

ART OF INTENTION

CLARE FRIEDRICH, Millie's mom

Children at Rita Gold don't grab for the color blue. They choose between a Prussian hue and aquamarine. They think carefully about the virtues of a flat brush versus a fan brush. Marta Cabral's specificity about the materials she uses with her artists is full of respect and intention, but veers sharply away from pomposity. Indeed, much of the time children ignore her. Not one to be disheartened, Marta deems these "deflected responses" valid and respectable.

"Children explore the motions and properties, from poking and pounding to pinching shut holes."

As substantial as her work with the children is, Marta uses the same intention working with adult caregivers. It is rational to want to call out the actions that children are doing, or put names to the objects that adults presume children to be creating. She gently steers adults away from doing so, however, letting the children's own artistic expressions and autonomy unfold. "If it seems like [something] helps to create a sense of more ownership, then I need to do more of that". Promoting this in the studio, in the classroom with the graduate assistants, and in the greater world of art education is an art in and of itself.

The older children at Rita Gold have had an emerging interest in buildings in their community. Preschoolers' artistic explorations have focused on three-dimensional collage – pasting mixed media to cardboard – and soft woods that Marta felt would be more conducive to building. The threads of emergent curriculum are intentional, but never strained or artificial.

The toddlers spend a lot of time with clay. One child in particular has been a strong lobbyist for the medium since his days in the infant room, and Marta has seen how many other toddlers have followed his lead. A lump of clay is placed on the sensory table, and eventually on the floor for a full-body experience.

Children explore the motions and properties, from poking and pounding to pinching shut holes. Tools are available for children who shy away from touching it. It is the children making the choices, naming the tools, naming their intentions.



Exploring colors, textures, and unlimited possibilities

In the infant room, Marta is working hard to get into the groove of the younger children's schedules and routines. She takes care to make sure children feel safe and comfortable in their environment, enough so that they feel secure about using certain art materials. Messy materials like paint could be disruptive to routines when children have been taught not to play with similar substances: soup or yogurt, for instance. Marta introduces novel objects like tubes and rolls of textured paper, bubble wrap, and corrugated cardboard. For children inclined to eat the cardboard, she moves away from such materials, not wanting to say "no" to any of the things she is bringing into the classroom. Eventually her hope is to bring in paints and have the children work with applying it to their chosen materials.

Marta encourages parents to set up an art studio date with their children anytime during the school year.

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