

*Review Paper*

***Collage, Paper Art, Reading and Writing Readiness***

## **Collage and Paper Art Activities and Preschool Children's Reading and Writing Readiness**

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### **Abstract**

**Objective:** Collage is a primary artistic activity in preschool. Collage and paper art are very important to children in this period because art helps them to develop their reasoning, creative, imaginative, and problem solving skills. Doing art enhances their motor skills, hand and eye coordination, and helps them to make cognitive advances such as learning proportions. Moreover, as a form of art it enables children to express their feelings, thoughts and wishes freely with voices, drawings and movements.

**Material and Method:** This study collected data by reviewing the literature on preschoolers and collage and paper art and considering current approaches to collage and paper art in preschool educational institutions in our country, in particular, as an important first step in learning how to read and write.

**Results:** After collecting the data, recommendations were made for educators for using collage and paper art activities as a springboard to reading and writing readiness.

**Keywords:** *Preschool, art education, paper collage, reading, writing, readiness*

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## **Introduction**

Human beings have been in a state of constant change and development since they began to exist. Changing living conditions affect the process of human development. During the period from birth to age six children make physical, social, emotional and mental developments that determine much of the rest of their lives. In our country and much of the world, this process includes preschool education (Arı, 2005). One of the reasons why preschool education is very important is that the period from birth to six years of age is when children develop most rapidly. It is also the most critical period of child development. Data from many years of research show that behaviors learned in childhood affect their attitudes, beliefs and values in adulthood, and academic skills developed in preschool positively contribute to success at higher levels of education and learning (Oktay, 2005).

Providing art education to children and making children good readers, viewers and listeners during preschool help them to understand and become critically aware of their environment (Özalp, 2012: 134). At a time when children are on the verge of becoming aware of their creativity, improving their ability to look and see by developing their memories and artistic skills, creating a suitable environment for art education, and establishing a relationship between materials and children are important goals of art education (Artut, 2004: 1).

There are a wide variety of basic techniques in teaching art in preschool. Among these activities collage and paper art is important in preschool since it is an essential step in the development of children's creative thinking skills and in their artistic education. The origin of the word collage derives from the French word for glue [*colle*]. It refers to art that made by gluing materials to a surface. In this technique, materials of different colors and textures, colored paper and paper with writing on it, fabric, tulle, reed mat, plastic, leather, tree leaves, wooden veneer and metal foil can be used (Kılıç, 1994). Collage and paper art is used by educators mostly for the psychomotor development of children, but it also positively supports children's personality structures, self-esteem, creativity, communication skills and social/emotional adjustment by affecting their emotional, physical, cognitive, social, linguistic and other developmental areas (Parlakyıldız & Yıldızbaş, 2004; Deliveli, 2012; Yangın, 2007).

It should be emphasized that the paper and collage artistic activities that can be used in most learning environments are effective in developing reading and writing skills, and

therefore they should be implemented informally and in the curriculum, too (Tuğrul & Kavici, 2002; Yangın, 2007; Deliveli, 2012). During the process of learning to read and write, children need a variety of activities, in particular, to help their small muscles develop more quickly and more healthily (Vander & Zanden, 1997). When performing folding activities, the right and left hands work together. This is important for right and left hand harmony (Tuğrul & Kavici, 2002). Accordingly, if the child can properly use these materials and play with toys, these behaviors may be considered a sign that the child has the cognitive and psychomotor maturity necessary to learn how to read and write (Oelwein 1995; Başal & Batu, 2012).

These are the major benefits that collage art offers children in terms of learning to read and write (Diğler, in 2012):

1. Actions such as tearing and using scissors improve the psychomotor skills of the children.
2. It helps them to comprehend part-whole relationships.
3. It helps the child to learn about the textures and forms of three-dimensional work on a less complicated flat surface.

Ahmetoğlu et.al. (2011) found that during preschool education, mothers also have their children color, draw, cut and paste paper and draw numbers. Mothers also show their children how to write letters, read to them and use concept books with them.

For reading and writing preparation, lessons should be organized in which the activities of cutting and tearing paper, attaching, folding, using scissors, sketching and coloring take place. These activities have the primary purposes of extending children's attention span, having them understand and carry out instructions, supporting their small muscle development and enhancing their hand-eye coordination (Parlakyıldız & Yıldızbaş, 2004; Deliveli, 2012; Yangın, 2007).

## **Material and Method**

This research is based on the descriptive survey model. As a consequence, whether collage and paper art are important or not for children's literacy skills was determined by reviewing the relevant literature. Collage art is an activity where pictures concerning a story are created by cutting or tearing various materials (paper, fabric, rope, newspaper and magazines, etc.) and attaching them to a piece of paper. This activity can be performed

individually as well as in groups. Educators need to prepare the tools and materials in advance, lead the children and plan well for the guidance phase (San, 2011).

When it comes to artistic practice, the tool is as important as the program. "*The subject is a tool rather than a goal.*" This adage is fundamental for preschool education programs. Here, it suggests that we should ask of preschool art activities: What is role of collage and paper art as a precursor to learning reading and writing, and what it should be?

Reading and writing readiness skills must be acquired by children before starting primary school (Morrison, 1998). Children must complete the level of development required to start elementary school, especially for reading. This development level is called reading readiness. Reading readiness means that the child has all the necessary knowledge and skills to start reading (Kılıçarslan, 1997). Therefore, the importance of the collage and paper art in art education programs is that it is a way to support reading readiness.

Meier (2000), Strickland and Morrow (2000), and Vadasy et al. (1998) all stress that early childhood experiences are very important in learning to read and write, and they all stress that the activities performed during this period are crucial for developing reading and writing skills (cited in Yangın, 2007).

One of the prerequisites for success in learning reading and writing is to be ready to read and write. Reading readiness refers to the development required to learn reading skills. Reading readiness is a combination of many skills. These include mental maturity, visual skills, auditory skills, speech and language development, cognitive skills, muscle development, social and emotional development, and interest and motivation (Love & Litton. 1994).

To determine if children are ready to read and write, one should observe whether they use materials and tools or not, and whether they play with their toys or not. If the child is able to use materials and can play with toys, this is a sign that the child has the cognitive and psychomotor maturity necessary to learn how to read and write (Olwein, 1995). Furthermore, there are many support activities that children must perform in the process of preparation for reading and writing. These include attention, line, maze and visual perception activities; grouping, sorting and differentiation activities; breathing, rhythm and sound activities; play, drama and art works; painting and kneading activities; paper art and collage; and activities involving waste materials (Megep, 2013). Collage art is an important component of these

activities. Origami is the primary activity of paper art. The most surprising feature of origami is that a single sheet of paper turns into a shape without being cut (Yin, 2009). In many countries, origami has become a hobby for people of all ages and all occupations, and a teaching tool used by many educational institutions (Akan, 2008). Origami is used most often to explain the interactions of surfaces, three dimensional constructed objects (Kanade, 1980) and mathematical concepts from geometry (Krier, 2007). If origami can be associated with the subjects of mathematics and geometry, these kinds of activities can improve the psychomotor development and cognitive skills of students (MNE, 2011). Polat (2013) has concluded that since origami activities enable mathematical subjects to be associated with daily life, these activities facilitate mathematics learning. Children who try to make objects using origami have to focus their attention, observe the model, and listen to instructions in order to be successful. This also teaches children patience. A review of the literature on origami shows that there are a large number of foreign studies (Kanade, 1980; Krier, 2007; Haga, 2008; Yin, 2009), whereas very few studies have been conducted in our country (Tuğrul & Kavici, 2002; Akan, 2008).

The prerequisites required for being ready to learn to write are hand-eye coordination and small and large muscle development. Activities such as paper crumpling, folding, tearing, cutting, winding rope pulleys, peeling vegetables and fruit can be done in order to improve hand-eye coordination. On the other hand, small and large muscles can be developed by activities such as flipping the pages of notebooks and books, working with materials such as clay and plastic, cutting with scissors, imitating writing with a typewriter, hitting fixed or moving balls, and playing catch (M.N.E., 2001).

The acquisition of writing skills takes place after listening, speaking and reading skills. In the process of developing reading and writing skills, the essential element that is processed in the memory is writing. Skills fulfill their functions in writing. Writing and the ability to narrate are two of the most important communication tools and have been used by humans for thousands of years (Çoşkun, 2013, Onan, 2012).

One of the major goals in collage and paper art is to ensure that children be ready for learning reading and writing. In particular, activities regarding muscle development and line activities must be done to support writing skills development. Since using paper and pencil for handwriting involves visual and motor skills (Fogo, 2008). Writing is both a physical activity

expressed in handwriting and a mental activity related to the production of written language, and is defined as making verbal language visible by using a tool. Children's handwriting develops in tandem with artistic skill and cognitive writing skill development (Havens, 2002).

According to Piaget's structuralist theory (2004), the development of children's knowledge structures are founded on their behavior and their interaction with the environment. According to Vygotsky (1962), learning happens due to environmental factors that enables children to perceive comfortably. This is because, between the ages of two and seven, children want to learn everything and do not forget what they learn. Sill (2009) states: Each child has their own learning style, and both strategies are important.

The reasons for this variation are perception, language, the materials used, concepts, creativity, cultural aspects, psychological differences, problem solving methods, social skills and aesthetic values. It is known that preschool children are involved in a sensory search, and can communicate with objects by experimenting with their hands.

In Turkey, there are few studies regarding children's reading and writing skills in preschool. These mainly concern reading skills (Alisinanoğlu and Şimşek: 2012). There are almost no studies of the factors that affect writing skills. Here are the basic reading and writing activities for preschoolers (Megep, 2013):

- Working with materials, e.g., dough, clay, etc.
- Crumpling and tearing activities
- Cutting with scissors
- Arm-hand-wrist exercises
- Practice holding a pencil correctly
- Line drawing on different surfaces
- Drawing activities with different materials
- Freehand line drawing
- Drawing without touching the boundaries specified by two lines
- Drawing lines by connecting the dots
- Drawing by copying a model
- Drawing the lines of a model by drawing a line between two lines

It may be noticed here that, as preparatory work for learning reading and writing, drawing is predominantly recommended by Megep (2013).

Similarly, some studies show that activities such as finding similarities and differences between objects and shapes in paper art and collage activities teach preschoolers to pay attention to visual information. Comparing, contrasting and grouping objects and shapes based on their various features enables children to distinguish geometric shapes according to size, volume, color and form. This supports reading and writing skills by enabling children to do letter/word analysis (Stanchfield, 1971; Barbour, 1992; Wifred, 1993; Beery & Beery, 2004; Arikök, 2001). There are some basic skills on many of the developmental tests that have been given to children worldwide for years that can be acquired by doing paper art and collage. For example, the Frankfurter Test, a concentration test given to children between five and six years of age at least fourteen days after they begin school, tests children's concept of direction (Kaymak, 1995; Raatz & Möhling 1971). The Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test is intended to detect developmental retardation, regression, function loss and organic brain damages in children examines children's ability to understand figure-ground relationships. The skills measured on the test have a positive impact on perception and cognitive skills by stimulating various brain centers (midbrain, pons, medulla and the cortex), and the six movement patterns on the test include skills that children need for learning reading and writing (Somer, 1988; Ergun, 1995; Bumin, 1998). Ferah (2001) found that first graders who attend preschool develop visual perception more successfully than those who do not. Similarly, as a sign of the physical maturity that is needed for reading and writing, there are some criteria in the research literature and anticipated by the Ministry of National Education Preschool Education Program for 36-72 Month Old Children. For example, there are thirteen attainments in the "Motor Development" section of the program, which intends for children to be: "able to make certain movements that require hand-eye coordination." Of these, the eighth item is to combine objects to form new shapes, and the twelfth item is to fold various materials in different ways. The thirteenth item is to cut materials in the desired shape, and the fourteenth item is to glue the materials as desired. These attainments are directly related to collage and paper art (M.N.E., 2011).

Çakmak (2009) found that children experience difficulties folding and joining parts, and ask for help from teachers and friends to overcome these difficulties. According to the research, paper art and collage activities effectively improve the collaboration skills of children. Tuğrul and Kavici (2002) have also claimed that paper art and collage activities

enhance communication, collaboration and observation skills. Researchers have pointed out that education and therapy programs should involve activities that support motor activities, starting primarily with desktop activities and work on paper about reading and writing (Bumin, 1998; Ergun, 1995; Marr, et al., 2001; Arıkök, 2001; Koç, 2002; Dankert, et al., 2003). Shaw (1994) has suggested that hand muscles should be strengthened with materials such as play doughs for writing skill preparation, and shapes such as circles and squares should be cut with scissors for hand-eye control. Games played with these kinds of materials aim first at rough motor development and then fine motor development.

According to San (2001), the ease with which children switch one object for another is due to their limited ability to recognize the differences between objects. Children choose a detail of an object that they recognize, and then identify the object with this single detail, without considering the object's general features.

Longcamp et al. (2005) indicated that children's writing skills progressed based on their motor skill development along with age; however, without intervention, this development may take a long time.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

All the following recommendations are made based on a review of the relevant literature.

- For the development of creative thinking and confidence feeling, in collage and paper art, children should be encouraged to create unique artworks in which they express their own feelings, rather than copying models. Educators and parents should guide children's collage art, instead of telling them what to do.
- Collage and paper art do not only enhance hand-eye coordination. These activities also play an important role in learning to read and write by requiring children to activate the relation between the cognitive level and psychomotor skills. For example, in collage and paper art, the activities of folding paper, cutting, rolling, tearing and attaching are based on the concepts of shape, the concept of length, the concept of direction, shape stability, location, spatial relationships and speed. These concepts and their link to psychomotor skills both play an important role in learning reading and writing.

- Instead of having students memorize information regarding a shape and then reproduce it to improve only their hand skills, in paper art and collage activities students should be guided to internalize the method, content, style and technical information, and develop their own observational and creative strengths.

- Children's individual differences should be taken into consideration in the process of evaluating their artworks. Children should participate at their own pace, and be treated with a tolerant and positive attitude that takes their age and developmental levels into account. Integrating thinking and hand-eye coordination can be done, but it is a challenge for preschoolers, so a motivating and encouraging attitude should characterize the feedback that children receive.

- Educators and parents should be sure that the children are ready collage and paper art and have them perform preliminary exercises before the activities.

- Educators and parents should definitely take into consideration while guiding preschoolers in collage and paper art that these are not aimless activities. Moreover, educators and parents should ensure that these activities focus on solving problems, making hypotheses, and developing concepts.

- An order ranged from simple to complex and easy to difficult should be followed when planning collage and paper art activities as preparation for learning how to read and write. This kind of learning experience contributes to the learning of concepts.

- The materials and activities should suit child's sociocultural environment and experiential background. The activities should be seen as process-oriented, rather than result-oriented.

The data collected shows that collage and paper art support the reading and writing skills of children in preschool and can also bolster their reading and writing skills when they move on to first grade. More research on the role of collage and paper art in children's development of reading and writing skills is needed, and preschool educators should research both the theory and practice of how preschoolers acquire the skills they need for reading and writing readiness.

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