</p> <p>b) No spatial order. Objects are scattered all over the place.</p> <p>c) The relationship between color and image in the picture is determined by children's preference.</p>

Lowenfeld, V. (1964). Creative and mental growth 4th

## ENVIRONMENT SETTING

A safe environment which encourages exploration and experimentation is the top priority to ensure children's positive artistic experiences.

Herberholz, B. J., & Hanson, L. 1985. Early childhood art. William C. Brown.

- Free, relax and safe surrounding.
- Prepare enough tools and materials for painting:
  - ✓ Scribble Wall
  - ✓ Waterproof cover-ups
  - ✓ Plastic tablecloth
  - ✓ Washable paint brushes
  - ✓ Safe and non-toxic painting materials













# POSITIVE PEDAGOGY

## EXAMPLES

"You had fun doing it!"

"Congratulations! You worked really hard for this."

"Be proud of yourself."

"These are very creative works."

"I can see that you've worked very hard putting them together."

"You've worked really hard on this every day and I like how You've drawn this picture using bright colors."

"You are good at trying different ways to create this work."

"I think the way you drew this line with the blue crayon is great."

Inappropriate praise can cause harm. effective productive evaluation can enhance and prolong the child's experience in art substantially

Eglinton, K. A. 2003. Art in the early years. Routledge.  
 Brummelman, E., Nelemans, S. A., Thomaes, S., & Orobio de Castro, B. 2017. "When parents' praise inflates, children's self-esteem deflates. Child development, 88(6), 1799-1809.



## KEEP LISTENING

Listen carefully to your child as they share and talk about their drawings, the process of talking about them helps to understand the true state of their cognitive, emotional and social development.

## TIMELY FEEDBACK

Children need to show patience and listen carefully and give feedback when they are bold enough to speak up and draw. If children feel understood, they will only receive positive feedback and will be more enthusiastic about expressing themselves.

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS

Through discussion, they can discover new possibilities in their artworks and develop the divergent thinking skills to add more unexpected contents to their work. Schaefer and Cole mentioned about 'teachable moments' is that under the circumstance when adults consider course target, providing an extra study chance. Educators then use this opportunity to engage in dialogue with young children, helping them to solve problems, gain new knowledge, or extend their experiences, etc.

Schaefer, C. and Cole, E. 1990 The Museum and Me: An Early Childhood Education Model. (Report No. PS020469). OH: The Toledo Museum of Art Early Childhood Program (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343721).

## THE GOOD WAY TO OPEN A CONVERSATION BOX.

- Ask open-ended questions:
- Let your children make up his or her own mind
- Let children name their works
- More affirmation
- Ask why and understand him/her

## FEEDBACK

Educators should offer feedback throughout the entire art experience.

Only give positive feedback, the educator has the responsibility to articulate feedback so that it will be interpreted as positive and encouraging.


Positive constructive feedback highlights the positive features of the work and comments on the process, objective, or skill being assessed.

When providing feedback, concentrate on vocabulary that highlights the art process.



- "That is the correct way to hold your paintbrush, now you can paint more beautiful pictures!"
- "It looks like the lines you are drawing are dancing, I think it is wonderful the way you can draw lines to the music we are listening to."
- "Tell me about your artwork."

## EXAMPLE



## STIMULATE DIVERGENT THINKING

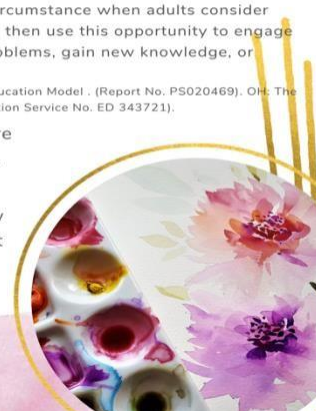
Through discussion, they can discover new possibilities in their artworks and develop the divergent thinking skills to add more unexpected contents to their work. Schaefer and Cole mentioned about 'teachable moments' is that under the circumstance when adults consider course target, providing an extra study chance. Educators then use this opportunity to engage in dialogue with young children, helping them to solve problems, gain new knowledge, or extend their experiences, etc.

Schaefer, C. and Cole, E. 1990 The Museum and Me: An Early Childhood Education Model . (Report No. PS020469). OH: The Toledo Museum of Art Early Childhood Program (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343721).

- Ask and wait until the children tell us what they are drawing. False assumption may hurt their feelings,
  - Inspire children to unlock their imagination from what they draw or make, and help them link what they draw to their feelings and experiences
  - Creating and expanding a story with the child based on their works.

### EXAMPLES

If the children claim they draw a car. Educators can ask where to go by that car, what to do, and whether the vehicle can only be driven on land, or in the sea, or in the sky.



## ENRICHING EXPERINCES

Aesthetic experiences assist and change children's perceptions of the world, increasing and enhancing awareness and experiences, instruct children in their subsequent encounters with works of art and arouse children's sense of beauty in daily experiences and items

### ART IN EXCURSIONS

- In nature, children learn about new things by observing them thoroughly and gaining new sensations by touching and listening to them, such as touching soft soil and rough tree trunks, listening to croaking frogs and crisp birdsong.
- visit a museum, planetarium, zoo, or take children to a car repair shop, food processing plant, etc.

### ART IN THE CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT

look at the made world, explore the colours and patterns, and compare it to the natural world. Try to find inspiration in everyday objects; seek the complex in the simple.

### ART IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- explore art elements, expressions, symbols in books.
- Use the rich colours of picture books to trigger the urge for artistic creation

Eglinton, K. A. 2003. Art in the early years. Routledge

## DOCUMENTATION

"Individual documents, such as photographs, drawings, or the personnel's observations make it possible to examine the children's development and learning together with the children."

From National Core Curriculum for Early childhood Education and Care 2018

**A. Using folders to collect children's works**

The educator's documentation of children's comments, actions, discoveries, and visual work gives staff and children the opportunity to see the process unfold

**Educators also assess and evaluate the following:**

- art materials;
- the physical learning environment;
- the social and emotional learning environment;
- the curriculum;
- the educators' teaching practices.

**B. Scanned the works into electronic format**

**C. Showing the child's drawing can make children feel encouraged**



Cited from: Pixabay



## GUIDING TECHNIQUES

LET'S SHARE  
STORIES-  
SENSORY  
STIMULATION



Lowenfeld shared one of his experiences of guiding the children through drawing teeth. First he prepared a box of hard candy in his pocket and shook it, asking the children to guess what were making the sound. Most of the children managed to get the answer. After that, Lowenfeld handed the candy to each child and nearly all the children chewed the candy loudly. At this point, Lowenfeld asked them to draw a mouth, there were teeth in that mouth

From Creative and Mental Health(1953)

## GUIDING TECHNIQUES

LET'S SHARE  
STORIES- WHEN  
CHILDREN SAY  
THEY CANNOT

The art pedagogy Lan asked the children to draw a picture. One of the little boys, with scissors in one hand and paper in the other, said with an anxious expression, "I can't cut an elephant."

The author patiently told him, "If you say you can, then you can." He suggested that he should first cut an 'elephant egg'.

But the child said, "An elephant egg? Elephants don't have eggs!"

The author then said, "Yes, they do. Even if the elephant is hiding in the egg." So the children cut out a large oval egg shape.

Then the author began to guide them, "Look, now the elephant is inside the egg, can you tell me where the elephant's head is? Where is the trunk? Where are the legs?"

The child points and gestures as he does so. The author then suggested that he should cut out the ones he had thought of.

The child happily started to cut out the elephant, keeping the whole egg shape and adding four lines to the bottom of the egg - the legs; and a long cut across the right side - the long trunk.

Many Children and Many Moon(2011)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

ERASMUS Manual: Art Activities for Children  
<https://peda.net/kuopio/p/muuruvesi/hankkeet/ovet-auki-maailmaan/kto/emp1:file/download/7bb2801efef730f704a0c049f3deaea6fe98475c/Erasmus%2B%20manual%20PDF%2014072018.pdf>



### Appendix 3 Evaluation Questionnaire

1. What do you think of the manual?
2. Is it helpful for you to support children's visual art education?
3. Which part is the most helpful to you?
4. What could be improved or added?