

EARLY YEARS SESSION PLAN

(total number of children: 17)

Session 1

Aims

- Improved brush handling
- To introduce simple colour mixing with the primary colours

Background

In theory all colours can be made using the three primary colours, yellow, blue and red. Another way of saying this is that each primary is the absence of all other colours, namely the other two primaries.

In practice we can only approximate this and the quality of the paints used and how close they are to the primaries is an important factor in how close theory can be adhered to.

With early years the effectiveness of this work is constant repetition. Young children love doing this and can be kept engrossed for extended periods of time during which the penny drops.

Materials

Poster paints: primary blue, primary red and primary yellow

plenty of large round brushes

palette for each child

A3 cartridge paper cut to a square. Keep the remaining strip.

Aprons

water pot

Central table

Preliminary Activity

The children are seated down and told to move very very slowly. This is to calm them and introduce a calm and reflective approach. Each child introduces themselves. You introduce yourself. Then everyone gets up very, very slowly and walks slowly to a table where a brush and palette awaits them.

They are not told to pick up the brush and shown how to hold it with “grippy fingers”. Then they go through a series of movements with the brush to engender slow and careful movements. First big horizontal circles slowly with the brush in an upright position. Then change direction. Then follow this with small slow circles first in one direction then in the other direction. Finally draw the brush from side to side, “pulling” the brush along the line of movement.

At all times stress slow movements and correct brush hold. These exercises help the children prepare and achieve better control of the brush and avoid “scrubbing” during painting.

Activity 1

Time Approximately 1 hour

prepare separate tables with palettes containing one of the three primaries.

Keep the palettes with one particular colour together, do not have a table with two different primaries.

Each child paints a simple shape in the middle of the paper.

I demonstrate this to the whole group... stressing the central placing of the shape and that it is, “not too large, or not too small”. The shape should cover approximately 50% of the paper area.

If a child paints near the edge as many children this age group are apt to do, I gently point out the middle of the page and suggest changing the paper for a new piece.

While painting I watch out for appropriate brush use. There is often a tendency for the child to push the bristles with the paint. A gentle reminder and demonstration of slow “pulling” of the brush with any necessary follow up usually remedies any difficulties.

Pulling the brush and paint, slowly, helps with more accurate and controlled application of paint.

When the first shapes have been completed, the children move onto the next palette and complete another shape in another of the primary colours.

A final third shape is painted on a third sheet of paper.

At the end the children should have three squares of cartridge paper with a large shape

The children are constantly reminded of the three colours they are using; blue, yellow and red.

Activity 2

45 minutes

Each palette to include two of the three primary colours each pair on different tables.

At the beginning of this session the children are asked to choose one of the three colour shapes they have painted. Try to encourage their choosing roughly equal numbers of each colour. This helps to apportion resources evenly.

Divide the children in three groups with their chosen painting, one group for each of the three colours.

Ask each group in turn which colour they have chosen. Once you have gone through all the groups ask which of the three colours they have not chosen, which two of the three colours are missing. Do this with each group

The children are then asked to stand at a palette with the two colours not in their chosen painting.

Go through the brush holding and exercise drill.

Gather the children round the central table and demonstrate the next activity.

Take a strip cut when making the A3 square sheets. Take a palette with two of the primaries, it does not matter which. The paint each colour with neat daubs at either end of the paper. Then mix the third colour in between the two primaries so you get an in between secondary. Daub this in the middle between the first two colours.

At this point ask the children what colour you have made using the first two. Say yellow and blue to make green. Then add a little more of one colour, put this along the line and show that another colour has been made, (a blue green). Do the same by adding more yellow to the green to make a yellow green. Point out how you have made several colours with just the two original ones.

One point; for children using yellow is that children they may have difficulty in keeping the yellow “clean”. This can apply to other colours too. In order to avoid this two brushes should be used. One is reserved for one of the primaries, say yellow. The other for the colour with stronger tinting strength. This way when mixing orange or green, the yellow is kept as clean as possible.

Another point at this stage is to keep the use of water to a minimum. It is common practice to use water to thin the paint and clean brushes. The problem with this is that children soon get into problems because the water becomes almost instantly muddied. Poster paints are usually liquid enough not to need dilution. Water should be reserved to adding to the primary colours to render them more liquid.

If a brush becomes “dirty” it is better to replace it for another one. After all, painters use many brushes when working and not just one!

The children are then sent to create their own colour strip with the words, see how many colours you can get using just your two colours.

The greatest difficulties encountered are:

- achieving a “balanced” orange rather than overwhelming the colour with red;
- keeping the yellow clear when mixing a green

- achieving a balanced violet rather than a purple. It is difficult to assess the mixed colour as the two primaries are the darkest ones. Children think in terms of purple rather than violet. This can be remedied by encouraging adding more blue to the mixture (as blue is the paint with weaker tinting strength).

If enough time is given to this activity children soon get the hang of it. The next activity reinforces this one and starts to underline the interplay between the three primary colours and the resulting secondary ones.

At the end of the session the children are seated in groups according to which two colours they mixed.

They are asked the following questions each one in turn over and over again until a rhythm and understanding is reached.

Which colour did you make?

Which two colours did you use to get green/violet/orange? (two primaries)

Which colour did you not use? (the third missing primary colour)

Confusion arose around the following points:

They used the two primaries not the mixed secondary. Confusion also arises with the third question which is somewhat abstract. Some children are apt to say any colour they did not use. At this point, in preparation for the next activity, it is worth underlining the fact that we are just using three colours, red/yellow and blue. All the other colours are made using just these three. This is a concept that is eventually grasped or glimpsed by most children. It helps to show the only three bottles used to mix all the colours to reinforce the fact that we are using only the three primaries. Confusion may be arising due to the use of language in that it is perfectly logical to arrive at the conclusion that we are painting with all the colours. The point is that all these colours are possible with and arisen out of just three colours.

These difficulties start to be resolved at the end of the next activity.

A record is made of which secondary colour each child mixed.

Session 2

Activity 3

1 hr 45 mins to 2 hr

This session follows on from activities 1 and 2.

Part 1

The children are seated again and slowed down. Each one is given the picture from activity 1 that corresponds to the missing primary in activity 2. They are then

asked which two colours they mixed the day before to make the secondary. Say, yellow and blue to make green. Then they are asked which of the three colours red, yellow and blue is missing from that mixture. That is the colour they are holding in their hand.

The children are told to stand by a palette containing the two colours they mixed in activity 2.

Go through the brush holding and painting drill.

Then gather the children around a table and demonstrate what they are going to do today.

They are to mix the two primaries not on their picture to make the secondary. Then the area surrounding the shape is painted, care been taken at the edges and show that all the blank area is to be covered. Stress slow brush strokes, pulling the paint, not pushing or scrubbing.

The children are sent back to their palettes to begin.

This first part takes about 1 hour while the children are repeatedly reminded of the relationship between the three primaries. That is to say, we are using only three colours to make all the other colours.

Part 2

At this point yesterday the children had a 15 minute break. This time however, the children did not have a break as they were so engrossed in their painting and an interruption would have served no good purpose other than disrupt their concentration.

The children were constantly reminded: to “pull” the brush, not scrub or push it; to work slowly and to use a new brush to keep one of the colours clean, normally yellow.

I found that working with water to dilute paint and clean the brushes was counter-productive as explained earlier. when the water pots were removed, the painting in terms of control and and colour purity was improved.

When children finish their painting towards the end of the session they are allowed to choose whichever two colours they want to paint with. At this point one observes that the pupils are able to make a reasoned choice, with controlled actions in response to the colours themselves.

After this the children are gathered together and the painting laid out on the floor in a grid pattern to show how colourful and varied the overall effect is. Three children are then chosen and each one is given one of the bottles to hold.

“We have made all these colours using just which three colours?”

Red, yellow and blue

Then the colour mixing is reinforced with questioning on how we produce the secondary colours green, violet and orange.

Finally the abstractly difficult concept of what a primary colour is can be introduced. That is to say, that all colours can be mixed from the three colours but yellow cannot be mixed from any other colours. The same applies to red and blue. So that all other colours can be produced by using at least two of the primary colours but the primaries cannot in turn be mixed from any other colour.

The children are then dismissed.

This concept although hard to grasp is the foundation for a great deal of colour control in later years.

The extension to this is to complete the other two primary colour shapes with their complementary mixed colours.

It is important to continually remind the children of the relationship between the colours and how other colours are mixed from the three primaries.



Thomas laying down his red shape at the end of the first activity. Teachers commented on how the children painted such regular shapes and on the whole managed to place them at the centre of the paper. This goes against the common practice to “attach” a shape to one or more of the sides of the paper.



Melody mixing her secondary colour and creating her colour strip. This is quite a difficult task for a small child. Although a great deal was expected of the children, most if not all managed competently. Some needed more help than others but at no time did the teachers do the work for them.



Thomas having mixed his green is trying to wash brushes. It is better to have a number of brushes for each colour, one particularly for yellow.



Joe mixing violet. He worked in stripes on his strip of paper. At first most if not all of the pupils tended to mix “purple” as this is what they expected to get. However, with a little help they understood that by adding more blue than red a violet could be achieved - a more balanced secondary. This introduces the concept that to achieve a colour unequal amounts of pigment may be required (due to differing tinting strengths).



Chloe made great progress throughout the two afternoons. Here she is mixing orange from yellow. The three pieces of work on the table show the difficulty that arises when mixing orange; that red tends to predominate again due to differences in tinting strength and the ease with which yellow can become contaminated. Once pointed out the children were able to improve on their colour mixing control.



At the end of the second day the children were seated in a circle to discuss the results of mixing two of the three colours. At this point they were asked which colours they used to mix and what the result was. Then which of the three colours was missing to reinforce the relationship between the three primary colours.



Having established the “missing” colour in the mixture, the children were asked to choose that colour shape from what they had done previously and to form three groups according to which colour they had. This exercise was quite challenging but did go towards the overall effect. The children were then asked to hold up their colour when called after which they were to hold up their colour if it went to make up one of the three (secondary) mixed colours when I called it out. Although this did prove confusing for some of the pupils, others did grasp the idea and eventually most were able to respond correctly.



Melody, on the second day, surrounding her primary shape with its secondary mixed complementary, The children responded to the “pull” the brush and paint and “slowly” drill well.



Emily was ill the day before so she had to plunge straight into the primary shape and secondary surround in one go. This did not present a problem and she soon picked up confidence in what she was doing.



Again Chloe, mixing her orange to surround the blue shape. Giordan likewise whilst Edward at the far end of the table continually painted two shapes despite being reminded to paint only one. He was allowed to continue as his quirky approach did not impede either his enjoyment of or progress in using paint.



Max made rapid progress alternating between confident understanding and making simple mistakes. However, he was able to achieve good results and was always happy to do more. Pierce, opposite, was working with the same colour combination demonstrating his careful approach and technique.



Here Jack working after having grasped the importance of slow brush work and pulling the paint along. His mixed secondary shows the difficulty boys have in getting away from the concept of “purple” from red and blue. This needs addressing in that it tends mixing towards brown muddiness with a predominance of red.



Here Holly is finishing her painting showing an ability to draw a regular shape, centred with a clean complementary colour surrounding it. She used more water than would have been ideal in most cases for the sake of paint control. However, she managed to keep the layer controlled and clean resulting in a sophisticated piece of paint-craft.



Max with his free choice. Max went on to complete the unpainted areas (which he had left so because his name was on the upper side so that it would not be obscured) with a rich orange. He was able to keep colours clean and bright. Further along, Daniel embarked on a complex composition keeping his colours clean albeit with a tendency towards tertiary colours.



Holly having completed her free choice shows the inversion of her previous composition this time using an orange circle with blue surround.



This is at the end of the day when the children can see the end result by putting the finished painting together. By holding the paint bottles the fact that all this was possible with only three colours is reinforced.



From the other end.

Evaluation

Much of the success of the activities depends on the responding to the dynamics of the children, adults and facilities.

Factors to be born in mind include:

to have as large a space as possible, preferably a school hall;

to limit the use of water, it is better to have a plentiful supply of brushes;

to remember to name all the pieces of paper on the back;

make a note of which sheet is to be used in the second session at the end of the first;

not having a break is better for concentration and continuity;

demonstrate at each step;

keep repeating the relationships between colours;

ideas for further work

The work done only covered a small, albeit valuable, part of handling colour. Ideally children should have access to such sessions once a week, once a month at least. It is also important that what the children have learnt is reinforced by teachers during their other school activities.