The Art Process
by Kendra Nenia (CCC Teacher)

As I walk through our beautiful center I see a multitude of activities going on. In an average classroom I observe children engaged in block play, busy exploring material at the media table or reading with a teacher in the book area. But my favorite thing to observe in any early childhood setting is the art area. It thrills me to see children actively engaged in art and sensory activities. I encourage all of the children in my classrooms to join in the art activities. “Grab a smock and meet me at the art table!” are words I speak quite often in my classrooms. Why? That could be what you, the reader, are wondering. I want to address that question with this brief article about the art process.

Before anything else, I must explain a little about how the human body first begins to develop. Understanding how the human body develops will help you learn why we provide the activities we do here at Campus Child Care. Here’s a brief summary. All bodies develop in three directions. First our muscles develop in our head, trunk, arms, and legs well before the fine muscles in our fingers, hands, eyes, and wrists. So the first area or direction of growth is from large motor muscles (our core muscles) to small motor muscles. The second direction we as humans develop is from our head to our toes. If you take a moment and think about how a baby develops it is generally in this order. First he or she held their head up, then lifted their chest when lying on their stomach; perhaps they sat up if they were propped up with a pillow, eventually sitting without support. Later they learn to crawl and stand with support, and finally, after some practice, walking on their own. They developed from head to toe! “The third pattern of development is from the inside to the outside”, according to Mary Mayesky. It states in her book Creative Activities for Young Children, “The core muscles of our bodies must develop before we can perfect the use of the smaller fine muscles of our bodies.”

“It is only by first developing these large motor skills a child can develop small motor skills.” (Mary Mayesky, Creative Activities for Young Children.) So, in providing young children with a wide variety of art and sensory activities we help them to exercise those large and small muscle groups. Making our children stronger people!

What can children learn by participating in art activities? To answer this question I am going to turn to a couple of different sources, one being Jean Piaget (a well-known authority in working with young children). The other resource is a website, www.punkyschildcare.com (this site has a multitude of information for parents and teachers). Using these sources, I will cover 5 of many areas art can help your child to grow and develop. I chose to cover these areas – scientific principles, physical knowledge and logic, cooperation, self esteem and math.
Scientific Principles
When we provide art material without restrictions we allow children the opportunity to experiment and discover a variety of materials. Discovery and experimentation are two very basic scientific principles. Children can explore these principles as well as cause and effect in a safe, low-risk environment. A child can see, if I slap my paint filled brush against a large piece of paper, that paint will splatter across the page. We give them opportunities that can encourage basic scientific thinking.

Physical knowledge and Logic
Also according to Piaget, by acting on objects (using the five senses) children gain physical knowledge. As this knowledge develops children become better able to compare, classify, sort and contrast. Physical knowledge leads to the development of logical thought process. In giving our children opportunities to have art experiences we give them the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the world around them!

Cooperation
Sitting at a table, sharing materials; what an opportunity to learn about dividing materials fairly community and others. In setting up these types of activities or situations children can learn to use language to reason and resolve disagreements. They can see how materials are divided as well as learn about what is considered fair. Older children (late 3 year olds and up) can work together to create, build, or design an art project. The opportunities for cooperation and community are limitless.

Self-esteem and Confidence
When we provide a blank piece of paper, a lump of play-dough, or other materials we are giving them complete control over how to use these materials. The child decides what they’re making and how they are going to do it. It is another chance to succeed. The art process provides children the opportunity to gain a sense of accomplishment, a positive self-esteem and confidence. You can further these positive feelings by talking about your child’s creation. You could comment on their use of colors, lines, balance and symmetry, shapes or materials, without critiquing their work; focus on their creation. Also, discussing these topics teaches them about the fundamental principles of art.

Math
Art and math? Yes! In exploring and manipulation art and sensory materials we can open the door to pre-mathematical experiences. Children must use reason, problem solving, discrimination, and observation when working with materials. (For example: a child may notice, “If I add another drop of paint to my paper the spot of paint gets larger.”) The use of collage materials gives us, as parents and educators, the opportunity to count, compare, and group materials with the children, or we can stand back and watch this discovery occur naturally.