

Let's Talk about...NAC Standard: *Activities that encourage creative expression/representation are provided daily.* (Children move with music, assume roles in dramatic play, express their own ideas and feelings with art materials. Teachers do not make models for children to copy nor provide patterns to color within lines)

By Lois Gamble

We do children an injustice if we pass along only what we know and do not encourage their own creativity. How can original, independent thinking be encouraged in group care? One avenue to creativity is through art experiences.

Art is an activity to be enjoyed itself rather than a representation of anything. The value in creative art is the experience, rather than the finished product.

Adults set the stage for creative art experiences by providing a **space** where children can explore and move about with limited restrictions. This defined area needs vertical and horizontal surfaces, ample lighting and organized storage space that will enable the child's access to art materials.

**Open-ended materials** are far more valuable to the child than those that have preset solutions and/or a model to duplicate. In fact, this standard on creativity is the only NAC standard expressed with a negative—"Teachers do not make models for children to copy nor provide patterns to color within lines". Creative art requires materials that allow discovery and experimentation. A creative art center should contain a variety of age-appropriate materials available for a child's choosing

Furnishings and clothing can be **protected** with newspapers, plastic cloths, and aprons so that the child will be free to concentrate on the activity without undue emphasize on 'being careful.'

**Clean up** is a part of art experiences. Involving the child in these procedures fosters responsibility for actions.

Adults can further facilitate creative art experiences by:

- Helping children identify their feelings about their work. The way the child feels is more important than the appraisal of others. A child who grows dependent upon the judgment of another can easily be discouraged by the insensitive remarks of a peer or older sibling.
- Listening attentively to children's interpretation of their work. This may provide insight about a child's understanding of the world.
- Allowing time for children to experiment with their idea until they are finished. (Use a sign-up list for children who are waiting their turn.)
- Providing evidence that art work is valued. Label each piece with the child's name written in manuscript. (Permit child to do this when he/she has the capability.) See that each piece is dried and protected from abuse. Display art work at the child's eye level so that it can be viewed and enjoyed.
- Serving as an interpreter of children's art work to parents. Teachers can help parents understand the developmental stages and positive qualities in their child's art through conversation, written notes, and parent meetings.

The teacher's role is to set the stage for a child's imagination to take flight and leave him/her free to control the route and destination.