Creative Activities: A Means of Expression for Young Children

Helen Young

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a means of expression for young children

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Pictures show children engaged in various forms of creative activity at the Nursery School conducted by the Department of Child Development and Family Relations, College of Home Economics at South Dakota State University, Brookings.
Creative Activities

a means of expression for young children

By Helen Young

Department of Child Development and Family Relations
Division of Home Economics

Play is children's work. Through play children learn about the world about them. Children need plenty of space—both indoor and outdoor—to work and play. To learn to live satisfactorily with each other they need large blocks of time for outdoor and indoor play. They need much outdoor and indoor equipment and many materials. These are the tools for constructive and creative work and play.

But what is creative work and play? Creative play is any activity in which children can use their individuality and originality—in which they find self-expression. Such activities as singing, dancing, painting, and coloring are especially adapted to this free expression. Manipulating paint on paper or pounding clay gives the child a sense of satisfaction that may lead to artistic expression. Creativeness, however, does not necessarily come in planned sessions with particular materials. It may come at anytime, for instance when the child might be walking along and starts to "be" a train. Children gain relaxation and pleasure through creative activities. They can often clarify and enrich their feelings.

Fortunately, creative materials need not be expensive or hard to obtain. Often materials can be found in the cupboard.

What are the things to look for in creative materials for child's play? The following questions provide a helpful guide.

Is the material safe? Is it free from dangerous corners, splinters, and nail points?

Is it sturdy and durable?

Does the material challenge children's imagination and stimulate thinking?
Does it suggest the adult world and its familiar materials?
Does it stimulate physical and muscular activity? Does it require manipulation, experimentation, and construction.
Does the material satisfy curiosity and call for creative activity?
Does it encourage language and communication of ideas.

**ART MEDIA**

The art media offers an important avenue for fulfillment of creative expression. We are happier when we are creative. When expressing our feelings through art, we are contributing to personality growth.

Materials used in a creative art program are varied and easily obtained. They should be of such a nature that they can be controlled by children without difficulty. Non-toxic paints which are relatively inexpensive (to allow full and unrestricted usage), are packaged in sturdy containers which can be stacked.

The following may be considered as a minimum of drawing and painting materials necessary for an art program for children.

**Tempera Paint (Dry Power-Opalescent)**

Dry tempera paint should be mixed with water to a creamy consistency. At least eight colors should be used: red, yellow, blue, green, purple, orange, black, and brown. White should be included if possible.

Suggested variations when using tempera paint are:

a) A bit of evaporated milk added to the mixture gives a creamy consistency and a slight shine.

b) The addition of soap flakes or liquid soap permits its use on glass or metal.

c) The addition of 1 or 2 drops of oil of cloves or wintergreen prevents spoilage.

**Colored Chalk**

Younger children should work with large colored chalk (approximately 1/2″ to 1″ in diameter). Either extruded or pressed chalk is desirable. The colors should be clear and brilliant.

**Crayons**

An 8 color box containing large crayons should be used with younger children. Round wax molded crayons are more adaptable for a variety of uses. Colors are: red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple, black and brown. It is well to remove wrappers from crayons to permit utilization of sides. A crayon broken in half is easier to manipulate.

**Finger Paint**

There are many excellent commercially prepared finger paints. A very satisfactory finger paint may be made by using liquid starch to which tempera paint has been added. The powdered paint may be applied to the paper directly, after the paper has been covered with starch. Wheat paste mixed with powdered paint is another good finger-painting medium.

To make homemade finger paint follow these directions.

- 2½ cup laundry starch
- cold water
- 1 quart boiling water
- ¼ cup talcum powder
- ½ cup soap flakes or detergent
- food coloring
Mix laundry starch with a small amount of cold water until dissolved. Add to 1 quart of boiling water and cook until it bubbles. Cool and add soap and powder. Mix well. When it has cooled, pour the finger paint into small jars that have tight lids. Add poster paint coloring or food coloring to get the colors you want.

**Paper**

A variety of paper should be available to children. Younger children should have large 12" x 18" paper. A good variety of papers would include:

**Newsprint** for painting with tempera, crayon work, colored chalk, charcoal, pencil. Newspapers are also satisfactory. The print gives an interesting texture.

**Manila drawing paper** for tempera painting, chalk, charcoal, crayons, water colors.

**White drawing paper** (more expensive) for water colors and crayons.

**Construction Paper** for tempera work and paintings generally. Colored chalk both wet and dry. Draft, freezer, butcher, shelf paper in rolls—24" or 36" wide for painting murals, finger painting. Paper comes in standard inch sizes of 9 x 12, 12 x 18, 18 x 24, and 24 x 36.

**Brushes**

Brushes should be large. The fur- rules should be seamless and crimped for strength; the handles hardwood or plastic, lacquered and non-painted for safety. A variety of sizes

Cold or rainy days can be peaceful for the mother who provides fingerpaints, colors, chalk, and plenty of paper.
of bristle brushes should be used for easel (tempera) painting ranging from $\frac{3}{4}$" to 1". Water color brushes of oxhair are better in size 10 or larger.

All of these materials may be purchased from any reputable school supply house, stationary store, art supply house, or department store. Whenever possible the accent should be on quality. Insist that the materials be non-toxic.

Clay

Many materials challenge children to satisfy their basic drive to be creative. Working in the third dimension with modeling materials such as clay, dough, and plasticine provides an opportunity for worthwhile creative experiences for children. Self-confidence and creative ability develop with the use of clay. Also, the child may take satisfaction from pinching, squeezing, rolling, and manipulating clay. Playing with this medium helps relax tensions.

There are four types of modeling materials: clay, plasticine, play dough, and modeling dough. Methods of preparing each one are listed below.

Potters clay comes in powder or wet form. Water must be added to the dry form to obtain the right consistency. The wet clay is ready for use. It is important that the clay be the right consistency for the best modeling. It is easily kept soft by making it into little balls and pouring water into depressions made in the balls and then put into plastic bags to store.

Plasticine is a commercial substitute for clay, which comes in sticks of various colors. It is somewhat expensive but less messy to use. Things made from it never dry completely. Store plasticine in a rust-proof container in a warm place. When it becomes dry from lack of use, it can be softened through kneading and by working into it a small amount of vaseline.

Play dough is made by mixing 1 cup salt, 1 cup flour and about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. Knead to a non-sticky consistency. Add fruit coloring for the color. This can be kept in the refrigerator for months in a tightly covered container.

When using these materials it is best to protect the table with an oil cloth mat. Squeezing, patting, rolling, and pounding the material will help the child relieve himself of frustrations and tensions. Knives, rolling pins and other similar articles may be added to stimulate interest.

The child should be permitted to use the materials in his own way. He will probably not make anything in particular but he will only use it as a form of manipulation.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Blocks, as a creative medium, provide many opportunities for the child's play and one that will be used through many stages of development.

The best blocks are essentially of two types, floor blocks and hollow yard blocks.

Floor blocks can be cut by a local carpenter, at a lumber yard, or in
school by any manual training department then sanded and varnished. Much of the material needed can be collected from the natural surroundings or salvaged from lumber yards, supermarkets, and hardware stores. Parents are good “collectors”.

The diagram and table on the next page illustrate and list the amount which meets the minimum building needs of children three and four years of age. These can be supplemented by other blocks from time to time. Older children require a larger number as more elaborate play schemes are developed. Toys such as trucks, cars of various shapes and sizes, gas station equipment, and many others can be added to stimulate block play.

Hollow yard blocks may be purchased from educational companies or made with ¾” soft pine reinforced through the center with wood block and finished with orange shellac. Use of ¾” plywood on two sides gives a lighter weight block. Measurements follow the same basic unit as floor blocks. They are: 6” x 6” x 12”; 6” x 12” x 12”; and 6” x 12” x 24”.

Other materials listed below may be obtained inexpensively and stimulate block play outside. It is always necessary to check these articles to be sure they are free from splinters, sharp corners, and protruding nails.

Boards Bricks
Large and small packing boxes
Barrels Logs Saw Horses

MAKING COLLAGES OR “FEELING AND SEEING” PICTURES

The term collage comes from the French and means paste. A collage is a two-dimensional design made out of different materials fastened or pasted together. The materials out of which a child makes collages include an almost infinite variety of things, manufactured or found in

Preschoolers create a world of their own out of building blocks of various sizes and shapes.
Floor blocks can be cut by local carpenters or at lumber yards, or in a school manual training department, then sanded and varnished. This set is a minimum for building needs of children three and four years of age. These can be supplemented by other blocks from time to time. Older children need a larger number as more elaborate play schemes are developed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Block</th>
<th>No. of pieces Per Set</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half unit</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1¾ x 2¾ x 2¾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1¾ x 2½ x 5½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double unit</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1¾ x 2¾ x 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadruple unit</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1¾ x 2½ x 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillars</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ x 1¾ x 5½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large cylinder</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2¼ dia. x 5½”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small cylinder</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ dia. x 5½”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular curve</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ x 2¾ x 90 Deg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliptical curve</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ x 2¾ x 90 Deg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small triangle</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ x 2½ x 5½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large triangle</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1¾ x 2½ x 2¾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cube</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1¾ x 1¾ x 1¾</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nature. These may range from fabrics, paper, metal, and plastic to leaves, bark, and shells.

The collage experience helps develop a child's sense of touch. The opportunity to make selections and judgments is basic to his growth and taste development. The opportunity to make choices, therefore, should be wide to include variety in color, bright or neutral; in texture, soft, hard, smooth, rough; in pattern, geometric or natural forms, large or small motifs. Many things which often go into the wastebasket can be used in collage, such as cellophane from the cigarette packages, ribbon or gay wrappings from birthday or Christmas gifts. In addition, it is advisable to purchase something special now and then, like florescent, colored, or metallic paper; or perhaps some tinsel string. These will not only add variety to the
child’s collection, but will encourage his realization that adults are interested in his creative efforts and, therefore, in him.

Some children make collages by sticking materials together, one on another. Most children, however, need a firm piece of construction paper or cardboard on which to arrange and fasten the materials they have selected. For sticking things together, library paste which comes in a jar with a brush is preferred by young children; but mucilage in small bottles with dispenser tops can be used if it is more convenient.

Material needed.
- Construction paper (many colors)
- Cloth (remnants)
- Pipe cleaners—pieces string—yarn
- Magazine pictures
- Soda straws
- Sawdust—Flocking—Glitter
- Paste
- Scissors

(Starred items necessary. Others are suggestions and can be enlarged upon greatly.)

**WOOD AND TOOLS**

Children’s early wood work is crudely made, but it provides an excellent release of tension. Wood work provides hand and eye coordination and it stretches the span of attention.

Inferior tools are extremely dangerous. Children work more safely with well-made sharp tools. Dependable tools can be obtained from school supply houses and hardware firms.

**COOKING**

Cooking gives children opportunities for discussing, planning, and sharing with others; for teaching quantitative measurement; for developing the skills of reading specific directions; and for providing successful and enjoyable experiences.

Children would be interested in comparing the different consistencies of flour, sugar, salt, tapioca, cornstarch, and other baking and cooking ingredients. These could be put in muffin tins so that they could touch and see the differences readily.

For first cooking and baking experiences such things as custards, applesauce, cakes and cookies could be used. Although this is an era of “package mixes” it is important that children have the opportunity to
know the ingredients and proportions in making a cake. A simple recipe follows:

1 1/2 cups of sugar
1 cup shortening
2 eggs
Stir, then add
2 1/4 cups sifted cake flour to which 3 teaspoons baking powder and 1 teaspoon salt have been added.

Sift again then add flour mixture alternately with 1 cup milk. When this is all used, add 1 teaspoon vanilla, put in greased and floured pan and bake at 375 degrees F.

The stove and oven should be explained to the children and their questions about it answered.

Other easy recipes are:

**Applesauce**—Let each child peel an apple (vegetable peelers). Put the apples in a pot with just enough water to start them cooking. When tender, mash; add sugar (4 cups for 24 apples). Cook again for 10 minutes and serve when cool.

**Custard**—
1 egg (or 2 yolks)
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Heat oven to 350°, beat egg, sugar and salt together. Stir in milk and vanilla, pour into 3 custard cups and set in pan of hot water (1” deep). Bake 45-50 minutes until silver knife inserted 1” from edge comes out clean. Cool and serve.

**Sugar Cookies**—
2 cups flour
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup butter
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon almond extract
1 egg

Grease baking sheets, start oven 10 minutes before baking (400°). Sift flour measure, resift 3 times with baking powder and salt. Cream butter until shiny, add sugar in 2 portions, creaming well. Stir in flavorings, then beat in egg until fluffy. Add flour in 3 or 4 portions, mixing well after each. Shape into small balls and press with fork or glass, or roll out and cut into different shapes.

Foreign foods could also be introduced, but do it simply just so an understanding of what other people eat can be established.

**SCIENCE EXPERIENCES**

Science is a wide area and many materials can be used. A few of them will be discussed here. These experiences will be most meaningful if the children are permitted to feel, handle, smell, and otherwise get first hand knowledge under supervision.

A seasonal display table works very well because the children can examine the articles closely and by themselves if they want to. Such things as seeds of different sizes and shapes, bird nests, magnifying glasses, clocks, thermometers, leaves, fruit, gourds, pumpkins, and magnets are only a few of the articles that can be used effectively.

Bird feeding stations (squirrels eat here, too) and fishing ponds
with a magnet system used to "catch" the fish are fun for the children; jars with captured insects or model thermometers can be used also. These things can be improvised by the imaginative adult working with the children.

Real and toy musical instruments which demonstrate different sounds make an interesting area to explore. Small animals, birds, and goldfish, as well as chemicals such as vinegar, baking soda, salt, baking powder, sugar, cream of tartar, rubbing alcohol, iodine, ammonia, and hydrogen peroxide, offer opportunities for learning of the world about us through touch and smell as well as sight.

Various fibers such as cotton, nylon, silk, rayon, linen—as well as candles, soil samples, paints, scales, safety matches, and paraffin can be used. Simple buzz systems and dry cell batteries of lights can be set up and used effectively in experiences.

**LANGUAGE**

Encourage children to self-expression through language by giving

Ironing is another part of the week's work for these two young ladies.
them opportunities to hear language that expresses thoughts and feelings they can understand. If children understand and enjoy these stories, they will more readily tell their own stories, which grow from similar experiences. In satisfying experiences, such as dramatic play in home making, children have rich opportunities for producing stories. Using a picture often offers suggestions for creating a story.

Use of hand puppets can be a media to encourage children to express their feelings in words. A listening adult who records the story as the child tells it and later reads it back to the child forms a basis for more stories of the child's own. "That's my story!" becomes a satisfying phrase.

**MUSIC**

Young children are naturally rhythmical. This quality is fostered by such activities as: hitting a spoon on a tin can, running a stick along a fence, swinging, rocking, pounding, running, pedaling a tricycle, teetering and bouncing. A singing child likes songs in connection with these activities. As toys are put away, boots are put on, or hands are being washed, make up words to a simple tune as, "This is the way we wash our clothes," such as, "We put our toys away so we can go out doors." Things are completed in a short time and a much better relationship is created. Soon children will express their own feelings in song. Encourage their creative expression in singing by jotting down the songs and singing these back to them later.

Dancing, as well as singing, occurs when children are free to act spontaneously. Running in the wind, marching to the crunching sound of dry leaves underfoot, imitating movements of a swimmer, galloping like a horse, and so forth are dance form expressions in children.

Children enjoy experimenting with sound indoors, as piano, drums, and bells; and outdoors, as car motors, trucks, fire whistles, bird calls, and so forth.

Children can profit from these opportunities and will use them in creative ways.