

VI. The Arts

Background and Criteria

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The Arts domain emphasizes children’s engagement with the arts (dance, dramatics, music, and visual arts), both actively and receptively. The components address two ideas: how children use the arts to express, represent, and integrate their experiences; and how children develop an understanding and appreciation for the arts. The domain focuses on how opportunities to use a variety of materials (including technology), guidance in the use of those materials, and communication with adults and peers about process and product enable children to demonstrate what they know, expand their thinking, and make connections among the arts, culture, history, and other domains.

Note: Preschool-3 performance indicators are noted unless the indicator starts at a higher grade. In those circumstances, the performance indicator is written starting at the lowest grade with the grade level noted in parentheses.

A. Expression and Representation

1. Participates in group music experiences.
2. Participates in creative movement, dance, and drama.
3. Uses a variety of art materials for tactile experience and exploration.

Research suggests that art experiences provide young children (preschoolers and kindergartners) with a primary means of communicating their understandings of themselves and their world (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), and as such, they should be given plenty of opportunity to explore, with a pedagogical balance between structure and experimentation. While they begin to identify and apply certain elements and techniques of art, their main focus is exploration and representation of thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). Once children reach the primary grades (first through third grade), their expanding cognitive and language skills allow them to better identify the elements and expressive qualities of the arts, and apply these skills to create and perform. In the primary grades, children should be provided with opportunities to expand and revise their representations (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Technology tools such as tablets and computers should not replace crayons, paper, and other traditional art materials in the early years, however, the experience of drawing on a touch screen or playing on a “piano keyboard” on a tablet can add to children’s representational experiences (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2012). Additionally, technology allows children to experiment with multiple digital/electronic media (e.g., photographs, videos, and music) and provides editing capabilities to experiment with different sound or lighting effects. Technology can also enable children to further explore the arts by providing a new dimension to their creative problem-solving abilities. Buckleitner (2013) suggests a guided discovery approach works best with children and technology rather than specifically telling them how to use a digital device; for example, ask the child, “What happens if you click here?” rather than demonstrate the feature.

Sensorimotor explorations are the key to learning in early childhood (Burton, 1999; Piaget, 1952), and once in school, children move from purely sensorimotor explorations to creating dances (Burton, 1999; Louis, 2000; Spitz, 2006), music (Mang, 2005; Pond, 1981; Whiteman, 2009), and visual art (Olson, 2003; Thompson, 2003) that express their feelings, thoughts, and preferences. Within each of these art components, there is a set of principles that characterize the process of growth: development proceeds

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from the head down, from the center outward, from simple (concrete) to the more complex, and from general to specific. A child's art representations and participation and responsiveness in the arts depends upon maturation, is a continuous process, and the rates of growth are idiosyncratic (Ruffin, 2009).

Music

From a very young age, children respond to music through movement (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2002; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1980). Most young children also have a positive attitude towards music and group singing (Siebenaler, 1999, 2008; Welch, Himonides, Papageorgi, Saunders, Rinta, Steward, & Hill, 2009), and they enjoy dancing to music, playing by ear, and inventing ways to represent familiar and original songs. Studies show a developmental progression in young children for singing, with 3-year-olds able to use tune segments and musical conventions, 4-year-olds showing range and more singing independence, and 5-year-olds gaining pitch accuracy (Kreutzer, 2001). Children also sing for various reasons including song play, communication, role playing, and invitations or cues to other children to play. If 3- and 4-year-olds have had sufficient background experiences with music, they can listen attentively, picking out sounds of specific instruments from a recording if they have been introduced to the instrument. They enjoy making their own sounds as they listen to music, applying concepts of loud, soft, happy, sad, light, heavy, fast, or slow. Five-year-olds advance from making gross discriminations in sounds to making fine discriminations. They are able to listen to a story song, piano selection, or recording of an orchestra and discuss the performance and their listening experience (The National Association for Music Education [MENC], 2012). Children at ages 4 and 5 begin to understand the basic principles of tone, tempo, genre, and pitch (e.g., can describe which songs are fast and slow or high and low). Once in kindergarten and first grade, they can perform vocal and instrumental music of age-appropriate songs from memory and create music from own imagination. (PBS, n.d.).

As children mature into the primary grades, their vocal accuracy usually improves (Davies & Roberts, 1975; Geringer, 1983; Gould, 1969; Green, 1990, 1994; Moore, Brotons, Fyk, & Castillo, 1997; Yarbrough, Green, Benson, & Bowers, 1991), as well as their appreciation of tonality and harmony in accompaniments to songs (Costa-Giomi, 2003). They can also better remember the words and melodies to a variety of songs, sing in a more expressive manner, identify a larger variety of simple music forms (e.g., AB form: when a song has two distinct melodies that are played in sequence), and follow cues from a conductor (PBS, n.d.).

Visual Arts

For preschoolers and kindergartners in the visual arts, the focus should not be on the finished product, but on the interactions and creative manipulation of materials. Children this age have short attention spans, cannot sit still for long periods of time, and learn best through hands-on exploration and manipulation of materials from the world around them (Wood, 2007; Wexler, 2004). They do not yet have the capacity for analysis, nor can they describe their plans or intentions well; however, they can look over what they have done and discuss it with the help of a teacher (Smith, 1983). As children develop more visual-motor control in preschool, they begin to create more deliberate series of experiments as one discovery in the material leads to the next. They often begin with a shape or mark discovered earlier and take it as a theme for the whole picture. They learn from modeling and need chances to practice new behavior, and they are generally more interested in process than product. While their fine motor skills improve in this stage, they are still more interested in gross motor skills, and precise movements or fine motor detail are not in the range of children's interests or abilities. Art making at this stage is about experimentation with materials and the kinesthetic experience of manipulating them much more than it is about trying to represent a particular object or idea (Louis, 2005; Kindler & Darras, 1994). When children begin attempting to represent people or objects, they draw from their own personal experience (Olson, 2003), but gradually their images start to become increasingly similar to other students' drawings, reflecting a growing desire to communicate socially shared meaning (Louis, 2005). Further, art making at this stage is a social

activity (Pearson, 2001). Students often “think out loud” as they work (Thompson, 1995) and are eager to retell the story of a drawing to anyone who would like to hear.

Once children get into second and third grade, art making becomes less of a tool of communication, and children become more interested in achieving realism in their work and in mastering art techniques. They may draw the same figure or object several times, aiming to perfect their idea rather than experiment with the subject matter. They become less likely to take risks and become more concerned with other’s criticism of their work. Children in second and third grade have increasingly refined motor coordination, and are more able to engage in delicate work with a wider range of tools, or revisit earlier processes with greater sophistication (Beal, 2001). They are better able to identify art elements (e.g., color, texture, form) and art principles (e.g., emphasis, pattern, rhythm), and describe how different media (e.g., oil, watercolor, stone), techniques, and processes can be used to communicate their ideas, experiences, and stories, and evoke different responses in the viewer. They can also explain how different compositional, expressive features (e.g., colors or subjects evoking joy, sadness, or anger), and organizational principles (e.g., repetition, balance, emphasis) also cause different responses (PBS, n.d.).

Dance

Preschoolers’ fine motor skills are still immature and developing, and as a result, the focus of dance activities should be on high energy, repetitive movements that create opportunities for expression of feelings and social development and interactions (Gilbert, 2006). The body skills most urgent at this age pertain to balance, strength, range of motion, and coordination. Movement skills that are attainable at this developmental level are use of breath, nonlocomotor (axial) movements, and locomotor (movements that move through space), as well as patterns combining these skills (National Dance Education Organization [NDEO], 2005). As children create their movements, they cognitively learn to pattern and are increasingly able to represent their ideas and feelings and create meaning through movement (Burnham, 1994). Further, by engaging in discussion with peers, children are able to share their intent, building confidence and social skills (Stinson, 2007). This creation of meaning through movement is at the center of the aesthetic development process, and assists in the emotional development of self-concept and positive self-image (Louis, 2002; Burton, 1999). These creations directly tie into the developmental social needs of preschoolers to learn to be independent individuals, which leads to the ability to then build friendships with others who are similar or dissimilar from themselves (DeBord, 2004).

Three-year-olds are just exploring what they can do with their own bodies (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006). Developing body awareness and image, 3-year-olds’ movement explorations are spontaneous and generally uncoordinated. Four-year-olds can manage to keep a beat with clapping or rhythm sticks but still have difficulty with simple motor-rhythmic tasks at a fast tempo, or with simultaneous tasks, such as moving and singing. Five-year-olds have learned to move to music with more smoothness, refinement, and rhythm. They have a greater understanding of height, weight, distance, and depth and can skip, run, and catch a ball or even something as delicate as a soap bubble without breaking it. Expressively, 5-year-olds are able to use movement in symbolic ways. They can express an idea, a feeling, or an emotion through a movement. They can create a dance, a skit, or a play to symbolize their feelings and experiences. Together the imagination and thinking involved in moving creatively, along with control of motor skills, facilitate symbolic expression (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006).

Moving out of sensorimotor explorations, into representational artwork in aesthetic development (Burton, 1999; Louis, 2000; Spitz, 2006), children in the primary grades are becoming skilled in the mastery of gross motor movements and a growing repertoire of fine motor articulations. Their experiments in increasingly complex patterns of both gross and fine motor movements help them create their own dances (Cullen, 2003). This period of development and maturation brings a steady rate of physical growth that brings youth-to-adult coordination levels (DeBord, 2004). For example, they can respond to the mood of a piece of music with rhythm, and can respond to changes in the speed of music (tempo). They can also

perform and differentiate among basic locomotor (e.g., hopping, walking, sliding) and nonlocomotor (e.g., bending, twisting, swinging) movements, and show body awareness when performing movement skills with improved concentration and focus (PBS, n.d.). Cognitive development in the upper brain at this time allows children to think about their behavior, trace back events, and see consequences for their actions, which provides linkages in both social and emotional growth in this understanding of cause and effect (Finkelstein et al., 2005; Gilbert, 2006). This self-awareness and self-control is paramount at this age for learning the discipline necessary in dance (Gilbert, 2006; Elkind, 1976).

Theatre

Theatre activities also foster young children's exploration and representation of themselves and the world. Children are invested in exploring ideas about themselves and the world in creative drama environments, and that "creative drama provides a unique way to put their imagination into action" (The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, College Board, January, 2012). They also utilize beginning critical-thinking skills to make observations about others in relation to self (Innes, Moss, & Smigiel, 2001; Saldaña, 2005). Additionally, the representational activities associated with drama and theatre for young children ultimately allow them a space in which play becomes a conduit to their development. Children surveyed about their own experience with representational play connected to theatre learning were able to articulate a developing knowledge of the world around them (Innes et al., 2001, p. 218).

It is well documented that children in the primary grades are beginning to embrace greater complexity, are beginning to practice self-regulation, and are invested in exploring their own symbolic or representational capacities (Bodrova, & Leong, 2005; Epstein, 2007), all contributing to a greater ability to act out real-life and imaginative situations. They can identify the beginning, middle, and end of a dramatization, name characters and settings, and identify the emotions of the characters (PBS, n.d.). Early childhood development is also influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts as learning occurs in family, school, and community settings. Children are also influenced by belief systems and patterns of behavior that are explicitly or implicitly presented by the various sociocultural entities that they encounter (Bowman & Stott, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Gonzales-Mena, 2008).

B. Understanding and Appreciation

1. Responds to artistic creations or events.

2. Begins to recognize cultural and historical connections with the arts (First Grade).

Creating their own artwork is one way in which children create meaning in their lives, but they can also discover meaning in the art created by others and in nature, and that discovery is the core of art appreciation. While engaging children in creating art, teachers and parents can also connect them to the world of art beyond their own actions. Helping them feel secure about expressing their opinions and feelings about art, helping them collect reproductions of fine art, and going to museums, theatre and dance companies, and art galleries all increase a child's understanding and appreciation for the arts. Appreciation of art for its own sake is both possible and valuable for young children. Too often, adults limit art experiences to the making of art. By helping children grow from art makers to art appreciators, their understanding of the world will deepen and their lives will be enriched in the process (Epstein, 2001). Preschoolers and kindergartners can describe what is pleasing about others' artwork and how the art makes him or her feel (e.g., finds pleasure in the bright colors and bold lines of Andy Warhol's artwork viewed on a trip to the museum). By 5 and 6, they can describe and imitate the style of their favorite artists (e.g., uses Cezanne's fruit bowls as a model for a drawing) (PBS, n.d.).

Once in the primary grades, students' have an ever-expanding understanding of themselves in relation to the world more broadly, are able to consider more abstract concepts, and are able to consider the world from another's perspective (Wood, 2007). This leads to an ability to relate the arts to culture and other content areas as well as more critically evaluate and analyze works of art. For example, according to a

report prepared by the College Board for the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (January, 2012), , art history, aesthetics and criticism should be integrated into second and third grade art classes with real world and cross-disciplinary connections. Additionally, many state standards suggest that elementary-aged children should be able to: 1) critique, analyze and reflect on works of art; 2) explain how different compositional, expressive features (colors or subjects evoking joy or sadness) and organizational principles (repetition, balance, contrast) cause different responses, and 3) demonstrate an understanding of dance, music, and theatre from various cultures and historical periods. (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009; PBS, n.d.). Finally, research has found that children who took art lessons and art appreciation classes, and who were taken to exhibitions or performances at young ages tended to continue their art appreciation, consumption, and participation into adulthood (Walker and Scott-Melnyk, 2002).

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