**Stages of Artistic Development**

The following is a brief overview of the developmental stages of children’s art. The ages provided are general guidelines: children will enter and leave each stage at their own pace. They will go through these stages in this order, but the pace will vary.

**Scribbling/Mark-making stage** (approximately 1 to 4 years of age)

* children are amazed at their ability to make marks
* they realize they can interact with, and affect, their environment
* much time is spent practicing motor skills
* focus on looping, arcing, vertical and horizontal lines
* children draw circles first, then squares and other geometric shapes
* children begin trying to recreate their world
* they may want to point to, and name, parts of their drawings

**Pre-schematic/Early Symbol stage** (approximately 4 to 6 years of age)

* first attempts are made to represent people or objects
* objects are recognizable to adults
* circles and ovals are dominant
* children show a fascination with a wide variety of colours
* objects often floating in space
* obvious connections between different parts of the drawing
* signs of approval from teachers and peers is important
* children can become easily fatigued and discouraged
* children are active, hands-on, eager to learn, self-centred
* highly imaginative
* tend to focus on one idea at a time
* children search for ways to represent their ideas

**Schematic/Symbol stage** (approximately 6 to 9 years of age)

* increased use of symbols in both number and frequency
* less self-centred
* may include different horizons to establish depth of space
* some improved hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills
* increased attention span
* eager to learn and create
* begin to develop a sense of humour
* special characteristics are represented for each person or object

**Realistic/Emerging Expertise stage** (approximately 9 to 12 years of age)

* art is greatly affected by peer influence
* increased amount of detail and use of symbols
* expanded individual differences
* beginning to develop a set of values
* want to do things “right”, realistically

**Pseudo-naturalistic/Artistic Challenges stage** (approximately 12 to 14 years of age)

* children are highly-critical of the art they make
* period of heightened self-consciousness
* often feel a need to conform to peers; may stifle their creativity
* more adult-like mode of expression
* often stay in this stage into adulthood due to lack of further art education

**Artistic Thinking stage** (approximately 14 to 17 years of age)

* adult understanding of artistic process
* emphasis on creative process more so than symbols and interpretation of reality
* realism to abstraction
* focus on social issues, emotional responses, skill development
* refinement of artistic skills
* much experimentation

**Educational considerations:**

* Children want their art to look like the object they see; failing in this attempt can be discouraging
* Children need to be taught that art does not have to mean copying what they see
* Show them other styles of art (e.g., impressionism, cubism, expressionism) to help them see that the free expression of ideas and emotions is more important than creating a mirror image
* Never compare one child’s work to another’s or select one child’s work to be a model or ideal
* Avoid projects that can be completed in only one way (e.g., formulaic paint-by-number activities, teacher-prescribed projects to be assembled, black-line masters to be coloured in)
* Do not use art as indoor recess or as a reward for good behaviour; art activities should be well planned, implemented, and assessed
* Have a wide variety of materials available to children and allow them to refine their understanding/use of these materials through ongoing practice
* Suggest options but allow children to make final decisions for art projects
* Ask children about their art while it is happening, not just at the end
* Children should describe their work, but don’t ask them to name objects or feelings depicted
* Assess the process and provide feedback along the way: the trip is just as important as the destination
* Display art at a child’s eye level
* Encourage individual expression: a classroom full of samples of individual creativity indicates that the teacher has given children choices and has focused on the process as well as the product

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