



(whole wall was dedicated to Arts for All)

ARTS FOR ALL – Artists in Neighbourhoods

Final Reflective Pedagogical Report

Telling the Story of Learning Together

Site: Wesley Urban Ministries – Riverdale, Hamilton ON

Artist Educator: Kamaldeep Kaur

Program: Artists in the Neighbourhood (AiN)

Context

At Wesley Urban Ministries – Riverdale, children of mixed ages came together once a week, some barely walking, some already full of stories. They were not sorted by age or group. They arrived together and made together, in a half-day drop-in session that also included families, caregivers, and grandparents sitting alongside them.

Over nine weeks children explored drawing, clay, chalk watercolour, salad spinning, cloud clay, hand printing, and cellophane with each week a new material, each week a new way of knowing. The site educators Daniel and Jadranka supported every session warmly, coordinating group rotations and transitions to ensure all children had a meaningful opportunity to participate.



About this program

Sessions ran in two rotating groups of six to seven children. Families were present throughout — not as observers but as participants. The drop-in format meant the group shifted from week to week, and every session was shaped by who arrived and what they brought with them.

What? - What did we observe?

Across the nine weeks, children at Wesley showed a consistent and remarkable quality: the capacity to become completely absorbed. Whether they were crushing chalk, pulling tape from a dispenser, or layering cellophane on paper, they settled into deep focus, often staying long past their group's turn, returning after snack without being invited, or choosing the table over going outside.

Week 1: Drawing Trees - Tempera Sticks, Fabric & Texture

When asked if trees have leaves, one child said no because it was winter, she could not see any outside. Children drew their own versions of trees: one made two vertical lines for bark and then dots, explaining the dots were leaves. When the educator closed a tempera stick lid, one child immediately did the same, drew, capped, placed, picked up the next colour and repeated. Another arranged colours vertically; a peer beside her quietly mirrored the same. A child who didn't want to use the sponge herself guided the educator's hand across her paper instead, watching each impression closely. After snack, she came back and asked for the action again.



(these dots are the leaves on a tree)



(this is a pinecone drawing inspired from the actual pinecone)

Week 2: The Paper Roll - Forests, Leaves & Shared Space

A wide paper roll replaced individual sheets. Pictures of nature were laid alongside it. Children named colours as they picked them up, 'It's purple,' 'It's brown' using the words to anchor what they were holding. A parent sat beside her child and drew trees alongside her. One child stayed at the table after snack, layering and scrubbing colours with full focus until the paper held something close to an abstract painting.





Week 3: Clay & Loose Parts - What Children See Inside the Material

Clay, tools, pipe cleaners, beads, googly eyes, pom-pom balls, and wool were placed on the table alongside pictures of trees and plants, not as models to follow, but as a quiet presence. What children made had almost nothing to do with trees. One child cut clay into small pieces; each time a piece was large enough, she added googly eyes and beads and made a face, two, then three. A tiger appeared. A monster built from bent pipe cleaners. A popsicle stick pressed from clay and a tool. When the second group arrived, the first group didn't want to leave. Even when it was time to go outside, they chose to stay.



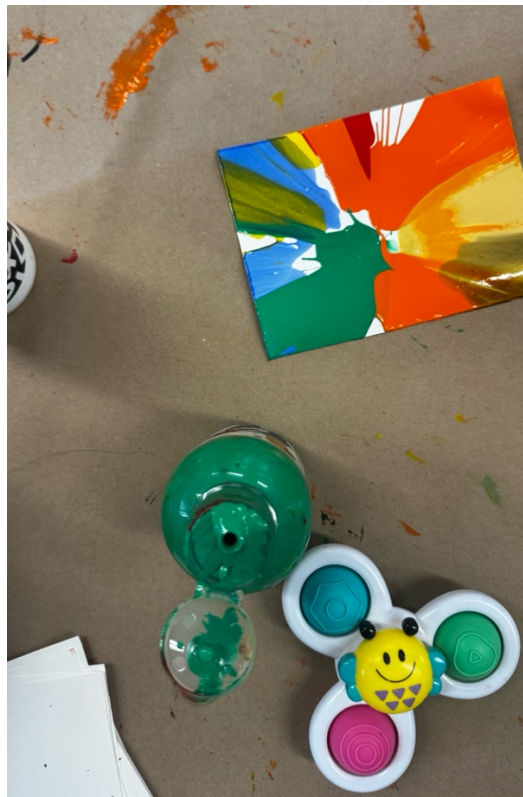
Week 4: Chalk Watercolour- Colour Made by Hand

Children crushed chalk in ziplock bags, poured the powder, added water, and mixed it to make their own paint. One child noticed the mixture wasn't smooth and pressed chalk pieces down until it dissolved completely, working through the problem herself. When the paint was ready, she asked for another colour to crush from the beginning. It was the making she wanted, not only the painting. Another child crushed with such determination the chalk became a fine powder; the colour it made was vivid. A parent arrived mid-session: 'Can he do this? Are you about to leave?' They stayed parent and child making watercolour together. The youngest child did not use the paper at all. He dipped a brush in colour and wandered the room with it. One child kept handing the a brush and paper to me saying: 'You should do it.' They made patterns side by side. When educators took her to another area, she ran back.



Week 5: Salad Spinners - Colour in Motion

Children poured paint, pressed the button, and waited to see what the motion had made. Both groups stayed fully engaged throughout, they wanted to keep making more. Looking at the finished pieces, one child said his looked like a mountain, another said hers looked like a dragon. Nobody had suggested either. The artworks were asking to be read, and the children read them. Despite a rainy start, one caregiver told me that she had come specifically because she looks forward to these sessions and tells other parents about them. Daniel, the site facilitator, came by and planned to hang the artworks on the wall.



Week 6: Cloud Clay - The Making Is the Point

Each child received their own cornflour, conditioner, and food colouring to mix themselves. One child plunged hands into the cornflour and stayed there, spreading it across the table, fully present in the feeling. Another mixed with such care and precision that her finished clay was smoother than the educator's; her caregiver explained she bakes at home and always helps. When the clay was ready, many children didn't want to play with it. They wanted to make it again. 'We want to make more.' Children from the first group hovered near the table while the second worked, drawn back by the scent of the conditioner still in the room.

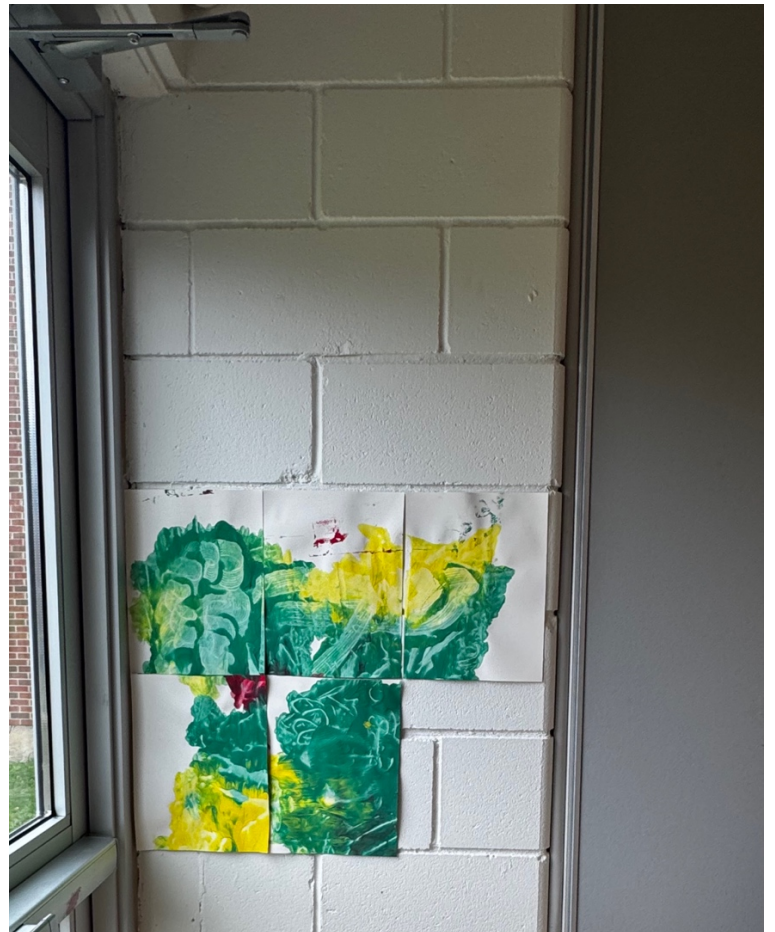


Week 7: The Earth Underneath

Earth-coloured paint was spread beneath a transparent sheet. No tools were given. Children found their own, a toy car, a small mop, wooden blocks. One rolled the car back and forth and watched the tracks appear in the colour below. Another mopped the surface with great seriousness. When the sheet was lifted, children gathered quietly around it. There was a real moment of anticipation. When the colours were revealed, surprise and delight crossed their faces. Some wanted to get underneath the lifted sheet, turning the cleanup into play.



(small papers were put under the curtain).



(after paper dried up, the ECE's put them on the wall)

Week 8: Handprint Tree- Earth Day

I drew the outline of a large tree on a paper roll. Children filled it, pressing paint-covered hands onto the branches and trunk, layer by layer, until the tree was full of hands. Every handprint was individual. Together, they made something none of them could have made alone.



Week 9: Cellophane & Light, The Last Day

The final session. Cellophane in many colours, craft paper, markers, and a laminator. Children held pieces up to the light, layered colours to see what happened between them, ran fingers along the surface. One child tore his craft paper into shapes and built his artwork from the pieces entirely. Another covered her sheet in carefully drawn hearts. Two children looked up and said they wanted to write 'mommy' and 'daddy', the art was already becoming a gift before it was finished.

And then a grandfather, sitting beside his grandchild, reached for a marker and began to draw. The child watched, and followed. They worked side by side without a word of instruction, placing cellophane on top of what they had both made. When the laminated pieces came out, the room went quiet.



Children's voices across the term:

"No — it's winter. I don't see leaves on the trees outside."

"It's purple. It's brown."

"We want to make more."

"It looks like a mountain. Mine looks like a dragon."

"I want to write mommy."

So What? — What does it mean?

The process was the curriculum.

Children who crushed chalk and watched it dissolve understood colour differently than those who open a tray. Children who made cloud clay and then wanted to make it again were not being repetitive, they were following something they could feel. The making was not preparation for learning. It was the learning.

Imitation is theorising.

When a child watched the educator cap a tempera stick and immediately did the same, draw, cap, place, repeat, she was building a mental model of how the tool works and testing it in real time. When one child arranged colours vertically and a peer mirrored her, that peer was asking: what does it mean to work this way? These are significant cognitive acts that look, from the outside, like ordinary play.

Every child finds their own door.

The youngest child at chalk watercolour did not use the paper. He wandered with a paint-dipped brush. This was not disengagement, it was engagement on his own terms, at his own scale. The child who guided the educator's hand rather than touching the sponge herself knew exactly what she wanted to see, and found the safest way to see it. Both were deeply present.

Families made it deeper.

When a parent reached for a marker, when a grandfather drew beside his grandchild, when a caregiver made chalk watercolour alongside her child, the art space became something more than an activity. Art made it possible for generations to make something together without a word of instruction. The two children who wanted to write 'mommy' and 'daddy' were not going off-task. They were doing what art is for.



Now What? - Future Possibilities

- Continue rotating groups of six to seven, and coordinate with site staff on snack timing so no child misses a session because of scheduling.
- Design at least one session per term explicitly as a family experience where caregivers are co-makers, not observers. A gentle invitation from the site facilitator at the start of each session goes a long way.
- Offer 'make your own material' sessions regularly, chalk watercolour, cloud clay, natural pigments. The experience of transformation is itself the learning.
- Return to favourite materials with small variations, the same chalk process on a new surface, the same clay with different loose parts. Repetition with variation is how children build depth.
- Use the laminator regularly as a way to honour children's work not only at the end of the program. Display laminated pieces on windows so light passes through them.
- Continue and expand the practice of displaying artworks on the site walls. Make children's learning visible to the whole community.
- Introduce natural and outdoor materials bark, seed pods, stones, soil as art materials. Let the environment outside become part of what is brought to the table.

The Hundred Languages of the Children

The children at Wesley expressed themselves through touch, movement, colour, sound, gesture, observation, imitation, repetition, and gift. Not all of their languages were words.

- Imitation- watching an action and repeating it exactly, down to the placing of the lid on the table.
- Observation- guiding the educator's hand; watching before touching; returning after snack to see what happens next.
- Naming- 'It's purple.' 'It looks like a dragon.' Naming as the first act of claiming what you know.
- Making again- crushing chalk a second time, wanting to make cloud clay again. The process as the destination.
- Staying- choosing to remain at the table after snack, after the session ended, after others had left.
- Gift- writing a parent's name on a piece of art; making something for someone you love before the session is even over.
- The handprint- the oldest mark. Proof of presence. I was here, and I was part of this.



Reflection

Artist Educator's Reflection

I really enjoy going to this site. Everyone is very supportive, the educators are consistently enthusiastic and look forward to each session. What this term reminded me is that children do not need a prescribed destination. They need an open road and enough time to travel it. The mixed-age group at Wesley showed me that creativity is not something we give children. It is something we get out of the way of and then watch carefully, so we can learn from what we see. The grandfather who reached for a marker on the last day. The child who crushed chalk again not to paint, but to feel the making. The girl who stayed at the table. These are the images I carry from Wesley.

