



"A child is a dynamic being; art becomes for him a language of thought."

-Viktor Lowenfeld, Art Educator

THE NEW PLAYROOM

A step-by-step guide on how to set up a home art space for kids

By Megan Schiller

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About The Author.....	Pg. 4
Preface.....	Pg. 5
Introduction.....	Pg. 6
• What skills Do Kids Learn From Art?.....	Pg. 7
• The Influence of Art Over The Years By Bar Rucci	Pg. 8
• What Exactly Is An Art Space?.....	Pg. 9
• Design Matters.....	Pg. 9
Setting Up Your Art Space.....	Pg. 10
• What Materials And Tools Should Be In An Art Space?.....	Pg. 10
• Essentials.....	Pg. 11
• Extra Goodies.....	Pg. 12
• It's Not Just For Art.....	Pg. 13
• Using An Art Space For Tinkering And Inventing By Rachelle Doorley	Pg. 14
• Planning Your Space.....	Pg. 15
• Choosing A Location By Jean Van't Hul	Pg. 16
• Gathering Ideas.....	Pg. 17
• The Layout.....	Pg. 17
• Table & Chairs.....	Pg. 18
• Storage.....	Pg. 20
• Containers.....	Pg. 22
• Easels.....	Pg. 23
• Art Storage & Display.....	Pg. 23
• Purchasing Products.....	Pg. 25
• Installation/Setting Up.....	Pg. 25
• Adding The Art Supplies.....	Pg. 26
Introducing Your Child To The Art Space.....	Pg. 28
• Keeping Materials Visible and Fresh.....	Pg. 29
• Understanding How To Use The Materials.....	Pg. 29
• Testing New Materials.....	Pg. 29
• Questions To Ask Your Child When Testing Different Mediums.....	Pg. 30
Keeping Your Child Engaged Over Time.....	Pg. 31
Having A Dedicated Art Space By Meri Cherry	Pg. 32
Additional Resources.....	Pg. 33
Thank You!.....	Pg. 34

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

While design has always been a passion of mine, my professional career has been full of the incredibly rewarding work of early childhood education. I began my career as a preschool teacher, intrigued by the use of art in the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. While working towards a Masters in Education, I had the opportunity to take part in a study tour of these Italian preschools, which had a profound impact on my view of education. From there, I worked as a curriculum specialist and art studio teacher, while helping to launch the first Reggio-inspired school in Sonoma County, California. A move to a new town ignited my entrepreneurial spirit where I opened a children's art studio and eventually founded The Art Pantry, a design studio and educational resource for kids' creative spaces and art exploration. I am truly dedicated to this work and love sharing it all with you. I live in the San Francisco Bay Area with my husband and two young daughters.



INTRODUCTION

As parents, we dedicate plenty of living space to our children's toys. Sometimes, we even dedicate an entire room to toys in the hopes of enriching our children's lives through play.

What if we put as much emphasis on art supplies and creative tools as we do on toys?

What if our kids were just as confident and skilled at using artistic materials as they are at building block towers and playing dress-up? This doesn't mean that they would grow up to become the next Picasso, but rather that they would grow up with a creative confidence and an understanding that these tools can be used to enhance other areas of their play.

In order to achieve this, we have to make art a priority in our homes. We have to make space in our children's lives for more creativity. This means making physical space in our homes, making time in our busy schedules, and opening up to new perspectives on creativity and art. As very young children, toddlers like to explore the world around them. When given the freedom to explore in their own way, all toddlers are curious about creative tools and materials. As kids get older, we tend to segment learning into subject matter and these creative materials are pushed into the discipline of Art. If a child doesn't relate to the way that "Art" is taught, he begins to shy away from this subject area, eventually seeing it as separate, as something that is only for "creative people." Adults, who also learned to regard art in this way, tend to reinforce this perspective. Art then becomes an elective, rather than a tool for learning and self-expression.

This guide is about setting up a space for creating visual art, but it is within the broad goal of helping children to become self-sufficient makers and innovative thinkers. Art is a means of expression, of working out ideas and emotions. It adds an aesthetic beauty to our world, but it is also an essential instrument of learning. While engaged in the creative process, children are continuously problem solving and coming to new conclusions about the way things work. This is why creativity is essential to innovation and is widely accepted as one of the most important skills in life and in the workplace. If we can reshape our views around art and creativity, we can start our kids early on this path of creative thinking and doing- a path of tapping into their intrinsic creative nature and nourishing it. We can help our children feel confident in their creative abilities, foster these fundamental skills, and support the unique ways in which they weave creative thinking into their lives.



STORY

A friend recently told me that she didn't do much art with her boys. When I asked her why, she said, "when I used to give my son crayons, all he did was use them to build a tower and knock it over." Because her son didn't respond by drawing with the crayons, she assumed he wasn't "artistic." But her son was being artistic! He was using materials in a creative way by building and investigating what happens when he knocks it over. What if, rather than avoiding art from that point on, she had nurtured these explorations and continued to provide a variety of artistic materials?

WHAT SKILLS DO KIDS LEARN FROM ART?

creative thinking

collaboration

critical thinking

perseverance

muscle control

confidence

risk-taking

focus

appreciating others

hand-eye coordination

imagination

communication

HOW DO THESE SKILLS PLAY OUT ON A DAILY BASIS?

- + Reading
- + Writing
- + Attention Span
- + Relationships
- + Athleticism
- + Self-Esteem
- + Leadership

WHAT EXACTLY IS AN ART SPACE?

An art space is simply a dedicated space for accessing and exploring art supplies. It can be as small as a shoebox, or as large as an entire room- and is often everything in between! The name, The Art Pantry, comes from our belief that an art space is as essential to children's development as a healthy kitchen pantry. Just like a healthy kitchen pantry is stocked with nutritious food and ingredients, a child's home should be stocked with tools and materials for creative nourishment. This "art pantry" then becomes a child's workshop, where they can access these tools and materials to work through ideas, tinker, discover, solve problems, learn techniques, and create anything they can imagine. An art pantry is about going back to the basics and allowing children the opportunity to explore with open-ended materials. This encourages children to be creative thinkers and problem solvers while fostering self-confidence and independence.



DESIGN MATTERS

How do you feel when you are cooking in a messy kitchen, or working at a cluttered desk? Is it enjoyable, or does it stress you out? What if you were making dinner and your cooking tools were misplaced and broken? This same feeling applies to children's art spaces. Whether it's your child's art space, your hall closet, your workspace, or your kitchen cabinets, a well-organized area makes you feel at ease and ready to use the space.



Design has the ability to affect our mood and productivity and therefore is a key factor in educational spaces. Your art space, no matter how small, is an educational space. If it's accessible, organized, aesthetically pleasing, and filled with quality materials, your child will be drawn to it. Don't be surprised if you are suddenly drawn to it too!

