

Promoting and Supporting Creative Ability

Umatilla Morrow Co. Head Start, Inc has been identified as a leader and strong partner in early childhood education which is developmentally appropriate in nature, promotes “best practice,” and provides quality care. With the introduction of the Child Outcomes Framework and educational measures for preschoolers, the importance of maintaining high standards is a focus of concern. The onset of such standards supporting the development of early skills may be mistaken as an effort to introduce methods of teaching used in the past for some preschools and older children in primary grades. As a result, this statement has been developed to support all children served by Umatilla Morrow Co, Head Start, Inc in the acquisition of skills and abilities which are age appropriate, developmentally sensitive, and respectful of individual creativity. “Art has the role in education of helping children become more themselves instead of more like everyone else. Each child's inner existence calls for expression and takes pleasure in such expression” (Clemmens, Sydney Gurewitz Art in the Classroom: Making Every Day Special. *Young Children* (January, 1990).

Desired Effects

The Curriculum Committee of Umatilla Morrow Co. Head Start, Inc has developed this statement to ensure the following:

- Development of skills and abilities in the area of creativity for young children utilizing a variety of mediums and experiences
- Planning of open-ended activities in order to stimulate individual creativity and problem-solving skills
- Stimulation of process-oriented education
- Promotion of the value of individualized child creativity
- Acceptance of each child’s individual abilities and perceptions
- Creation of a fun, adventurous learning environment for all children
- Recognition and use of a variety of environments in which creative learning occurs
- Planning for creative educational experiences that address the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework in all developmental domains

What Teachers Can Do

Given what is known about young children's learning and about their amazing competence to express their visions of themselves and their world, how can the classroom be modified to best support their emerging creativity?

Time. Creativity does not follow the clock. Children need extended, unhurried time to explore and do their best work. They should not be artificially rotated, that is, asked to move to a different learning center or activity when they are still productively engaged and motivated by a piece of creative work.

Space. Children need a place to leave unfinished work to continue the next day, and a space that inspires them to do their best work. A barren, drab environment is not conducive to creative work. Rather, children's work is fostered by a space that has natural light, harmonious colors, comfortable and child-sized areas, examples of their own and others' work and inviting materials.

Materials. Without spending great amounts of money, teachers can organize wonderful collections of resource materials that might be bought, found, or recycled. These materials can include paper goods of all kinds, writing and drawing tools, materials for constructions and collages (such as buttons, stones, shells, beads, and seeds) and sculpting materials (such as play dough, goop, and clay.) These materials are used most productively and imaginatively by children when they have helped select, organize, sort, and arrange the collections.

** Small materials that can be lodged in a child's airway and cause choking or put in their nose and ears are not appropriate for EHS classrooms.*

Climate. The classroom atmosphere should reflect the adults' encouragement and acceptance of mistakes, risk-taking, innovation, and uniqueness, along with a certain amount of mess, noise, and freedom. This is not a matter of chaos, or of tight control, but instead something in between. In order to create such a climate, teachers must give themselves permission to try artistic activities themselves (in adult settings, not with the children) even when they have not been fortunate to have had formal art training or to feel they are naturally "good at art."

Occasions. Children's best and most exciting work involves a stimulating encounter between themselves and their inner or outer world. Teachers provide the occasions for these adventures. Children find it hard to be creative without any concrete inspiration. Instead, they prefer to draw on the direct evidence of their senses or memories. These memories can become more vivid and accessible through the teacher's provocations and preparations. For example, teachers can encourage children to represent their knowledge and ideas before and after they have taken a field trip or observed and discussed an interesting plant or animal brought into class. Teachers can put up a mirror or photos of the children in the art area so they can study their faces as they draw their self-portrait. Teachers can offer children the opportunity to check what they have drawn against an original model and then let them revise and improve upon their first representation.

Adapted from: Edwards, Carolyn Pope, and Kay Wright Springate (1995). *The Lion Comes Out of the Stone: Helping Young Children Achieve Their Creative Potential. Dimensions of Early Childhood* 23(4, Fall): 24-29.

Expectation for planning and curriculum in UMCHS classroom

- Activities designed for Head Start and Early Head Start children should be open-ended and explorative in nature.

- staff working with children need to provide opportunities where children can learn at their own pace and explore their own abilities
- The atmosphere must be accepting and child-centered
- Though products result in many art-like activities, process is the most important part of learning
- Because of the need for open-ended creativity and problem-solving, “ditto” pages and coloring books are not to be included as educational materials