



Art in Early Childhood

How to be Led into Play: Tuning-in to Transient Process art with Nomadic Artworking, a Therapeutic Art Play Practice.

Georgia Freebody.

MArtTher, MRes, GradDipEd, BFA

Therapeutic Art Play program

University of Sydney,

freebody.g@gmail.com | therapeuticartplay.com

Georgia completed the research into the TAP program, featured in this article, as part of higher degree research studies across the disciplines of art therapy and education at Western Sydney University.

Abstract

This article examines the cultivation of process art in early education for fostering well-being, agency, and learning. It outlines the complex characteristics of process art with an explanation of 'artworking'. An example of the facilitation of artworking is provided with a description of the Therapeutic Art Play (TAP) program. TAP is a relational, adaptive approach integrating visual arts, educational, and art therapy practices. The program foregrounds agency, autonomy, and creativity through iterative routines and rituals of: consultation, mindful material sourcing, invitations to play, artworking, and reflective reporting. TAP's relational principles and practices of slipstreaming and attunement,

specifically to transient process art, are portrayed along with the underpinning research study. The article introduces nomadic artworking, a sensory and empathic methodology developed to deepen understanding of the TAP process, emphasizing embodied connection and multisensory engagement. Theoretical and practical implications for pedagogy are discussed and advocated for the integration of responsive artworking environments and practices. This work contributes to advancing arts pedagogy and advocating for child-led, materially informed co-creation in early learning.

Key Words:

Early Childhood Education, Process art, art therapy, new materialism, co-creation, child-led play. Arts- based research.

Introduction: How Can Facilitators Be Led into Play?

Early childhood learning spaces are inherently rich, filled with capable people, evolving ideas, and relational connections. Yet, these environments remain teacher-directed, often dominated by approaches privileging structured instruction over children's interpretations and sensory agency (Vaisarova, Ulferts, & Karabach, 2022). While structure can scaffold learning, overreliance on teacher-led practice can restrict children's capacity to express inner worlds through diverse modes of communication (Malaguzzi, 1993/2018).

Contemporary research increasingly calls for pedagogies that honour children as co-researchers and knowledge-makers, supporting well-being alongside academic development (Parker, Thomsen, & Berry, 2022). Such approaches recognise creativity as foundational to emotional health and cognitive growth. Within this context, process art (emphasising exploration and experimentation along with outcomes) emerges as a compelling methodology of play for cultivating intrinsic motivation, agency, and deep engagement (Jarvis, 2011; Meyerowitz-Katz & Reddick, 2017).

This article begins by outlining background and theory related to process art in early childhood education. It moves on to introduce practical structure and key principles of the Therapeutic Art Play (TAP) program. Drawing on TAP, it explores how educators can be led into play through relational, arts-based facilitation that values open-ended co-creation. The following sections present detailed descriptions of artworking practices, facilitation methods, and the program's foundational concepts of attunement and slipstreaming. The article then

examines underpinning research into TAP, with a particular focus on new approaches such as transient process art and nomadic artworking. Throughout, examples and reflections are provided to illustrate implementation in educational settings. By mapping this progression, the article aims to clarify the connections between theory, research, and practice, and to advance frameworks for empathy, reflexivity, and shared meaning-making (Freebody, 2025).

Process Art in Early Education: Exploration, Synthesis, and Expression

In early childhood education, process art makes possible conditions for learning that are embodied, sensory, and relational. It invites children, educators, and materials into dynamic intra-actions that extend beyond skill acquisition or product-based evaluation. Intra-action, as defined by Barad (2007), refers to the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. In process art it suggests that materials, time, space and participants do not exist as separate individuals prior to their relating but instead emerge through their ongoing relationships and exchanges. In this context, making art is not merely about representation, it is a practice of becoming through sensory movement, affect, and material agency (Jarvis, 2011).

Process art values experience and centres the creative journey. Creativity is initiated and sustained when the creative activity is intrinsically motivated (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Meyerowitz-Katz and Reddick (2017) describe such intrinsically motivated engagement, where autonomy, play, and sensory discovery converge to promote self-regulation and resilience. Facilitating child-led sensory-rich spaces for process art becomes vital for cultivating learning. This facilitation requires care, in this way care and learning are deeply connected: the rituals of care are relational educational practices (Garboden Murray, 2021). Within open-ended, child-led spaces, relational flow replaces instruction, facilitators and children collaborate through gestures, textures, and rhythms that enable both personal and collective expression (Freebody, 2025).

Creating environments that nurture this level of engagement requires attention to both social and aesthetic conditions. Spaces for collaborative artworking can generate emotional safety, attuned to the cultivation of empathy and belonging. Hyland-Moon has referred to tuning in with this therapeutic aspect as a 'relational aesthetics' (Moon, 2002. P. 142). Supported by relational frameworks (Jefferson & Anderson, 2017; Fraser et al., 2006), the creative process helps participants develop learning dispositions such as perseverance, curiosity, and communication. Through continuous interaction, children and educators practice what might be seen as an ecological pedagogy; learning with, rather than about, the world around them (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2021).

Part of Van Der Tuin and Verhoeff 's definition of care is acting to 'optimise conditions for growth and flourishing' (p. 41. 2022). The shift toward process-oriented artmaking is also a shift toward relationality when art is considered not as a fixed subject but as a co-created dialogue among children, educators, and materials. As Fraser et al. (2006) and Harris (2014) noted, creativity thrives in contexts of trust, curiosity, and aesthetic care. The role of the facilitator here is not to direct but to notice deeply (Buley et al., 2016), to attune to gestures, materials, and affective resonance as they unfold. In doing so, empathy and responsiveness are facilitated, creating conditions where art becomes a shared inquiry into the living world.

Evidence from art therapy and neuroscience further strengthens the connection between sensory artmaking and child well-being. Engaging multiple sensory pathways activates brain regions responsible for emotional regulation, motor coordination, and problem-solving (King, 2025; Kaimal et al., 2017). Such embodied activity supports neuroplasticity, enhancing children's capacity to adapt emotionally and cognitively to their environments (Little et al., 2022; Strang, 2024). These findings affirm what educators, artists and art therapists witness daily: Sensory exploration facilitates communication, especially where language may fall short, offering alternative routes to understanding identity, emotion, and relation (Malchiodi, 2020).

Building from this foundation, the Therapeutic Art Play (TAP) program positions process art as a transformative tool linking emotional well-being, learning and development. TAP integrates creative art therapy practices with the pedagogical frameworks of early childhood education. Operating within a relational ontology each TAP experience forms a temporary ecology of human and non-human encounters (such as between sand, paint, children, educators, space, and time) coalescing into a living art event. These encounters invite mutual transformation, where art experiences together becomes both process and product, enabling participants to access meaning through felt experience rather than description alone.

In TAP, process art becomes not simply a developmental tool but a mode of relational inquiry, where educators, as facilitators, are led into children's creative worlds through open, sensory engagement. This framework foregrounds responsiveness as a practice, that is the facilitator's capacity to slipstream alongside children's play rather than control its direction. By embracing process art as a relational phenomenon, TAP positions the artworking experience as a lively event of empathy, imagination, and well-being (Freebody, 2025).

Therapeutic Art Play: Artworking for Belonging, Being, and Becoming:

The TAP program is run, and was researched, in early education. It also has frameworks and runs programs in primary, private, and out of hours school groups. TAP central activity is 'artworking', a term developed to describe the activity of making process art. TAP is relationally responsive, child-led, and materially informed, making every session different. Having said that, TAP has a dynamic, cyclical rhythm with routines and rituals. Continuous consultation is vital, where the facilitator communicates with children, adults, and attends to environmental cues. This maintains an emergent, responsive curriculum. Next, the facilitator sources materials mindfully, considering their sensory and aesthetic qualities, environmental impact, heritage, and sustainability. These materials are then prepared to create an invitation to art play, arranged to engage participants' curiosity and facilitate meaningful interactions.

The core event is the artworking session, where the invitation to artplay is accepted and children, adults, and materials come together in open-ended, creative engagement. The facilitator holds this space with reflexive art therapy practices, assessing risk and providing containment while enabling exploration and play. Throughout, the facilitator models presence, attunement, slipstreaming, and responsive communication, nurturing safety for participants and materials to intra-act freely. The artworking has a lively arc, it is born, it artworks, it ends, the materials go still, the children drift and move, play schema goes quiet (Atherton, & Nutbrown. 2013; Freebody, 2025). A skilled facilitator will peel back or add materials, depending on needs and wants. Necessarily, artworking at times needs to end because of classroom routines, or 'rogue' elements such as visitors to the space.

Following artworking reflective reports are crafted to capture and document experiences, observations, participant voices, artworks, learning outcomes, and therapeutic mechanisms. These reports serve both creative reflection by the TAP facilitator, records, and programming tools. Including learning stories, links to national quality and learning frameworks, art responses by facilitators, reflective reports are fine tuned to the needs of the educational setting and their teaching learning teams. They inform subsequent sessions and contribute to an evolving emergent curriculum. The following images describe an invitation to play, and an artworking event, and then the artefact once the artwork has finished. These images were chosen to provide a sensory example of an artworking lifespan.

TAP program acknowledges the original indigenous custodians of the materials gathered and transformed in the art working process and returns materials to country where possible.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Figure 1. *How it Started*. Photograph: (2023) Invitation to play, Coloured sand, black felt, loose parts (paper straws, sticks, cardboard squares, clay), natural materials (leaves, seedpods, flowers, gathered on Wangal land N.S.W, in the children's playground).

Figure 2. *How it Went*. Photograph: (2023) Materials mix; fingers and arms reach across the table offering and yielding materials. Leaves crackle and break releasing a tiny scent of eucalyptus oil. Clay yields, imprints, sticks, holds. Tiny treasures gather, placed on square card.

Figure 3. *How it Finished*. Photograph: (2023) The children have drifted off or left, some taking a leaf or straw, some cradling assemblages in their hands, placing them in their lockers. The table is spread with colour and texture. The occasional sculpture on a tiny square island of neutral card.

This is a description of one singular artworking event, informed by the one before, informing the next, in a program in its fifth year of running. The TAP program established in 2020 and was further developed by a research study completed in 2023 (Freebody, 2023). The principles of the TAP approach, aligning with the findings of the research are addressed in the next section. This section firstly addresses the research project exploring TAP, then will unpack the core understanding of the creative art experience as 'Artworking'. Following this is a description of the TAP's central relational principles: 'Attunement', the capacity to stay connected to the shifting forces within the artworking assemblage; and 'slipstreaming', the fluid co-movement through affective and creative flow.

Research: Arts-Informed, New Materialist Inquiry and Diffractive Analysis

The study of TAP, conducted within early childhood education settings on Wangal land in Sydney's inner west, adopted an arts-informed, new materialist methodology to explore how art therapy practices can create a relational space for learning, and well-being. Data were drawn from artmaking sessions (with children aged 12 months to 3 years involving sand, shells, plaster, and water), alongside questionnaires with staff, observations, and reflective art responses by the researcher through a process termed nomadic artworking (Freebody, 2025). Diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007) was used to explore how participants, materials, and environments intra-acted, mutually influencing and reshaping each other. This revealed toddlers as active co-creators in evolving material assemblages, where meaning and expression emerged through embodied play.

Artworking: Multisensory Intra-Action and Relational Containment

The research found that at the centre of the TAP framework is artworking, a process of creative co-activity unfolding within shared, sensory-rich environments. Multiple agents (children, adults, materials, sounds, and time) intra-act dynamically, shaping a living, multisensory artworking event. During effective TAP events emotional safety is sustained through relational containment, an emergent, co-produced holding of space rather than a prescriptive framework (Cahill, 2015; Case et al., 2022). Containment evolves continuously through gesture, rhythm, and affective attunement, allowing aesthetic risk and emotional regulation to coexist within creative flow (Bion, 1985; Freebody, 2023).

Artworking thus functions as a dialogic practice where cognition, emotion, and materials are in relationship. The materials, sounds, time, light, and participants are all active agents in the artworking event (Barad, 2007) The facilitator becomes part of this relational ecology, joining play, noticing shifts in tempo and energy, and enabling transformation. This ecology fosters empathy, and wellbeing as belonging, sense of self and transformation are realised through artworkings ephemeral, shared, unfolding.

By positioning artworking as both process and outcome, TAP reframes creative encounters as transformative exchanges that weave together artistry, learning, and care. The research study recorded the development of specific TAP practices of artworking being attunement and slipstreaming.

Attunement and Slipstreaming: TAP Facilitation in Action

Attunement in TAP extends beyond traditional psychological models that focus solely on the carer-infant dyad (Bowlby, 1997). Instead, it encompasses the broader ecology of learning and play with humans, materials, sounds, and gestures, creating interconnected rhythms of awareness (Freebody, 2023). In this enriched relational field, attunement enables safety, empathy, and collective flow. The facilitator becomes a co-regulator within this dynamic ecology, offering containment without control. This aligns with Winnicott's (1971) notion of the *holding environment*, reframed as an unfolding creative field in which all participants co-constitute meaning through presence and sensory exchange (Freebody, 2025).

Slipstreaming, a concept adapted from aerodynamics, represents another innovative relational practice within TAP. It describes how facilitators, children, and materials can move alongside one another in rhythm and flow, co-navigating the creative process rather than directing it. Slipstreaming, dependant on attunement, is how relational energy circulates through the group. By joining in rather than guiding, encouraging, or directing, facilitators sustain momentum and responsiveness, fostering collective authorship of the artworking event (Freebody, 2025).

Artworking often produces an outcome (as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3), the nature of this product can be considered a byproduct of the artworking event. Artworking can create outcomes, connections, memories and material artifacts. However, at times, artworking can be completely transient, with no physical artifact leftover. In contemporary art parlance, this art may be considered more akin to performance art, and what is left is how the artwork is recorded, remembered, and retold.

Transient Artworking: Embracing Ephemerality and Play.

Sometimes after TAP there is no artifact or artwork to look at, touch, or take home. In TAP we come together, we make art, we work the art, 'and the art works us'. The physical aesthetic remains are photographs and recordings.

These become the artifact, symbol, container, touchstone, or souvenir of the artworking event. The following photograph, taken during a TAP session, is a description of a transient artworking event:



Figure 4. Transient Artworking. Photo: (2023). In this session the TAP facilitator arrived in the classroom of 24 preschool children (aged 4yrs) with the agreed materials. However, the classroom dynamic had changed with the teacher away sick. Quickly realising any preplanning would be inappropriate for the space, time, and culture of the classroom, the facilitator cleared a table, wrapping it in paper. This attracted eight chatting and excited children. The facilitator put out eight long-handled brushes, which were quickly snatched up.

Thick blobs of green and pink poster paint were poured onto the table, and the children used the brushes to poke, spread, and make energized marks. Soon, these marks reached towards one another, creating a web of mixed colour, thick on the table.

One participant threw down their brush and began using their hands, spreading paint and making fingerprints. Soon all the children's hands were moving in the paint, table, and paper, the lines blending all becoming one. Lifting their hands to look at them and laugh, one child moved away from the table creating a ripple of nervous excitement in the facilitator (imagining handprints across the classroom). Rushing over to the collage trolley, green and pink hands were thrust into a pile of cut coloured paper. Grabbing handfuls, they came back to the artworking and sprinkled them over the dynamic painted tabletop. Laughter broke out as the falling shapes and colours were caught and swatted. The movement grew fast and excited, the paper wet and tearing under pressure. The children clumped the paper, squeezing paint from it. The facilitator gathered two handfuls of the paint-soaked paper and tossed it theatrically in the bin; *splat!* Soon, others followed suit, scratching, tearing, and scrunching the paper before discarding it in the bin with a *splat!*

One participant then said, "I need to wash my hands," and moved to the bathroom, influencing the others to follow. While they washed and chatted, the facilitator threw eight wet sponges onto the table.

With curious looks at the table, the children returned to grab sponges that moved across the table in smooth, sweeping movements that mirrored earlier painting and tearing play. The sponges were then thrown back onto the table. Grabbing their hats the children left to continue playing outside. This artworking lasted about 15 to 20 minutes, was self-motivated and is a concise example of transient artworking. Remaining are the memories: colours, movements, laughter; the sound of running taps and chatter in the bathroom, the splat of paper and paint in the bin. The collaboration spirited creative flow, and self-regulation by the group remains vivid in the facilitators mind. All aspects of this experience were enabled by the continuous presence of the TAP facilitator.

A key finding in the TAP research was the importance of continuous facilitator presence, remaining attuned and responsive as artworking unfolds (Freebody, 2023). Without continuous presence facilitators cannot witness or effectively contain the artworking to meet the needs of the children. Containment and relational presence rely on the facilitator's ability to witness and validate each moment, noticing the sensory and emotional nuances between children, materials, and environment (Learmonth, 1994). This attentive presence is illuminated in the following figure showing how a child's gestures can be intentional, careful, and expressive. Subtle movements, scooping, touching, layering, signify rich processes of exploration, communication, and care.



Figure 5. *Intention and Care* Photograph: (2022)

Without the relational containment of the TAP facilitator, or attuned carer/teacher, the interaction between material and child, along with the child's careful intention could have been misinterpreted as messy play. The children's attunement and developing connections to the material world could easily have been missed.

Having located an account of the vitality of presence and containment of artworking, questions arise around the practicalities of attuning to these spaces. A research method for exploring the sensory aspects of TAPs practices of attunement and slipstreaming was needed to approach these questions (Freebody, 2025). Nomadic Artworking developed to critically respond, contain, and extend artworking as research.

Nomadic Artworking: Extending Practice Through Sensory Response

Nomadic artworking was developed initially as part of a research methodology that evolved into a reflective and diffractive art-based TAP practice. Extending the TAP artworking event, nomadic artworking carries the process beyond its original classroom context into new environments. Developed and defined within TAP, it draws inspiration from nomadic analysis as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Nomadic analysis in research emphasizes movement, multiplicity, and flexibility within inquiry (Cole, 2013).

A diffractive methodology was developed to study TAP that considered not only repetition, schema, pattern, and similarity but also single variants, difference, diverse modes of expression, and feedback loops. This allowed the research to intra-act with the complexity of artworking experiences in early childhood. Similarly, recognizing materials as active agents provided interesting and potentially crucial insights. Nomadic artworking served as a practice for creating an 'empathic bridge' for sensory intra-action between children, materials, and the researcher or facilitator (Freebody, 2025).

Researching TAP revealed that nomadic artworking necessarily calls on the practitioner to re-engage with similar art materials in different environments. The following example illustrates how this process appears and feels in practice, combining photographs, brief descriptions, and reflective storytelling to exemplify nomadic artworking in action.



Figure 6. Invitation to Artworking in the Toddler Room. Photograph; (2022)

Figure 7. Lively Artworking. Photograph: (2022)

Figure 6. Invitation to play including clear plastic containers and plastic and wooden scoops, water, white paint, grey felt base, sand, shells, and stones gathered from Wodi Wodi and Dharawal country (N.S.W, Australia), and native flowers from Gadigal land (N.S.W, Australia).

Figure 7. Children (five two-year-olds) and a staff member drift into the space, drawn by the textures and colours waiting on the mat. Sitting down they shuffle closer, creeping toward bowls, scoops, and flowers. One folds forward to watch quietly, while another reaches out, touching a scoop, switching hands with intention, movement and exclamations as sand pours between fingers and thumbs.

When the staff member sits on the floor, a rhythm forms, scooping, tipping, and patting. Sand blends when water and poster paint is added. Liquid threads through sand, clumping it into textured mounds. Brushes slide; deliberate lines disappear beneath new layers. Children narrate their actions; voices rise and fall, bodies move, mirrored by each other, sound and movement echo. Hands, legs, and tools overlap, pushing, scraping, sprinkling, colour, weight, and rhythm.

Warm water is introduced, voices chant “wa-wa,”. The materials shift again, sticky turns to silky, hands splash and smooth the surface. One child rolls a foot across a spiky flower, laughing, another swirls the last puddle of paint and sand. “I done, bye,” calls a voice, the materials rest, holding traces of touch, colour, and shared expression.



Figure 8. *Invitation to Nomadic Artworking in Response* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 9. *Transient Nomadic Artworking Response* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 8. Similar materials to the artworking experience in TAP were placed carefully in the researcher’s studio space in her apartment.

Figure 9. In a quiet, solitary space, everything is still, without the movements and sounds of the classroom the coarse scraping of sand across surfaces sounds sharp, it is dry and raspy, unexpectedly loud. With sleeves rolled the material dialogue is re-engaged. The absence of parallel play is striking; where children once mirrored, layered, and echoed movement and sound, this engagement becomes singular and inward.

Dry sand moves, is scooped, pouring, shifting, changing tones as sands meet and mix. When viscous white paint is introduced, textures merge, sand clumps, resisting clear marks, rolling slowly through the paint’s density. Clear containers become vessels to see through, miniature worlds of shifting clarity and detail, their mingled textures prompt quiet amusement.

The addition of water transforms tempo. Liquid collapses resistance; paint and sand find fluid motion, activating embodied memories of play on the beach, sand, shell, and water reunited. As the materials revive in contact, their texture evokes recognition, as though remembering the play's origins. A soft tapping with a flower soaked in paint recalls a child's earlier gesture, closing the loop between the collective artworking in the classroom and this solitary extension. Memories of the feel and sound, as materials clump on fingers and nerves respond to materials spilling onto the table.

The above depiction of nomadic artworking describes a concept grounded in new materialist theory (Barad, 2007). This approach challenges anthropocentric perspectives by distributing agency across bodies, materials, environments, and temporalities. TAP's relational ontology aligns with this approach, whereby artworking functions as a dynamic assemblage of intra-actions producing emergent experiences of learning, belonging, and well-being. Nomadic artworking serves both as methodological tool and creative practice, attuning facilitators and researchers to the multisensory, embodied complexity of young children's artworking in TAP.

The potential benefits of nomadic artworking include heightened empathic understanding of the sensory worlds explored during artworking events. This method expands opportunities for critical practice, and the cultivation of an ethical, responsive posture toward creative co-creation. By allowing facilitators, teachers, researchers, and art therapists to move beyond fixed sites and moments of artworking, this approach promotes sustained sensitivity to the evolving nature of embodied play and creativity. Implied are the fostering and support of intergenerational and multi-sited dialogues (Den Haese, Keyte-Hartland, Lowings, & Verhaeghe. 2019) that enrich pedagogical, therapeutic, and artistic knowledge (Freebody, 2025).

Nomadic artworking extends the core principles and experiences of Therapeutic Art Play, drawing our attention beyond the classroom, embodying movement, sensory richness, and relational intra-action as essential pathways to deepening creative engagement. This practice not only enriches facilitation and pedagogy but also invites ongoing reflection and ethical responsiveness, underscoring the dynamic, embodied nature of early childhood artmaking. As such, nomadic artworking bridges immediate educational encounters with broader inquiries into how sensory, material, and relational practices cultivate belonging, empathy, and transformation. Just beyond the scope of this article lies a view of reciprocity from these spaces, from the portal into artworking in early education. This study leads to questions about how we may be inspired or informed by the creative inquiry of very young artists.

Conclusion

Nomadic artworking represents an embodied explorative extension of Therapeutic Art Play. It embraces characteristics of process art towards providing a portal into young artists experiences. Based partly on new materialist thinking, it offers facilitators, therapists, and educators a reflective and embodied methodology to attune to the evolving complexities of early childhood artworking. By moving beyond fixed spaces and times, nomadic artworking fosters sustained sensory awareness and opens dialogic intra-actions that enhance empathic understanding, co-creative responsiveness, and a practice of deeply noticing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Through its iterative and immersive engagement, nomadic artworking is described as deepening participation by acknowledging the agency of materials, gestures, and environments (Barad, 2007) alongside those of children and adults. This relational approach challenges aspects of hierarchical models of teaching and learning, promoting shared authorship and enabling child-led creativity to flourish.

The insights offered by the principals and practices of TAP hold implications for early childhood education and art therapy. They advocate for pedagogies that prioritize embodied presence, sensory exploration, and ethical collaboration. By foregrounding multisensory, affective, and material intra-actions, this practice cultivates environments where children's capacities, experience, and creative processes are valued as integral to holistic development (Freebody, 2025).

In sum, this article set out to describe characteristics of process art. What was discovered was a diverse and changeable space for the experience, synthesis, and expression of play. It explored how educators and facilitators can be carefully led into this play, moving beyond directive teaching to become partners in dynamic creative encounters. Through the relational practices of slipstreaming, attunement within artworking, and nomadic artworking, new pathways for empathy, sensory attunement, and responding to the many languages of children were revealed. These approaches contribute to a shifting paradigm, one that recognises early childhood education as a dynamic, relational field. This shift honours play and artworking as methods for fostering well-being, learning, and connection. Such a shift considers the classroom as a place informed by the creative methodologies of very young artists. To facilitate in this way is to be led into a community shaped by the creativity, play, and rights of young children themselves.

Figures.

Figure 1. *How it Started. Invitation to play.* Photograph: (2023)

Figure 2. *How it Went. Materials mix.* Photograph (2023)

Figure 3. *How it Finished. Process is product.* Photograph: (2023)

Figure 4. *Transient Artworking.* Photograph: (2022).

Figure 5. *Intention and Care.* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 6. *Invitation to Artworking in the Toddler Room.* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 7. *Lively Artworking.* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 8. *Invitation to Nomadic Artworking in Response.* Photograph: (2022)

Figure 9. *Transient Nomadic Artworking Response.* Photograph: Georgia Freebody (2art work2

References

Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to “The social psychology of creativity”*. Westview Press.

Atherton, F., & Nutbrown, C. (2013). *Understanding schemas and young children: From birth to three*. Sage.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

Bion, W. R. (1985). Container and contained. *Group Relations Reader*, 2(8), 127–133.

Bowlby, J. (1997). *Attachment and loss: Volume 1: Attachment*. Pimlico.

Buley, J., Buley, D., & Collister, R. C. (Eds.). (2016). *The art of noticing deeply: Commentaries on teaching, learning and mindfulness*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-4438-9788-4>

Cahill, H. (2015). Rethinking role-play for health and wellbeing: Creating a pedagogy of possibility. In K. Wright & J. McLeod (Eds.), *Rethinking youth wellbeing: Critical perspectives* (pp. 127–142). Springer.

- Case, C., Dalley, T., & Reddick, D. (2022). *The handbook of art therapy*. Taylor & Francis.
- Cole, D. R. (2013). Lost in data space: Using nomadic analysis to perform social science. In R. Coleman & J. Ringrose (Eds.), *Deleuze and research methodologies* (pp. 219–237). Edinburgh University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity*. HarperCollins.
- Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A., Osborne, M., Lasczik, A., Malone, K., & Knight, L. (2021). *Mudbook: Nature play framework*. Queensland Government Department of Education.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980/1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980)
- Den Haese, J., Keyte-Hartland, D., Lowings, L., & Verhaeghe, K. (2019). Art in curriculum: Blurring the boundaries. *Art in Early Childhood*. <https://www.artinearlychildhood.org/content/uploads/2022/02/Art-in-Curriculum-Blurring-the-Boundaries.pdf>
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. Capricorn Books.
- Fraser, D., Price, G., & Henderson, C. (2006). Relational pedagogy and the arts. *SET: Research Information for Teachers*, (3). <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/relational-pedagogy-and-arts>
- Freebody, G. (2023). *Therapeutic art play: A space for artworking research in a toddler classroom* (Master's thesis, Western Sydney University). https://padlet.com/Georgia_Freebody/georgia-freebody-research-therapeutic-art-play-a-space-for-a-dn5yy0s83627hue6
- Freebody, G. (2025). Therapeutic art play: Art therapy practices in education to nurture autonomy, creativity, and connection. *JoCAT*, 20(2). <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-25-freebody>
- Garboden Murray, C. (2021). *Illuminating care: The pedagogy and practice of care in early childhood communities*. Exchange Press.
- Harris, A. (2014). *The creative turn*. Sense Publishers.
- Hyland Moon, C. (2002). *Studio art therapy*. Jessica Kingsley.
- Jarvis, M. (2011). What teachers can learn from the practice of artists. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 30(2), 307–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2011.01694.x>
- Jefferson, M., & Anderson, M. (2017). *Transforming schools: Creativity, critical reflection, communication, collaboration*. Bloomsbury.

Kaimal, G., Ray, K., & Muniz, J. (2017). Functional neuroimaging studies of the impact of art making on the brain: A review and synthesis. *Art Therapy, 34*(2), 81–88.

King, J. L. (2025). *Art therapy and the neuroscience of trauma: Theoretical and practical perspectives* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Learmonth, M. (1994). Witness and witnessing in art therapy. *Inscape, 1*, 19–22.

Lenz Taguchi, H. (2009). *Going beyond the theory/practice divide in early childhood education: Introducing an intra-active pedagogy*. Routledge.

Little, L. M., Ausderau, K. K., Freuler, A., Sideris, J., & Baranek, G. T. (2022). Caregiver strategies to sensory features for children with autism and developmental disabilities. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, Article 905154. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.905154>

Malaguzzi, L. (1993/2018). The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach. *Exchange, 195*, 56–60.

Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). *Trauma and expressive arts therapy: Brain, body, and imagination in the healing process*. Guilford Press.

Meyerowitz-Katz, J., & Reddick, D. (2017). *Art therapy in the early years: Therapeutic interventions with infants, toddlers, and their families*. Routledge.

Parker, R., Thomsen, B. S., & Berry, A. (2022). Learning through play at school: A framework for policy and practice. *Frontiers in Education, 7*, Article 751801. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2022.751801>

Strang, C. E. (2024). Art therapy and neuroscience: Evidence, limits, and myths. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, Article 1484481. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1484481>

Vaisarova, J., Ulferts, H., & Karabach, T. (2022). Is more child-initiated always better? Exploring relations between child-initiated and teacher-directed instruction and school readiness in preschool children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 59*, 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.01.004>

Van der Tuin, I., & Verhoeff, N. (2022). *Critical concepts for the creative humanities*. Rowman & Littlefield. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781538147757>

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Tavistock.