Planning for the Arts in STEAM Experiences

Use this planning tool to help you brainstorm ways to elevate the arts in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) learning experiences. As you plan, consider how the experience will build on children's interests, cultures, home languages, abilities, family knowledge, and everyday ways of making sense of the world.

What STEAM concept or phenomenon would you like children to investigate?

What science, technology, computer science, engineering, arts, or mathematics concepts or phenomena will children focus on? Refer to the relevant foundations or standards, children's interests, or everyday experiences to generate ideas.

How will children investigate this concept or phenomenon?

Consider what activities children can engage in to learn about this concept or phenomenon. For instance, can they observe plants in the garden, explore and compare different sounds, or explore how water changes the shape of land?

How can the arts enhance learning of this concept or phenomenon?

Decide whether the arts may provide an opportunity to explore the concept or phenomenon directly (for instance, exploring different sounds in music), provide a medium for documenting or communicating about this concept or phenomenon (for instance, creating a dance that expresses the movement of water), or both.

What materials might you need?

Consider the resources you have and whether there are any additional materials or tools children might need to engage in the arts during the investigation. Use materials that invite multiple uses and sustained experimentation. Consider whether any adaptations are needed for children of all abilities to engage with the materials, for instance, varied textures, larger-handled tools, and other alternate ways for children to use materials.

What supports might children need to engage in the arts during the investigation?

Are children familiar with the art forms (such as drawing or painting), might they need a demonstration (for instance, on how to work with clay), or might you engage another educator or community member to support the learning experience (for instance, a dance or drama educator)? Can you provide visual directions, communication supports, partner options, or other participation options to support all children in engaging with the art forms?

How might you engage families in this learning experience?

Work with families and community members to introduce art forms, materials, or techniques that are culturally meaningful for children. When appropriate, include art objects, stories, songs, and visual motifs from children's home cultures. Treat cultural artifacts and art forms respectfully: ask about meaning, proper handling, and any cultural protocols before displaying or recreating them.

What community resources can you draw on?

Connect with local artists, cultural organizations, museums, makerspaces, libraries, or higher education arts departments. These partners can provide demonstrations, co-teach lessons, loan tools, or host field experiences that expand children's perspective and access to materials and expertise.

How will you support children in communicating about their learning?

Consider how children might use their home languages, gestures, movement, Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices, drawing, modeling, or storytelling to communicate their ideas. Build routines that prompt children to communicate about their process, choices, and discoveries. Use open-ended prompts such as: "What did you discover?" "What surprised you?" "Tell me about what you made," and "What were you trying to show?" Encourage peer-to-peer discussion and questioning to deepen observation and STEAM discourse.

How will children share their learning?

How might you support children to share and display their learning with others through process evidence (photos, sketches, prototypes) and final artifacts, alongside captions or children's quotes that explain their thinking? How will you and others respond to children's creations? It is important that responses to children's artwork are not evaluative but rather inquisitive about their process, choices, and what their creations communicate about their learning.

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