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Child-Centered Learning Practices in Facilitating Creative and Imaginative Expression in Early Childhood Education

Imam Faizin[1], Irfan Haris[2]
[2] Institut Agama Islam Pemalang
Jl. DI Panjaitan KM. 3, Paduraksa, Pemalang, Central Java, Indonesia
[1] UIN KH. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan
Jl. Pahlawan KM. 5 Rowolaku, Kajen, Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia
[1]ifaizin@gmail.com

Abstract. This study describes and analyzes child-centered learning practices that support creative and imaginative expression at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep in Bandar, Batang, Indonesia. The study used a qualitative approach to examine how creative activities are implemented and how learning media are used in early childhood education. The researchers collected data through observations, interviews, and documentation of learning activities. The study focused on five activities: free drawing, modeling various objects with playdough, constructing buildings with blocks, creating sun-themed crafts using Styrofoam, and making collages using seeds and other supporting materials. The findings indicate that these activities provide diverse learning experiences through visual, manipulative, constructive, and artistic activities. Children actively used drawing tools, manipulated playdough, arranged blocks, applied paint, and attached materials to cardboard surfaces. These varied activities gave children opportunities to explore learning media and create creative work. However, the extent to which children were free to determine forms, develop ideas, and make decisions during the activities needs to be understood in relation to classroom interactions and teacher guidance. This study highlights the importance of providing diverse learning materials and pedagogical support that respects children's initiative and individuality of expression. The findings are expected to inform teachers' reflective practices in designing creative learning experiences that support exploration aligned with young children's developmental characteristics.

Keywords: Child-Centered Learning; Creative Expression; Imagination; Learning Media; Early Childhood Education.

1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) gives children opportunities to develop their potential through meaningful, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Young children are naturally curious, explore their surroundings, and build understanding through play and interaction with objects in their environment. One important aspect that needs to be fostered in learning is creative and imaginative expression. Creative expression lets children communicate their ideas, feelings, and experiences through various forms of work, while imagination helps them envision new possibilities and connect their experiences. Therefore, early childhood learning should give children opportunities to explore, make choices, experiment, and create based on their own ideas.

Child-centered learning is a pedagogical approach that places children's needs, interests, experiences, abilities, and initiatives at the center of the learning process. This approach is rooted in

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constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and interaction with their environment (Abdiyah & Subiyantoro, 2021; Saguni, 2020). Within this framework, children are no longer viewed as passive recipients of information but as active participants who construct their own understanding (Hakiky et al., 2023; Muzakki, 2021).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasizes Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as a fundamental framework for early childhood education. DAP is based on the understanding that all developmental domains—physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and adaptive—are interconnected and central to children's early development (Leung, 2012). This principle highlights the importance of providing learning experiences that accommodate the diverse ways children participate, develop ideas, and express their abilities.

Creative and imaginative expression should be understood as a process rather than merely a final product assessed for uniformity or resemblance to a teacher's example. In free-drawing activities, for instance, children can express their experiences through lines, shapes, colors, and stories about their drawings. Playdough activities let children shape materials into various forms, while block play lets them build structures based on their ideas. Creating sun-themed crafts using Styrofoam and making collages also offer creative experiences through different materials and techniques. In this context, learning outcomes depend not only on the products children create but also on their engagement, initiative, willingness to experiment, and opportunities to develop ideas throughout the creative process.

However, art and craft activities can become restrictive when children are expected only to imitate examples, follow uniform patterns, or produce work entirely predetermined by teachers. Such practices may limit children's opportunities to make decisions and develop ideas independently. In contrast, providing diverse materials, sufficient time for exploration, and opportunities to explain their creations can broaden children's expressive possibilities. This suggests that access to creative learning materials alone does not guarantee child-centered learning. Teachers' roles in providing guidance, responding to children's ideas, and balancing learning objectives with freedom of expression must also be considered. Accordingly, learning practices should be examined through the interactions that occur during activities rather than solely through the products children create.

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of creative activities in early childhood learning. Jarmiati, Kustiono, and Budiartati (2020) investigated the effectiveness of free-drawing activities in developing young children's vocabulary and creativity. Their findings indicated that free drawing effectively improved both aspects. Drawing activities gave children opportunities to explore materials and colors, use their imagination, and describe their drawings. These findings highlight drawing's potential as a learning experience that connects visual expression with language development. Nevertheless, their study focused on the effectiveness of drawing activities, distinguishing it from research examining teacher facilitation across various creative activities.

Kartini and Sujarwo (2014) investigated using playdough to enhance young children's creativity. Their findings revealed differences in creativity before and after playdough use, as well as differences between groups using playdough and blocks. Meanwhile, Suryana and Desmila (2022) examined creativity development through block play and emphasized the importance of providing varied teaching materials to create diverse play experiences. Through a literature review, Wandi and Mayar (2019) also discussed the relationship between collage activities, creativity, and fine motor skills in early childhood. These studies indicate that different learning materials offer different possibilities for creative experiences. However, understanding creativity also requires

attention to how children use materials, develop ideas, and are given opportunities to make decisions during learning activities.

Based on this literature, further research is needed to understand child-centered learning practices across multiple creative activities within a single early childhood education setting. This study was conducted at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep, Indonesia, to describe and analyze child-centered learning practices in facilitating children's creative and imaginative expression. A qualitative approach was employed to understand how these activities were implemented in everyday learning contexts. The study focused on learning materials, children's involvement in the creative process, opportunities to develop ideas, and teachers' roles in preparing the learning environment and providing appropriate support.

The findings are expected to contribute to research on early childhood pedagogy and serve as a basis for teachers to reflect on their practices when designing learning activities that value children's diverse forms of expression. Ultimately, creative learning should not focus solely on task completion but should also provide opportunities for children's initiative, exploration, and the development of their unique ideas.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative, descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of child-centered learning practices that facilitate creative and imaginative expression at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep, Bandar, Batang, Indonesia. This approach was selected because it focused on the learning process, children's forms of expression, teacher–child interactions, and facilitation strategies used within the natural learning environment.

The research participants included teachers who led the learning activities and children who participated in creative activities. The head of the RA also served as a supporting informant, providing additional information on learning planning and implementation. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to identify children's exploratory processes, initiatives, learning interactions, and how teachers provided assistance. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' considerations in designing learning activities and facilitating children's creativity. Documentation included learning plans, records of learning activities, and children's artwork.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. We established data trustworthiness through source and method triangulation by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation.

3. Result

Facilitating Free-Drawing Activities

Child-centered learning practices at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep were implemented through free-drawing activities that provided children with opportunities to express their ideas and imagination through drawings. Drawing materials served as a medium for children to represent their thoughts, imagined objects, and everyday experiences. Unlike drawing activities that require children to imitate predetermined patterns, free drawing lets them choose what to draw based on their own ideas.

The activity can begin by providing paper and drawing tools appropriate for children's ages. The teacher introduces the activity, and children then create drawings based on their own ideas. Children can express their thoughts through lines, shapes, and colors. The resulting drawings do

not need to be identical because each child has different experiences and imagination. These variations in children's drawings are important aspects to observe during the learning process.

In this activity, the teacher provides opportunities for creative expression, offers assistance when needed, and appreciates children's ideas. Paying attention to the drawing process is essential to ensure the activity focuses not only on the final product but also gives children opportunities to develop their visual expression.



Figure 1. Free-drawing activity

Facilitating Modeling Clay Activities

The next activity involved using modeling clay to create various shapes based on children's ideas. Modeling clay offers a different learning experience from drawing because children interact directly with a material they can shape and reshape. Through this activity, children can create three-dimensional works by using the clay's flexibility.

During the activity, modeling clay serves as a medium for exploring shapes. Children can manipulate the material through hand movements such as pressing, rolling, flattening, shaping, and combining pieces of clay. These actions help children develop forms that represent their ideas. The resulting creations may differ from one child to another, depending on their ideas and how they manipulate the material.

The teacher prepares appropriate materials, gives initial instructions on using the modeling clay, and helps children when they encounter difficulties. This support helps children use the materials appropriately without losing the opportunity to develop their own creations. In a child-centered learning approach, shaping modeling clay is particularly important because it shows how children turn ideas into tangible forms.

This activity provides an opportunity to observe how children manipulate modeling clay, develop shapes, and determine the outcomes of their creative work. Documentation should capture both the process of manipulating the material and the resulting creations. Where available, photographs or field notes can describe variations in children's work more concretely, ensuring the research findings accurately reflect how the activity was implemented at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep.



Figure 2. Modeling clay activity involving the creation of various shapes

Facilitating Block Play to Construct Various Buildings

Creative learning was also implemented through block play. In this activity, blocks served as construction materials, enabling children to arrange and combine different shapes into buildings based on their imagination. Unlike drawing and modeling clay activities, block play involves arranging objects into structures in which the individual components are connected.

The activity focuses on building constructions with blocks. Children use blocks as building components and arrange them into forms of their choice. This process involves selecting, positioning, arranging, and combining blocks to create a structure. The resulting buildings may vary according to children's ideas. Specific types of buildings should only be identified when their forms are clearly visible in the documentation or recorded in the observation findings.

In this activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator by providing materials and guiding block use in line with the learning objectives. The teacher may offer technical assistance when children have difficulty arranging the blocks, while still letting them decide what types of buildings they want to construct. The construction process is an important part of the activity because children do not merely use blocks as play materials but also transform them into structures that represent their ideas. Block play therefore demonstrates learning through constructive activities.



Figure 3. Block play activity

Facilitating Creative Activities Using Styrofoam

Another creative activity involved making a sun-shaped craft using Styrofoam. This activity introduced children to creating artwork based on a specific shape or theme by manipulating materials. Using Styrofoam expanded the available learning media because children were not limited to drawing or arranging objects; they could also create a sun-shaped piece.

The activity focused on creating a sun-shaped artwork using Styrofoam as the primary material. Children participated in the production stages appropriate to their age and developmental abilities. These stages may include assembling components, applying colors, or adding decorative elements. Thus, Styrofoam served as a medium for producing visual artwork based on a predetermined theme. The teacher prepared materials, explained the activity, and guided students throughout the production process. The selection and use of materials and tools also needed to consider children's safety.



Figure 4. Creative activity using Styrofoam

Facilitating Collage-Making Activities

Collage-making was another creative activity implemented during the learning process. Collage involves arranging and attaching materials to a surface to create a visual artwork. Through this activity, children interact with materials to produce particular arrangements. The creative process involves hand movements, positioning materials, and combining different elements into a finished composition.

During the activity, children use the provided collage materials as needed. They arrange and attach the materials to a working surface to create the intended shape or image. When the activity lets children choose materials and decide their placement, they can also develop compositions based on their own ideas. The shapes, themes, and materials used in this study should be described according to the available documentation.

The teacher provides the materials, explains the procedure, and helps children when they have difficulty attaching or arranging the materials. Such support should consider children's ability to control their hand movements and use adhesives appropriately. Children should continue to participate actively in arranging their creations rather than merely completing steps entirely predetermined by the teacher.

Collage-making offers a different creative experience from free drawing, modeling clay, and block construction. This study describes the implementation of collage-making based on observable processes, including material use, children's participation, teacher support, and the resulting artwork. Photographs of the process and finished collages provide supporting evidence for explaining how the activity was implemented at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep.



Figure 5. Collage-making activity

Based on the five activities examined in this study, creative learning practices at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep involved drawing materials, modeling clay, blocks, Styrofoam, and collage materials. Each activity provided a different learning context. Free drawing focused on expressing ideas visually; modeling clay was used to create various objects; blocks were used to construct structures; Styrofoam was used to create a sun-shaped craft; and collage-making involved arranging and attaching materials to produce visual artwork.

Table 1. Facilitation of Child-Centered Learning Activities

No.	Activity	Implementation	Focus of observation
1	Free drawing	Children express their ideas through drawings using drawing tools.	Choice of objects, use of colors, drawing process, and teacher's role.
2	Modeling clay	Children manipulate modeling clay to create various shapes.	Shaping techniques, variations in creations, children's initiative, and teacher support.
3	Block play	Children arrange blocks to build structures based on their imagination.	Construction process, building forms, children's choices, and assistance provided.

4	Sun-shaped Styrofoam craft	Children create a sun-shaped artwork using Styrofoam.	Production stages, material use, opportunities for creativity, and safety.
5	Collage-making	Children arrange and attach materials to produce visual artwork.	Material use, attachment process, composition, and teacher support.

The five activities illustrate different ways of implementing creative learning through varied materials and forms of engagement. The diversity of these activities provides a basis for examining how learning media characteristics, activity design, and teacher facilitation relate to child-centered learning. Nevertheless, conclusions about children's freedom to make choices, develop ideas, and exercise initiative need to be supported by observational records of classroom interactions and teacher guidance. Integrating such evidence will ensure that the findings explain not only the activities themselves but also how creative and imaginative expression is facilitated throughout the learning process.

4. Discussion

Child-Centered Learning Practices through a Variety of Creative Activities

Observations at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep revealed that creative learning was implemented through five activities: free drawing, shaping modeling clay into various forms, constructing structures with blocks, creating a sun-shaped craft using Styrofoam, and making collages using seeds and adhesive. These activities involved diverse learning materials and experiences that engaged children directly in the creative process. Children interacted with materials, used tools, and created visual artworks and constructions. This variety provides a context for examining how learning activities can facilitate creative and imaginative expression in early childhood.

Theoretically, these practices align with the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) proposed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This approach emphasizes play-based learning that considers children's developmental characteristics, individual uniqueness, and experiential and environmental contexts (NAEYC, 2020). In contemporary education, children are viewed as active individuals with different potentials, interests, and experiences. This perspective positions creativity not merely as the ability to produce an artwork but also as an integral part of the learning process. Lin (2011) explains that creativity can be fostered through three interconnected dimensions: *creative teaching*, *creative learning*, and *teaching for creativity*. Together, these dimensions encourage children to participate actively, explore freely, and engage creatively in learning activities. Innovative teaching practices and active child participation also establish a supportive learning environment (Lin, 2011).

These principles relate to the research findings through the use of diverse learning materials. Free drawing gives children opportunities to express ideas through images, modeling clay lets them transform materials into specific forms, and blocks let them arrange objects into constructions. Sun-themed crafts and collage-making further expand creative experiences through paint, Styrofoam, seeds, and adhesive. These differences matter because each activity offers children a distinct way to interact with materials and create.

Free Drawing as a Means of Creative and Imaginative Expression

The observational documentation showed a child using a pencil to make marks on a sheet of white paper. The child held the pencil in the right hand while using the other hand to hold the paper in place. This activity demonstrated the child's direct involvement in the drawing process. Using paper without a pre-drawn pattern also gave the child a surface to express ideas through lines and shapes.

In early childhood education, free drawing supports creative expression by allowing children to communicate their experiences and ideas through visual language (Septaria & Fahmi, 2023; Awalini et al., 2023). Visually, children can communicate through play and storytelling using their expressions, imagination, and creativity. Their drawings can therefore be understood as symbols that convey imaginative and creative ideas (Ningrum & Pamela, 2022; Ningrum, 2021).

Children's drawings should not be assessed primarily by their resemblance to real-world objects but by the creative process involved (Loita, 2017; Koodho & Pamungkas, 2023). Children draw based on what they know rather than solely on what they can visually observe from a particular perspective (Loita, 2017). Therefore, we can understand a drawing's meaning by considering the child's explanation, the process through which they created it, and the ideas they intended to communicate (Sari, 2020; Pebrianty & Pamungkas, 2023).

Free-drawing activities let children express their thoughts and ideas without unnecessary constraints (Septaria & Fahmi, 2023; Panjaitan, 2021). They also help children recognize and communicate their feelings creatively (Zairina, 2022). Accordingly, drawing gives children opportunities to develop visual representations while communicating their experiences through stories about their artwork.

The study by Jarmiati, Kustiono, and Budiartati (2020) provides empirical support for the relevance of free-drawing activities. Using a quasi-experimental design, they examined free drawing's effectiveness in improving young children's vocabulary and creativity. Their findings indicated that the activity effectively improved both aspects. Free drawing gave children opportunities to explore drawing materials, colors, and imagination, and to describe the pictures they created.

These findings are relevant to the free-drawing activity at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep because both studies consider drawing a meaningful learning experience for children. However, the differences in research design must be acknowledged. Jarmiati et al. examined the activity's effectiveness using a quantitative approach, whereas the present study describes its implementation in an early childhood education setting. Therefore, the previous findings strengthen the interpretation of free drawing's potential but cannot be used to claim that the drawing activity at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep has been proven to improve children's creativity or vocabulary.

The pedagogical implication is that children should be given opportunities to develop drawings based on their own ideas. Teachers can support this process by providing appropriate drawing tools, allowing sufficient time, and inviting children to explain their work. In this way, free drawing can help children appreciate differences in expression and learning experiences.

Modeling Clay Activities for Exploring Shapes and Developing Ideas

Observational evidence from the modeling clay activity showed several children interacting with colorful materials placed on a table. The children appeared to hold and manipulate the clay using their fingers. This activity provided hands-on learning, allowing children to interact directly with materials to create different shapes. Unlike drawing, which involves marks on a two-dimensional surface, modeling clay lets children form objects by shaping materials into three-dimensional forms.

Modeling clay has distinctive characteristics, including a soft texture, the ability to retain its pliability, and the potential for repeated use (Fitriani et al., 2023). These properties allow children to perform various physical manipulations, including pressing, rolling, flattening, and reshaping the material (Fitriani et al., 2023; Musviro et al., 2023). These activities simultaneously stimulate fine motor development and support sensory exploration.

When children can choose the shapes they want to create, modeling clay can support creativity, imagination, and decision-making (Fitriani et al., 2023). Modeling activities also encourage children to explore different possibilities and transform ideas into tangible creations (Raven & Wenner, 2022; Ardizzi et al., 2023). Sensorimotor experiences gained by manipulating materials such as modeling clay or natural clay have been shown to support children's cognitive and aesthetic development (Ardizzi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the extent of children's freedom depends on how the activity is implemented, rather than on the characteristics of the material alone.

Kartini and Sujarwo (2014) investigated using modeling clay to enhance early childhood creativity. Their quasi-experimental study identified differences in creativity before and after using modeling clay, as well as differences between groups using modeling clay and blocks. These findings indicate that modeling clay can support creativity-oriented learning in the context examined.

This research is relevant to practice at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep because it uses modeling clay as a medium for children to create forms through direct manipulation. Nevertheless, Kartini and Sujarwo focused on differences in creativity outcomes, whereas the present study focuses on activity implementation and opportunities for expression.

In practice, teachers should let children experiment with different shaping techniques and create according to their abilities. Basic techniques may be demonstrated when necessary, but children should not be required to produce identical forms. Teachers can provide technical assistance without taking over the creative process. Thus, modeling clay serves not only as a material for producing objects but also as a medium that supports exploration and the development of ideas.

Block Play as a Constructive and Imaginative Experience

Documentation of block-play activities showed several children arranging colored blocks and wooden blocks into a construction on the classroom floor. The blocks were positioned horizontally and vertically to form structures composed of multiple parts. The children were observed around the construction, handling blocks, and participating in the building process. This visual evidence indicates that the activity involved constructive processes through which objects were combined into more complex arrangements.

Block-building activities allow children to explore relationships between components and develop spatial reasoning. Block-center activities have been shown to support visual-spatial intelligence as children learn about shapes, colors, and sizes by designing and building structures (Pa'indu et al., 2021). Block play also naturally encourages observation, experimentation, and construction skills (Marhun, 2021).

When children decide what to build, these activities provide opportunities to develop imagination and creativity (Yatri, 2022). Wooden blocks in interactive learning approaches have been shown to support early childhood creativity because direct interaction with blocks stimulates imagination and abstract thinking (Ardhi & Warmansyah, 2023). Constructive block play has also been identified as an effective way to support children's creative thinking (Masnipal, 2016).

Suryana and Desmila (2022) examined creativity development through block-play activities using a classroom action research approach. Their findings documented developments in learning implementation and emphasized the importance of varying teaching materials and block shapes to prevent repetitive activities and provide children with more diverse experiences.

These findings are relevant to the practice at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep because the documentation shows the use of blocks with different shapes and colors. This variety gives children opportunities to build structures by combining different objects. However, the intended meaning of a child's construction cannot be established from photographs alone. Observation notes or

conversations with children are needed to determine whether a construction represents a particular building or results from exploratory block arrangement.

From a child-centered learning perspective, block play can support imagination when children are given opportunities to determine their constructions and modify their arrangements. Teachers can observe the process, provide sufficient materials, and ask open-ended questions when appropriate. Such facilitation allows children to remain the primary agents in the construction process. Consequently, the activity's value depends not only on the completed structure but also on the opportunities children have to develop and realize their ideas through block arrangement.

Styrofoam Crafts as a Guided Art Activity

Documentation of the sun-themed Styrofoam craft activity showed children using brushes to apply red paint to circular surfaces. Several children were positioned around the work area, with paint and small containers available nearby. The evidence illustrates painting as one stage of the creative process. In this study, the activity was part of creating a sun-themed craft using Styrofoam.

Unlike free drawing and block play, which may offer greater flexibility in determining objects or forms, the sun-themed craft had a predetermined subject. Establishing a theme does not necessarily eliminate opportunities for creativity because children can still make choices during the process, such as selecting colors, adding decorative elements, or deciding how to complete particular sections. However, the extent of these opportunities depends on the activity design and the instructions the teacher provides.

Within a child-centered learning framework, a themed activity can retain defined learning objectives and boundaries while still allowing meaningful child participation. Teachers can guide the use of materials and basic techniques, then adjust their support to children's abilities. The key consideration is how guidance is provided so that children retain opportunities to participate, handle materials, and make decisions appropriate to their developmental abilities.

Collage-Making as an Experience in Material Exploration and Visual Expression

Documentation of the collage activity showed the use of seeds or small grains, adhesive, and cardboard surfaces with pre-drawn outlines. The photographs included containers holding different materials, including containers labeled beans and corn, as well as children engaged in attaching materials. Some materials were placed on the cardboard, and adhesive was applied to the surfaces where they would be attached. This evidence indicates that collage-making involved selecting or taking materials, positioning them on a working surface, and attaching them.

Collage-making differs from other creative media because children combine small elements to produce a single visual composition. The process can offer opportunities to arrange materials, notice differences in texture and color, and coordinate hand movements as they attach objects. These activities may also support fine motor development by helping children pick up, position, and attach materials. However, such benefits should be understood as potential developmental contributions associated with the activity's characteristics rather than as improvements directly demonstrated among the children observed in this study.

Wandi and Mayar (2019) examined fine motor skills and creativity in early childhood through collage activities using a literature review approach. Their review explained that arranging, tearing, folding, and attaching materials are associated with hand–eye coordination and the development of creativity. These findings provide a basis for understanding collage-making as an activity involving both motor skills and the arrangement of visual elements.

The findings at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep are relevant to this review because the documentation shows children using small materials and adhesive to produce artwork. The use of seeds also introduces varied materials that provide visual and tactile experiences. Nevertheless, the circular

outlines on the cardboard indicate that the activity included a visual guide. This does not automatically make the activity non-child-centered, but it raises questions about how much freedom children had to arrange the materials.

If children can select materials and decide where to place them, collage-making can offer opportunities to develop compositions based on their own ideas. Conversely, if the entire arrangement is predetermined and children are only asked to attach materials according to a fixed pattern, the activity is more strongly oriented toward completing a teacher-designed task. This distinction needs to be examined through observation records. Therefore, the analysis of collage-making should consider not only the materials used but also the opportunities children have to make decisions and express their ideas.

Synthesis: The Role of Learning Materials and Teacher Facilitation in Creative Learning

A comparison of the five activities at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep reveals differences in the materials used and the creative processes involved. Free drawing involves visual representation through lines and shapes; modeling clay enables children to manipulate materials into objects; blocks are used to construct structures; sun-themed crafts involve painting a themed creation; and collage-making involves attaching materials to a surface. These variations show that creative experiences can take many forms rather than relying on a single type of artistic engagement.

This study's analytical contribution lies in examining varied creative experiences as part of child-centered learning practices. Learning materials are not seen as factors that automatically produce creativity but as resources that offer possibilities for specific activities. These possibilities depend on how teachers organize the learning process and create opportunities for children to develop their ideas. In other words, using diverse materials must be paired with facilitation that considers children's interests, abilities, and needs.

An important implication for early childhood education is balancing learning objectives, teacher guidance, and opportunities for children to make decisions. Teachers can set learning objectives and prepare safe materials while still allowing children to explore based on each activity's characteristics. In free drawing, children can be given choices regarding subjects and colors. In modeling clay activities, they can determine the shapes they wish to create. During block construction, they can develop buildings according to their ideas. In sun-themed crafts and collage-making, teachers can identify aspects of the activities that allow children to make choices without compromising learning objectives or safety.

Furthermore, learning documentation should capture not only the final products but also the process through which children interact with materials. Records of children's choices, strategies for overcoming difficulties, teacher responses, and explanations of their artwork can strengthen understanding of the creative process. This approach helps teachers reflect on their pedagogical practices and avoid assessments that emphasize only uniformity and neatness.

Overall, the findings at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep indicate that learning activities incorporated a variety of creative experiences using different materials. This diversity provides a relevant context for facilitating children's creative and imaginative expression. However, the extent to which learning was child-centered requires further examination through evidence of children's choices, initiatives, and pedagogical interactions during the activities. This study therefore emphasizes connecting the use of learning materials with the quality of teacher facilitation, ensuring that creative learning extends beyond producing artwork and gives children opportunities to develop and express their own ideas.

5. Conclusion

Child-centered learning practices aimed at facilitating children's creative and imaginative expression at RA Al Anwar Tumbrep, Bandar District, Batang Regency, Indonesia, were implemented through five activities: free drawing, shaping modeling clay into various forms, arranging blocks to construct buildings, creating sun-themed crafts using Styrofoam, and making collages from seeds. These activities provided diverse learning experiences that directly engaged children in using learning materials, manipulating objects, and producing creative work. Each activity had distinct characteristics that offered children opportunities to explore visually, manipulatively, constructively, and artistically.

The observations revealed that drawing activities used pencils and paper, modeling clay activities provided experience in shaping materials, block play involved constructing structures, sun-themed crafts involved painting, and collage-making involved attaching materials to cardboard surfaces. These variations show that creative learning can be implemented through diverse materials and activities suited to early childhood education. The findings also highlight the relevance of art activities and constructive play as contexts for facilitating children's creative and imaginative expression.

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