SYMBOLS AND STORYTELLING

HOW CHILDREN CONSTRUCT LITERACY THROUGH ART
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Children play constructively when they manipulate materials with the goal of creating something new or something representing a real object (Kieff and Casbergue, 2000)
CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY IS...

...an organized form of play that is, in many ways, goal oriented and thoughtful. Children who are engaged in constructive play use materials to create something, and this increases in complexity as they get older.

Burman (2012)
CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY IS THE MOST FREQUENT ACTIVITY OF YOUNG CHILDREN

• Indoors

• Outdoors
HOW CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY DEVELOPS

Functional Play (0-3 years)

Any repetitive action that the child finds enjoyable is considered functional play.
FUNCTIONAL PLAY IN ART

• No attempt at symbolic representation

• Manipulation of art materials is purely sensory (visual and tactile)

• Development of physical knowledge
HOW CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY DEVELOPS

Physical Knowledge

• knowledge of objects in external reality
• includes discovering the physical properties of objects
• observable properties such as form, weight, and function
• best acquired through direct interactions and sensory-motor experiences with objects
HOW CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY DEVELOPS

• By age 3 years, 40% of children’s play activities are constructive play.

• Three-year-olds focus on manipulating materials and don’t try to represent anything specific.

• Children are more focused on process than product.

• Children develop **physical knowledge**.
HOW CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY DEVELOPS

Between the ages of four and six years, constructive play accounts for approximately 50% of children’s play activities.
The more the children explore what they can do with the materials, the broader the base from which they will take the first steps into symbol making.
Danielle changed the identity of her creation as she worked with modeling clay. First it was a Hershey’s chocolate kiss, then it became a mermaid sitting on a rock.
• or, in this case, *art dictation*

• as children talk with an adult about their art, they may provide accompanying titles, labels, or sentences

• adults record and then read the children’s language, encouraging the children to read it again by themselves.
“First, I drew my mom, and then I put the sun up here and the rainbow and then I put the earrings on her so she’d look so pretty.”

Mariajose, age 5 years
“First, the horse was in the barn but now it’s out on the road. He’s going to take the girl on a picnic. They’re gonna go over there, on that grass.”

Madison, age 5 years
STORYTELLING AND ART

The importance of drawing in the early stages of literacy development cannot be over-estimated.
“He went for a run to get his exercise. He went by the lake and he, he went around the lake. And when he went around it he saw the Loch Ness Monster and he started running away. He had to run far away because he scared.”

Joseph, age 6 years
As the use of symbols increases in children’s artwork, the role of the teacher is simply that of facilitator.