

Hands, Minds, and Art Supplies:
A Child's Tools of Communication

A written exploration of a semester of Play,

By: Evi Milanovic and the children of Lawfield Elementary School

This semester at Lawfield Elementary School the children reminded me that creativity does not begin with instruction, it begins with wonder.

Through clay, watercolor, paint, and multimedia, they approached art not as something to perfect, but as something to experience. Each material became an invitation to explore ideas, emotions, and possibilities freely, allowing the children to communicate in ways that often extended beyond words.

While working with clay, the children engaged with the process of shaping and reshaping. Small hands rolled coils, pressed textures into surfaces, and carefully transformed simple pieces of clay into imaginative creations. Some children approached the material thoughtfully and slowly, while others experimented quickly, extremely eager to discover what the clay could become. One child held up their sculpture proudly and said, *"It was supposed to be a bird, but now it's a dragon bird."* Another child pressed patterns into their clay repeatedly, explaining, *"I like when it leaves footprints behind."*



"Snowman in Spring" Terracotta clay

These moments revealed the children's willingness to adapt their ideas as they worked. In the Reggio Emilia approach, materials are not simply tools, but languages through which children express their thinking. The clay became a conversation between imagination and touch,

allowing children to problem solve, experiment, and communicate their ideas physically and emotionally.

Through watercolor painting, the children explored color, movement, and unpredictability. They watched closely as paint spread across wet paper, blending and shifting in unexpected ways. Rather than focusing on controlling the outcome, I encouraged the children to embrace surprise and discovery throughout the process, which they absolutely did. One child quietly observed, *“The blue is going into the yellow,”* while another excitedly announced, *“Mine looks like a storm and a sunset together.”*



A scene of the children in the after school program experimenting with watercolour.

The watercolor process encouraged patience, observation, and openness to change. The children learned that art does not always need a fixed plan to be meaningful. Instead, they discovered that beauty can emerge through experimentation, chance, and curiosity. Their

paintings reflected not only technical exploration, but emotional expression and storytelling as well.

In their drawings and paintings, the children translated ideas into marks, symbols, and narratives unique to their own experiences. Some children filled their pages with careful details, while others worked boldly and instinctively across the paper. During one session, a child explained, *“This is my grandma’s garden, but I added a rainbow because I like them.”* Another child pointed to a series of looping lines and shared, *“These are the sounds the birds were making outside.”* One boy in the after school program noted, *“I like this time of day best, because I can create whatever I want and enjoy being in my imagination.”*



“Map of My World” Marker, Pencil, and Crayon on paper

These images demonstrated that children naturally use art as a language for observation, memory, imagination, and connection. The act of drawing or painting became not only an artistic process, but a way for children to make sense of their world and share their perspectives with others.



"Pink" by Daxton in the Toddler Room

Along with our many explorations of art mediums, we also explored the senses with cornstarch paint. When mixing water, food colouring, and cornstarch together, we created a sticky, thick paint that was exciting to play with and manipulate.



Scenes from the Toddler Room, an exploration of sense, texture, and layering.

Across each experience this semester at Lawfield Elementary School, whether it was toddlers, preschoolers, or the after school program of school age children, the children showed that creativity flourishes most fully when there is space for freedom, risk-taking, and exploration. When children are trusted to follow their own ideas, they create work that is thoughtful, expressive, and deeply personal.

This semester reaffirmed the importance of providing environments where children feel safe to experiment, change direction, and create without fear of being “right” or “wrong.” Through their artwork, the curation of a playful, open environment, our conversations, and their many discoveries, the children reminded me that art is not simply about what is made, it is about the confidence, joy, and sense of identity that emerges through the act of creating itself. If all children are artists, we as adults are simply their studio technicians, ready to provide the tools they need to communicate their many wondrous ideas.