

## Valuing All Forms of Creative Play

Given a crayon or marker and a piece of paper, young children can be quite creative. They may not all grow up to be the next Rembrandt or Picasso but they share one important characteristic with the artist: a desire and willingness to express themselves using the tools of creativity. At first their scribbles may make sense only to themselves but over time their efforts become more representational and we can begin to understand and appreciate what they are trying to express. Very often these artistic creations are signed by the child and displayed on the galleries of classroom walls and the refrigerator doors of home. Once displayed, they can be admired and praise can be showered upon the artist.

Children are also engaged in other forms of creative expression, however, that don't lead to the same kind of displayable product like the results of taking crayon to paper. Whether it is their complex block structures, the mini-dramas of make believe play, or the humor of knock-knock jokes, young children's creative impulses take many forms. Unlike artwork, the results of these creative activities can't be displayed on refrigerator doors. The intricate block construction has to be dismantled from the bedroom floor and the blocks have to be returned to their container. The words and actions that made up the make believe play are gone once spoken and acted, and the props used to enhance the story have to be returned to the toy closet. And once the laughter at the knock-knock joke fades away, that particular moment of creativity is over. Because block buildings, mini-dramas, and knock-knock jokes don't stick to refrigerator doors, they don't bear the names of their creators and don't live past their time and often don't receive the same praise and admiration as children's artwork.

There are ways, however, that parents and teachers can capture these less tangible products of children's creative activity. With the availability of digital cameras of all types, photographs of a child's block building can be taken, preserved, displayed on the classroom wall or refrigerator door, and even sent to the grandparents. It's also not that difficult these days to take a video of the block building in process. The video can then be watched with the child and she can be asked about the decisions she made during the construction of the block structure. This interest in what the child was doing is a very powerful way of expressing admiration for the activity.

Photographs and video can also be used to capture the creativity of children's make-believe and dramatic play. If a camera is not available, a description of the play can be written down in a play journal or diary that can later be read with the child, again providing an opportunity for the parent or teacher to show an interest in what the child was doing when she was acting out her invented story.

All forms of creative play are important for children's development and they all provide ways for children to express their ideas, feelings, and emotions. Creative play also provides opportunities for children to problem solve, whether it is the problem of mixing the paints to find just the right color or the problem of figuring out which blocks are needed to build the bridge that will support the truck crossing the river. We value these

activities when we show an interest in what children are doing. It is easy to show that interest when there is a tangible product that is a result of their activity. Artwork lends itself to the creation of those tangible products so it is easy to become focused on that one form of creative activity. As the few examples above suggest, we have to find ways to capture and make permanent all forms of children's creative play so that we can send the message to children that it is all valued.

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