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If Every Child Is An Artist…

Written *by* [Dawn Braa](http://www.hatchearlylearning.com/author/dbraa/) *on* November 7, 2012 · [0 Comments](http://www.hatchearlylearning.com/if-every-child-is-an-artist/#disqus_thread)

“[*Creativity is*](http://creatingminds.org/quotes/creativity_is.htm) *a characteristic given to all human beings at birth*.” Abraham Maslow.

Laurie Greeninger and I would like to thank Dr. McManis for the invitation to guest blog today. The above quote recognizes the innate creativity in each person; however, sometimes people doubt their own creativity. They harbor insecurities about their work and are oftentimes limited in thought by logistics and reality. It seems that young children recognize their creative ability initially, but as they age, self-doubt sometimes sets in. “*To* [*stimulate*](http://creatingminds.org/quotes/stimulation.htm) *creativity, one must develop the childlike inclination for* [*play*](http://creatingminds.org/quotes/play.htm) *and the childlike* [*desire*](http://creatingminds.org/quotes/desire.htm) *for recognition*.” Albert Einstein.

We’d like to address creativity through visual art. Art opportunities should be open-ended experiences, offered daily, so as to not stifle a child’s own creativity. Open-ended art is developmentally appropriate at all developmental levels and abilities. These opportunities build a child’s self-esteem, eagerness to learn, fine motor skills, and confidence!

Coloring books and dittos are not examples of open-ended art; nor are pre-cut teacher designs. If you draw a horse for a child, it’s *your* horse not *theirs*. It’s the way you see a horse and may have no meaning/connection for the child, especially if they have never seen a horse. If you draw it for the child, they may begin to doubt their own abilities or become dependent on the teacher. Teachers and parents often say, “But it’ll look better if I do this or add this.” Of course it would – an adult’s skills are much more refined! Who would it look better to? Whose art is it? Adults need to be careful not to put their own judgment on a child’s creative work.

Pablo Picasso’s famous quote, *“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up”,* should cause us to reflect on what role we play as teachers and parents in the creative potential of the children in our classrooms and in our homes.  How can we be sure that we offer the right environment, the right materials, and the right instruction?  The answer may be simpler than you realize.

*The first key to opening up a child’s creativity is TRUST!*  Or maybe we should really say that the key to keeping a child’s creativity open is by allowing children to trust and follow their instincts. Children seem to have an inner current of creativity as they play and explore the world around them with an almost amazing freedom. “Artists know that trusting their instincts is essential for creativity to flourish. Likewise, if we don’t offer this trust to our children, it’s far less likely they’ll learn to trust themselves enough to enjoy art or fulfill their creative potential” ([Lansbury, 2012](http://www.janetlansbury.com/2012/08/are-you-putting-the-kibosh-on-creativity/)).Our creativity as human beings is an essential part of our make up as human beings. But somehow in the growth and development to adulthood, children are pressured into following rules and blueprints instead of their own intuition and as a result, their creative passion is lost. Intuition is the fuel that maintains inspiration; it is a moving force of creativity, and leads to self-expression. Children become self-reliant, have a stronger self-esteem and develop self-confidence when they are encouraged to trust their intuition. They must discover that what they need to create and be creative is already inside them. Prepared models and traditional instruction can lead to more dependence on others and an uncertainty about who they are and what they feel. This leads us to the second key.

*The second key to promote creativity is CHOICE*!  The ideal creative scenario would be for the teacher to offer materials without suggesting ideas to the children.It is our role to provide children with rich experiences, good-quality materials, and skills that will help them be lifelong learners and lifelong thinkers. Such art experiences are not about: “Follow the directions, stick this on here and that on there, now color it in, and now doesn’t that look pretty?” Children should feel encouraged to be thinkers and theorists, and not merely learn to follow directions. Children’s ideas should structure art programs to empower the children as artists. Choice-based art education regards students as artists and offers them real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through the making of art. This educational style also supports multiple modes of learning and assessment for the diverse needs of students. Teaching for Artistic Behavior Inc. (TAB), [www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org](http://www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org/), is a grassroots organization developed by and for art teachers, and serves to promote and support choice-based art education in public and private education settings.

*The third key to creativity is the LEARNING ENVIRONMENT!* Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making *(Arts and Activities Magazine, November 2012, page 11).* Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice.  A CENTERS APPROACH reflects the learning environment, with different learning centers set up in the classroom. Centers offer students a focused learning experience. Most choice-based art programs offer separate media centers, such as painting, clay, printmaking, etc. These centers function as mini art studios, complete with instructional information, menus, resources, materials, and tools. Students move independently between centers, utilizing materials, tools, and resources as needed in their art making. Centers are arranged to provide students with independent learning opportunities. Many childcare centers already use a Centers Approach (block area, group area, manipulatives, library, technology, etc.). All schools should consider incorporating a Creation Station that is available each day with open-ended materials to stimulate children’s creativity and encourage individual design. Changing materials daily or weekly from painting, to clay, to printmaking, etc. will continue to intrigue and motivate children to create.

Allowing children to experiment in a learning environment that offers resources, materials, and tools encourages them to explore their own ideas and interests as well as promoting children to trust in their vast creative capacities. It’s a guaranteed recipe for success! Why not give it a try?

**More Resources**

Lansbury, Janet. “Are you putting the kibosh on creativity?” *Elevating Child Care*. Retrieved October 31, 2012 from <http://www.janetlansbury.com/2012/08/are-you-putting-the-kibosh-on-creativity/>.

[http://www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org](http://www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org/)

<http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=257>

<http://www.artsandactivities.com/Bkissues.html>

<http://www.rediscovercenter.org/pdf/promoting_creativity1.pdf>

**About Laurie Greeninger**

Laurie Greeninger is a K-12 art instructor and has worked in both rural and Twin Cities schools across Minnesota. She holds a M.A. degree in Arts Administration and a B.S. degree in Art Education. Laurie’s teaching style is one that encourages creativity and innovation while meeting curriculum goals and fostering student achievement. She uses instructional practices that stimulate critical thinking, combine interdisciplinary learning, and connect with the individual child. Laurie is a current member of the Board of Directors for the East Central Arts Council and a former board member of the Art Educators of Minnesota. She was awarded the Middle School Art Educator of the Year Award from the Art Educators of Minnesota and a Leadership Award from the Minnesota State Arts Board.