

WHICH ONE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL? CREATIVE ARTS VERSUS STEREOTYPED ART ACTIVITIES¹

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates pre-school education children's views on product and process of art activities after participating in stereotyped and creative art activities. Evaluation of pre-service teachers who applied these art activities are also within the scope of this study. Six pre-service teachers and 96 children who attended practicum schools of those teachers participated in this study. Children first engaged in stereotyped art activity, and then a creative art activity was applied. Afterwards children were asked to evaluate the art activities that they experienced. Content analysis is utilized to analyze data. Findings revealed that children's products in stereotyped activities were almost identical. However, children expressed that they preferred stereotyped art activities. This preference might be due to the classroom environment that gives more importance to the product rather than the process. Pre-service teachers stated that they liked creative activities more as these activities enable children to initiate their own ideas.

Keywords: early childhood education, art activities, creativity, pre-service teachers.

HANGİSİ DAHA GÜZEL? YARATICI SANATA KARŐI KALIPLAŐMIŐ SANAT ETKİNLİKLERİ

ÖZ

Bu alıőmanın amacı okul öncesi eğitime devam eden çocukların öğretmen merkezli kalıplaőmış sanat etkinlikleri ile yaratıcı sanat faaliyetlerine katıldıktan sonra ürün ve süreç hakkındaki görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu sanat faaliyetlerini uygulayan son sınıf öğretmen adaylarının uygulamalarını deęerlendirmeleri de alıőmanın kapsamı içindedir. Bu alıőmaya, 6 okul öncesi eğitimi son sınıf öğretmen adayı ve onların öğretmenlik uygulaması dersini aldıkları anasınıflarındaki 96 çocuk katılmıştır. Çocuklara önce kalıplaőmış bir sanat etkinlięi olan civciv yaptırılmış ardından açık uçlu yaratıcı sanat etkinlikleri uygulanmıştır. Daha sonra çocuklardan ve öğretmen adaylarından uyguladıkları etkinlikleri deęerlendirmeleri istenmiştir. alıőmanın verilerini analiz etmek için içerik analizi teknięi benimsenmiştir. Kalıplaőmış etkinliklerde çocukların ortaya ıkardıkları ürünler birbirinin hemen hemen aynısı olmuştur. Yine de çocuklar yaratıcı sanat etkinlikleri yerine kalıplaőmış etkinlikleri tercih ettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Bu durumun süreç yerine ürüne önem verilen sınıf ortamından kaynaklandıęı düşünülmektedir. Öğretmen adayları ise çocuklara seçme Őansı tanıdıęı için yaratıcı sanat etkinliklerini daha çok sevdiklerini ve ilerde uygulayacaklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: okul öncesi eğitim, sanat etkinlikleri, yaratıcılık, öğretmen adayları.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of art education for young children was first raised by Froebel, who was considered the father of preschool education. Froebel has involved art activities in educational program. He developed activities namely "Occupation" including working with dough, drawing, painting, folding paper, embroidery, and weaving (Ulutaş & Ersoy, 2004). Pioneering of progressive education Dewey (1934) also emphasized that art education is as important as science courses. He further argued that children express their deepest feeling and thought by art and people who could not gain this ability would not be happy. Dewey stated that art education is not solely for children who have the artistry skill; instead it is necessary for all children's emotional development.

Montessori also gives importance to art education as she believed that children should involve all of their five senses in education actively. Aesthetic learning environment in her educational approach is highly related with art education. Similarly, according to Regio Emilia approach, art education is an indispensable part of educational programme. In fact, there is a teacher (Atelierista) in charge of art education and class (atelier) to conduct art activities (Wardle, 2009).

Art education activities are conducted in schools systematically or unsystematically and children get lots of pleasure from them. While doing art activities, children might seem that they are messing themselves and their surrounding, yet they are having a great time and also learning several new things by art (Ulutaş & Ersoy, 2004). Well-designed art activities offer meaningful learning opportunities to children and increase their sense of accomplishment as well as self-confidence (Kim, Park, & Lee, 2001). When the teaching environment was arranged to give children the opportunity to freely interact with different materials, it was observed that children loved the school more and their art products represented better stylistic features (Kocamanoglu & Acer, 2015). Combining two applied disciplines such as pedagogy and art can contribute to creativity development. As such, it is important for the teachers to find the activities that encourage children to ask

questions, offer answers, encourage children to acquire new skills, and think (Scoditti, Clavica, & Caroli, 2011). When the art activities are applied in pre-school education, more importance should be given to the process rather than the product (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). During the art activities, children think deeply about the subject, express their original ideas, and learn about the physical characteristics of these materials while working with various materials. Learning through art enables children to establish connection among emotion, ideas, and words (Nimmo, 1998). The efforts of children in art activities and the quality of their work are influenced by how adults evaluate children's products. If children realize that their art products are appreciated and respected their self-esteem is increased (Katz, 1998).

The art activities in the Pre-School Education Program are defined as allowing the children to solve problem, think creatively, and imaginatively. Besides, those activities should be designed to help children to think critically and solution oriented. Art activities should enable children to develop communication skills by expressing themselves. They should also be organized to help the children to know and understand themselves, the culture surround them, and the other cultures. In doing so, children would be able to learn respecting differences (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2013).

The purpose of this study is to investigate pre-school education children's views on the product and process of art activities after participating in teacher-directed stereotyped activities and creative art activities. Evaluation of senior pre-service teachers who applied these art activities are also within the scope of this study. Precisely, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do pre-school education children evaluate the product and process of art activities after participating in teacher-directed stereotyped activities and creative art activities?
- How do senior pre-service teachers evaluate teacher-directed stereotyped activities and creative art activities after applying them?

ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

Phases of Implementation

The participants of this research are six senior pre-school education teachers who were taking teaching practice course and 96 children in their practicum schools. Table 1 presents the demographic information of children.

Table 1. The Demographic Data of Children Who Participated in the Study

Senior Pre-service Teacher Codes	Socio-economic Status of the Class	Number of Children in the Class	
		Female	Male
T1	Low	7	7
T2	Low	8	6
T3	Middle	9	6
T4	Middle	12	14
T5	Low	5	7
T6	Low	7	7

Before starting to work, senior pre-service teachers were interviewed about the art activities that they and the class teachers use in the classroom. There are no well-proven activities that improve children's creativity. However, activities that encourage children to think, to question, to trigger their curiosity, and to allow them to experience different skills from the objects, events, phenomena and situations improve children's creativity (Kocamanoglu & Acer, 2015). The researcher is a faculty member in the pre-school education program and she lectures school experience course, which requires researcher to be active in pre-schools, teaching practice, community service, and research project courses. During these lectures, the researcher observed the art activities. Although the Pre-School Education program is child-centred, teacher-centred activities are often used in pre-schools. These observations were influential in the emergence of this study. Six senior pre-service pre-school education teachers who attend the teaching

practice course in different pre-schools participated in the study. The participating senior pre-service pre-school education teachers are all women and their ages range from 22 to 23. Prior to the study, pre-service teachers were interviewed about art activities in the pre-school classes which they were teaching for teaching practice course. They mentioned that the art activities in pre-schools are based on teacher-centered activities and these activities are stereotyped activities that are based on cutting, folding, and gluing by teacher's instructions. Literature review was conducted in order to find six activities that were not experienced previously by children and pre-service teachers. It was ensured that these six activities allowed students to make a choice and decision (AI-Girl Tan, 2007; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Fox & Schirrmacher, 2014; MoNE, 2013; Wardle, 2009). Then, pre-service teachers showed these activities to the class teacher to ensure that the class did not engage in a similar activity before. Once open-ended activities have been identified, a stereotyped activity has been determined for comparison. The researcher decided to apply the chick activity as it has been exhibiting for many years on school boards.

Tools and Equipment

- A4 sized paper
- Scissors
- Handcrafted Papers
- Stone
- Crayon
- Glue
- Tape

Contextual Information

Each pre-service teacher chose one of the designated art activities. Pre-service teachers carried out the chick activity and a creative activity at different times on the same day, and then asked children questions about both activities. Chick activity took 20-30 minutes whereas the creative activities lasted around 30-45 minutes. The study was conducted in April as the activities also included outdoor facilities. Table 1 presents the pre-service teachers and the activities they carried out in the class.

T1. Making Copy

Children are asked whether they have ever put a coin under a piece of paper and copied its shape. For those who have never done it, the teacher gathers the children around the table, gives each of them a coin and asks them to make copies of the coins by first showing how to do it. They then distribute A4 size paper to the children and ask them to make copies of the different textures they find in the garden. Children then go to the garden together with the teacher, make copies by placing the paper on the grass, tree, iron door, or floor. Children hang the copies on the board in the classroom and they discuss each copy and try to predict the surfaces that copies belong to.

T2. Image Completion

The pre-service teacher brings illustrated journals and newspapers to the class, and asks the children to have a look at the magazine and newspaper pictures, cut out a picture of their choice, and paste it onto A4 paper. Then children are asked to complete the pictures they have pasted as they wish.

T3. Stone Painting

Two pieces of stone are distributed to children and they are asked to paint the stones in an identical way. Then, the pairs of stones are collected and hidden somewhere in the garden. They exchange stones left in children's hands and go out to the garden again to find the pair of the stones.

T4. Drawing Shadow

The children are asked to choose a toy and then to go out to the garden, but they are advised to choose a toy whose shadow they can draw. The children are scattered in the garden and place their paper on the shadow of the toy. They draw the shade of their toys with paint or pencils. When they return to the class, they exhibit their drawings and the children look at each picture one by one and try to guess what it is.

T5. Painting on the Ceiling

Children are read a story about submarine. Then teacher tells children: "*We always paint on the table. Let's try something different today and let's go under the table and paint.*" The children lie on their backs and go under the table. They make a painting with the paint or the pencils they want on the piece of paper pasted under the table.

T6. Creating Shapes from the Sand

The pre-service teacher brings a bucket of sand to the classroom and asks children what they could do with sand. After discussing what could be done with the sand, children are given some sand to form any shape they want.

After all these activities and chick activities, the following questions were asked to the children:

- Which of the activities did you like the most?
- If we are to do one of these activities tomorrow, which one do you prefer? Why?
- What did you want to describe in this picture?
- Which of these activities do you find nicer?

After completing the activities, the pre-service teachers evaluated the activities they carried out in terms of children, teachers, and the program. The data of this research are the products of art activities created by 96 children, the answers of children to the questions, and the evaluation of the stereotypical and creative art activities conducted by the pre-service teachers in accordance with the Preschool Education Program. Content analysis technique was used to analyse the data. The purpose of content analysis is to collect and present the data related to each other under common themes and to interpret and present them in a way that readers can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Data are presented with frequency and quotes.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Art Activities

Making copy. Both the chick and making copy activity in Photograph 1 belongs to the same children. On the left, the child copied the surface of the iron door whereas in the right one, another child copied the tree trunk. There is freedom and difference in children's choices and works in copying activity, yet the products of chick activity resemble each other.

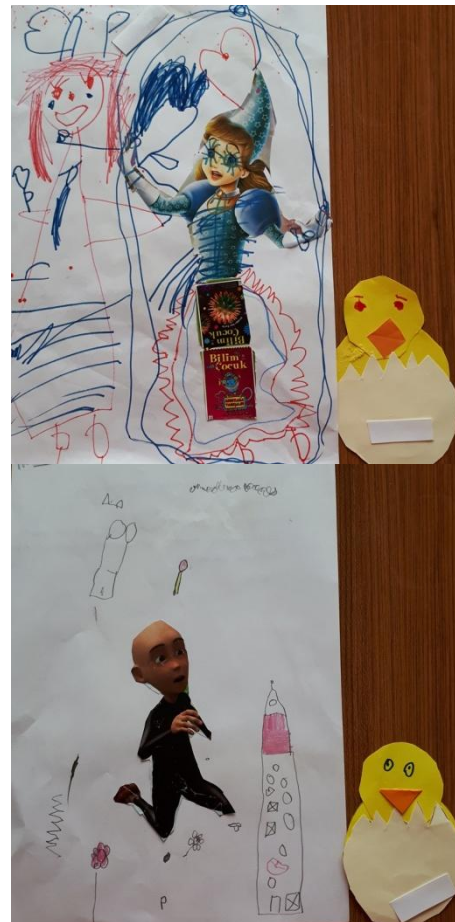


Photograph 1. Samples of Copying and Chick Activity

All 14 children who participated in these activities stated that they liked doing the chick activity most and they wanted to do it again as it looked much better. When children are asked what they wanted to express in activities, the children who did the copy activity gave responses reflecting the process and their choices such as *"I first touched the iron door. Then I put it on the paper and let it out"* or *"I sat next to the tree and put it on the paper and scribbled."* On the other hand, those who did the chick activity provided the answer of *"chick"* when asked the same question.

Image completion. Photograph 2 presents the samples from chick and image completion activity. When we look at these products, it is not possible to separate stereotypes from each other, while creative arts activities seem to be unique to children. Only two of 14 children who performed these art activities said that they would like completing pictures and three of them expressed that they liked the product of completion activity more. The rest of the children expressed that they enjoyed the chick activity most and that they wanted to do it

again and liked the product of chick activity more.



Photograph 2. Samples of Image Completion and Chick Activity

When asked about what they wanted to express in the paintings presented in Photograph 2, the first one said: *"The girl planted flower and stars came out at night."* On the other hand, the second kid expressed that *"There are many people in it and the rocket transports them. The man drives the rocket and his name is Ekber."* Similarly, the children who made the painting art activity brought different explanations about the paintings. Some of the explanations give us information about children and some information will allow us to support their language development by asking children additional questions. The chick activity is not open-ended, therefore it does not allow in-depth discussion with children.

Stone painting. The stone painting work was combined with a game; therefore, compared to other activities, the children were more interested in this activity compared to the chick activity.



Photograph 3. Samples of Stone Painting and Chick Activity

Five of the 15 children who were involved in these different art activities mentioned that they liked the activity of stone painting more, that they wanted to do it again, and that it looked more beautiful. The remaining 10 children preferred the chick activity. Compared to other activities, boys in this activity liked stone painting, which is an open-ended activity. Upon being asked which activity looks more beautiful, one of the children said that *“I liked the stones that I painted most.”* and thus she showed a belonging to her own product. This means that it is important for children to have unique products that can make something of their own instead of copying each other's art activities. On the other hand, another child expressed the interest in stereotyped art activities by saying *“Let's always do chicks.”*

Drawing shadow. Twelve of the 26 children who participated in shadow-drawing activity said that they enjoyed the activity and would like to do it again, but when asked to compare the products of these two works, three of them said that the chick activity products looked nicer. However, five of the 14 children who said they loved chick activity more and found

it more beautiful expressed that they wanted to do shadow activity when asked which of the two activities they would like to do next day.



Photograph 4. Samples of Shadow Drawing and Chick Activity

Although children love the shadow activity more, we, as adults, may be shaping the choices of the children who prefer the chick activity because they do not like the products they have produced. One of the children who participated in shadow activity approached negatively to his product and said: *“I drew a toy, I wanted to draw its shade but it was not good.”* Another kid, on the other hand, said: *“I liked the Chick because I drew the chick better. I like it.”* These expressions show that children focus on the artwork rather than the process. Shadow activity could be more popular than other activities since it is an outdoor activity.

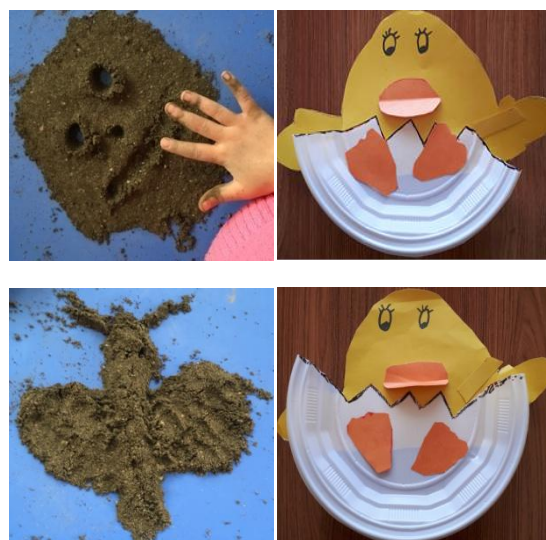
Painting the ceiling. Seven of the twelve children who lied under the table and did painting upwards said that they enjoyed going under the table and painting, and they wanted to do it again. However, one of these children stated that the chick activity seemed more beautiful. Two of the five kids who said they liked the chick activity were younger although they were in 5-year old classroom, and therefore they had difficulty in painting. This must be why they did not like the painting under the table. This indicates the need to pay attention to the developmental characteristics of children when selecting activities.



Photograph 5. Samples of Painting the Ceiling and Chick Activity

When asked which of the art activities the children were doing was more beautiful, students used expressions such as “My sea vehicle is lovely”, “My mermaid is beautiful. I liked it very much” or “My picture is beautiful.” Thus, they showed that they formed a belonging to their products. None of the 96 children who participated in the study used possession expression for the chick product. They may have liked this activity more because they perceived the activity of making a picture under the table as a game.

Creating shapes from the sand. Four of the 14 children who participated in the sand activity preferred chick activity, while nine said they liked to form shapes from sand more and wanted to do it again. But six of these nine children expressed that the chick activity seemed better. One of the children said, “Chick activity is good because everyone’s is like a chick”, which is contrary to the purpose of art activities, but reflects expectations of art activities in the classroom environment. One child also said: “I liked the activity of the chick because it was showing me how and where to cut.” This reflects that children liked the activities that do not give them the opportunity to choose.



Photograph 6. Samples of Sand and Chick Activities

Finally, in Photograph 7 stereotypical art activities are presented so that it can clearly show how few choices are provided to children and the difficulty of distinguishing the activities from one another. In addition, children’s evaluation of all of the activities is presented in Table 2 to reflect an overall picture of the findings.



Photograph 7. Samples of Chick Activity

Table 2. Children's Evaluation of the Creative Art Activities

Creative Art Activity	Number of Children	Product Looks Better	I Like Creative Art Activity More	I Like to Make Creative Art Activity Again
Making Copy	14	0	0	0
Image Completion	14	3	2	0
Stone Painting	15	5	5	5
Drawing Shadow	26	9	12	14
Painting on the Ceiling	12	6	7	7
Creating Shapes from the Sand	14	6	9	9

It is expected that all children produce the same thing because the chick activity, applied as an example of stereotyped art activities, restricts them. It is quite difficult to distinguish children's products from each other. Pre-service teachers participating in this study gave children flexibility in making chicks as they respect children's preferences. Nevertheless, it is difficult to differentiate chick products. Children's artistic products will be even more similar if teachers want to help children and even complete the activities instead of them and make them do the same thing.

Senior Pre-school Education Pre-service Teachers' Evaluation

In terms of children. All of the pre-service teachers stated that implementing chick activity was easier as children are accustomed to involving in those activities. They have stated that it was more difficult to implement creative arts activities because children have encountered this type of activity for the first time in class. Teachers have had difficulty in explaining children to creative arts activities. This may be due to the fact that the directions

of stereotyped activities are clearer, and what is needed from children is more obvious. The pre-service teacher applying the sand activity summarized this situation as follows: *“They enjoyed a lot in sand activity. Yet, they continuously said ‘What do we draw’, ‘I cannot draw’, ‘nothing occur to me’ as they have never experienced these kinds of activities. Children expected to receive instruction like in chick activity.”*

The pre-service teacher applying the image completion activity explained why children loved the chick activity more and made it easily:

“Children preferred the chick activity because making it and its appearance is more fun for children. Children got help when they needed while doing the chick activity. It was obvious that children liked the chick activity. They have done this kind of activity with their teacher before. For example, they made a frog. It was not difficult to apply.”

The pre-service teacher who applied the copy making activity stated that the children were challenged in the creative art activity, and also attributed this to the fact that the children did not encounter these activities before: *“Children had difficulty in this activity [copying activity] compared to the chick activity. I guess that the reason is their lack of knowledge.”*

In terms of teacher. All pre-service teachers stated that even though it is more difficult they would prefer to apply creative art activities when they become a teacher in the future. Pre-service teachers are trained to engage in activities designed to improve children's creativity during their four-year training. However they witnessed the very stereotypical application of artistic activities in schools and they use their own preferences for creative art activities. The pre-service teacher who applied the shadow activity explained why she would use creative activities as follows:

“I prefer the shadow-drawing activity of objects that children can work freely and develop their creativity because when performing the activity, each child has the chance to add something

from them personally. When I looked at the chick activities all of them looked similar. Yet, I could distinguish which child produced in the creative art activity without asking them. Children were more excited in the shadow drawing activity and enthusiastically did it. They reacted to chick activity in a usual way as they often do these kinds of activities and they know well what to do when they are doing it. But they asked questions constantly in the shadow activity and watched how their friends did it curiously.”

The pre-service teacher who implemented the stone painting activity compared the two activities and summarized why she would choose open-ended activities as follows:

“I prefer the stone-painting and hiding activity because the more we let children free the more they become imaginative. When applying the stone painting activity, I did not restrict children by saying ‘You should paint using this colour or you should do it in this way.’ They painted what colour they wanted and enjoyed. Whereas, in the chick activity I showed them a model and said ‘We will make a chick like this one.’ I restricted their imagination. I presented a model and wanted them to cut off the lines and finish the chick.”

In terms of program. The pre-service teacher who implemented the painting under the table activity emphasized the necessities of creative art activities in order to meet the requirements of pre-school education program: *“In general, children enjoyed the activity and wanted an additional paper. Sometimes children need such different activities. Children participated more in these creative activities and they passed their days in a different way. Children need creative activities.”*

The Pre-School Education Program suggests focusing on the process rather than creating a product in art activities. According to the program, the teachers should prepare various activities related materials based on the size and characteristics of the group so that they

could enable children to make a choice (MoNE, 2013). Just as it is in this study, we cannot accomplish the aim of the program when we give a chick model to the children and want them to produce an art product by combining the pieces based on the teacher's instruction. As this study was conducted towards the end of April, children had participated in several art activities during the year. A great amount of the activities they had participated in were product-oriented. As such, children prefer product even if they were offered process-oriented activities. The reason for children's preferences of chick might be originated from classroom environment in which the product is emphasized more. However, it is not appropriate for children's development to show them a model and want them to produce the same one by following the instructions. We should give young children great pastel sets, large papers, and brushes and allow them to manipulate these materials and make explorations instead of expecting them to create a finished art product. In this way their self-regulation skills will be improved (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

SUGGESTIONS

As Artut (2001) expressed, the artistic products of the child give us clues about his thought process, and children's art products are different from each other since each child follows a unique cognitive, emotional, and perceptual development path. Again each child produce unique art products provided that they are offered freedom and creative art activities. As we have seen in this study, if we want children to follow instructions and produce the same model that we showed them, children's artwork would be similar to each other and far from reflecting their characteristics.

Katz (1998) stated that children's attitudes about their art products are influenced by adult's assessment of the artistic products. As seen in this study, children expressed that their artworks look better in stereotyped art activities even if they had a better time in creative open-ended art activities. This might originate from the fact that both teachers and parents value the artworks that children produce in stereotyped art activities. Pre-school education is considered the first place where children meet with art education. Thus,

it should be designed to help children to develop artistic tastes, protect the mental health, think originally, use a different way of communication, facilitate imagination, and improve self-confidence (Ayaydın, 2010). We can not determine children's capabilities and guide them to appropriate fields by having children to do stereotyped activities. Offering stereotyped artistic activities to children result in producing similar products. This may not only prevent them from discovering their abilities but also it may lead us to misjudge the development of children. As Morrison (2006) pointed out, the works of art created by children form one of the authentic evaluation dimensions. When all children produce similar artwork, a realistic assessment can not be accomplished. Above all, stereotyped art activities will not improve children's creativity but will cause it to fade because children need to take risks, discover, be curious, and choose among many options to develop their creativity (AI-Girl Tan, 2007; Daniels & Peters, 2013).

After a teacher shows a turtle model and asks children to cut the marked pieces and paste them on a plastic dish to make the same turtle, children will do what is required of them so that their turtle does not look worse than their friends' turtle. Instead of contributing something from themselves, they will try to make the product look like the example shown by the teacher. Children are aware of everything and they know it well when their art products do not look as good as their friends' art products (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). Even if the teacher says that they focus on the process, not the product, they would not be able to achieve this by offering children stereotyped activities as found in this study.

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