

Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

Top Tips to maximise the Creative Area

The purpose of this guidance is to support early years practitioners to develop the potential of the creative area to increase the creative, imaginative and communication and language opportunities available to support children's development.

The Creative Area

This is an area of the continuous provision that is set up with resources that children can use to develop their creativity. The creative area is perfect for helping develop children's fine motor skills and allowing them the freedom to create their own original designs, experiment with colour, shape, size and materials.

The purpose of the creative area is to explore and combine materials, tools and techniques. It is a multi-sensorial space that invites interactions by engaging the mind, hands, imagination and the senses. It is a part of the environment that should offer high quality tools and techniques that translate into numerous possibilities and experiences.

*"Creativity is intelligence having fun!"
Albert Einstein*

Tip 1: Organisation

Have a defined creative area in your environment, where arts and crafts resources are readily available at all times. It is important to allow easy access to this area to enable children to freely experiment with resources and materials independently to see



through their visions. Include a range of open-ended materials:

A range of brushes, sponges, paint easels, printing items, and paints.

Well-sorted modelling resources; boxes, plastic bottles, corks, bottle tops. Sticky tape, masking tape, glue, string, wool, glue sticks, scissors, pens, pencils, crayons, pompoms, tissue paper, card, ribbon, fabric off-cuts, matchsticks, clay, feathers, lollipop sticks, sequins, and buttons.

Tip 2: The Environment

Does the creative area need to involve lots of colourful displays or could hessian backgrounds be used? Does there need to be things hanging from the ceiling potentially causing distractions? Are resources displayed in a purposeful way, where children can see and self-select items, instead of all resources jumbled together and messy?

Think about how resources are displayed in the area; could you display the resources in a more thought-provoking way such as by colour? Can all the red crayons be placed in a pot, next to the red paint and red sticking materials etc?

Tip 3: Provocations

Set up your creative area so it includes provocation. This is something such as a photo or real objects such as flowers, that will provoke thoughts, ideas and learning. Provocations are adult-planned but child-led scenarios that seek to engage, inspire, or challenge children. Rather than asking children to imitate the look and style of an artist's work - a more effective strategy is to place the children's learning processes side by side with the creative practice of an artist. This happens when the children are introduced to the artist's thought process, motivation and material techniques. The children are then given the freedom to follow the paths of their own work.



Tip 6: Supporting Communication and Language

Consider how you are creating a communication friendly environment within the area. The creative area can lead to some brilliant discussions as children talk about their creations. Sometimes this can be hindered when the creative area becomes too overwhelming. Be an active listener and observer, ready to respond to children's ideas and being happy to follow their directions. Use dialogue to engage with children's learning processes and encourage them to reason and work things out. Use open-ended questioning techniques that further challenge and stretch children's expectations of themselves and encourage them to solve problems.

Tip 4: Independence

Make sure there are lots of opportunities for children's independent explorations and expression of self. Sometimes the creative area can be a space that practitioners take over with too many adult led activities. This can lead to the focus being on the end product and not the processes children will experience. Ensure the area allows children to independently select the resources they need to see through their visions, without them having to ask an adult for a particular resource.

Tip 7: Providing Challenge

Introducing new and exciting resources, materials and equipment is important in extending children's creative development. Look for opportunities for children to use 'real' equipment and materials.

Introduce new techniques such as printing or marbling and then make them readily available for the children to use when they are ready and when they have time to experiment and to find out what can be achieved.

Tip 5: Cultural Identity

Add items to the creative area that reflect children's cultural identity. Use paint colours that reflect the skin tones of children in the provision. Provide fabric offcuts from different cultures to reflect the local community and diversity within the setting. Include the work of artists that represent different races/cultures and disabilities. Children can learn to appreciate cultural diversity in styles of art, craft, music and dance.



Think about the opportunity children have to transform everyday materials. Are they provided with time to explore and discover? Are they encouraged to consider the shapes, patterns, textures, symmetry, balance, and beauty of the resources available?

What tools are provided for the children to use and what techniques are children taught or given opportunity to learn and develop?

Some techniques to consider introducing to children include:

- folding, wrapping, covering, sawing, breaking, coiling, piling, connecting, ripping, squashing, twisting, sewing, combining, curling, piercing and collaborating.



- Imagine new possibilities...The way in which children invent with materials are often unexpected and surprising, it is important that adults who work with the children adopt an attitude of freedom and open-ended possibility toward the children's work.
- Think about how to entice, rather than direct children to take part in creative activities.
- Allow children time to explore art materials and their properties, talk to them about what they are discovering as they work.
- Look at the area with a critical eye, pretend to be visitors, here for the first time, to see new possibilities and find creative solutions.

Tip 8: Role of the Adult

Encourage children to be confident in their own ideas and opinions, model a creative, playful approach that shows children they can do the same. Be willing to find things out alongside the children, rather than taking on the role of 'expert.' Support children to be independent and make their own choices.

Most of all, enjoy watching the children get creative, lost in the world of their imaginations.

"Creativity is the ability to look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary"
Dewitt Jones

Reflect on:

- What do the children know already and what skills do they have?
- Observe, notice and record what is happening and attempt to make meaning from unfolding and evolving ideas.
- Where are the children in the creative area? What materials are they using?
- How do they approach the materials and what do they do with them?
- What is it about the experience that captivates the children's imagination / fascination?
- Whose thinking is represented here? How much scope is there for children to find their own ways to represent and develop their own ideas?
- What works well, what are the difficulties?
- List materials that have worked well or materials you would like to try.



Further Information

[Waltham Forest The Hub Teaching and Learning](#)

[Help for early years providers : Expressive arts and design \(education.gov.uk\)](#)

[Early Years Careers How to Improve Your Creative Area](#)

[Developing Creative Learning Environments for Early Years - video](#)