

HEART

HEART: Healing and Education through the Arts

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “ARTS”?

You have to think about adjusting HEART activities so that all children benefit from these activities. Knowing the child with whom you are doing HEART activities is very important as is your knowledge to accommodate these activities. Give children plenty of time.

When we think of the arts, many of us think of drawing and painting—but there is so much more: singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, acting/drama, clay sculpture, model building, story-telling, puppetry, poetry, creative writing. All of these have roles to play in helping children to develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially. “Art” promotes self-expression. That is why these art forms are called the expressive arts.

- Dance allows children to better situate themselves in time and space, and to feel present in their bodies and in the moment. That presence of mind grounds the child. The physical movement and balance also promotes gross motor skills development and helps strengthen math skills through counting steps and clapping rhythms.
- Drawing encourages concentration and permits children to make visible, feelings that might be hidden, not only to others, but also to themselves.
- Holding and controlling a crayon, marker, or pencil also promotes fine motor skills development.
- Painting promotes a feeling of freedom as children are invited to experiment with colors and discover new ones. It also promotes fine motor skills development.
- Music can offer children support while they are led through relaxation exercises during art activities. It can also offer them the opportunity to find their own voice, whether through singing or playing instruments and promote teamwork and coordination when they sing together. Music also strengthens math skills as children learn to count beats, memorize rhythms and time harmonies.
- Drama and storytelling provide the opportunity for children to create stories and act them out within a group. Acting out of a story can be deeply healing and transformative and help promote problem-solving skills. Drama and storytelling can also strengthen literacy when stories are written down to plan performances or made into storybooks with written text and painted pictures.

RATIONALE: WHY THE ARTS?

How do the arts help children? The various art forms identified earlier are forms of “play” that engage the imagination of children. This is their natural language. Through play, children use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. In some contexts, for various reasons, children do not have the opportunity to engage in this kind of play. With the guidance of non-judgmental, compassionate adults, all children can learn how to play.

When playing and doing arts activities (whether singing, painting, dancing, or acting), children are:

- Increasing their ability to concentrate and to work toward a goal;
- Solving problems by finding alternatives and making choices;
- Gaining a sense of mastery by achieving goals through their own efforts;
- Building self-confidence and, with it, a willingness to face new challenges;
- Releasing tension and reducing anxiety by channeling energy into constructive activities;
- Communicating their ideas;
- Expressing feelings that might be hard to talk about;
- Developing fine and gross motor skills;
- Developing social skills (listening, sharing, taking turns, cooperating).