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Coloring their world

The DCCA gives preschoolers a chance to learn creative skills

By *TARA LYNN JOHNSON*, *Special to The News Journal*

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They have the cutest little baby faces.

And the children taking part in the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts' Preschool Parent and Child Program colored artistic representations of them recently. They discussed the parts of the face, then created a face on a sheet of paper with a guideline of the head, neck and shoulders. Teacher and artist Carrie Ida Edinger encouraged the kids to use as many colors as they wanted.

"Understanding what makes up a face is part of early childhood development, and artists have been making self portraits for centuries," she said. "I am not expecting the children to create perfect faces. It is an experience that builds art and observational skills."

Edinger's objective is to let the children experience the basics of creating art, gain more self-confidence in their imaginations, and then go on to create art with the skills they're learning.

Kelly McNelis and her 5-year-old daughter Lindy are both learning things during the four-week program.

The first class focused on lines and the beginnings of art. Lindy and Kelly glued stripes on a zebra together, and they drew windows on a building.

During that session, Lindy was free to draw whatever she wanted -- squiggles, zigzags, curlicues. It's fun and educational, which is important to her mom, who lives in Middletown. She wants both her daughters to be exposed to as much culture as they can. The art programs open their eyes to the world around them and the fact that art is everywhere -- in sculpture, painting, in jewelry, animals and architecture, she said.

And it's opened her eyes, too. Kelly said she's learning things.

"I looked at the art in architecture, in zebras' stripes. There are all different ways to think about things," she said. "I never thought of lines in that way before. They're everywhere."

And one-on-one time with Lindy is one of the greatest benefits.

"It's nice to have my full attention on her," Kelly said. "We worked together, which is the most fun."

Lindy thinks so, too.

"I liked it," she said.

Anna Garcia, who'll be 4 on Saturday, likes it, too. She gets to draw and paint, which she loves to do. She colored flowers pink and purple, two of her favorite colors, with her mom, Laura, during one class.

Laura, who lives in Wilmington, is happy with what her daughter is getting out of the program. Anna learns that artists use skill and tools

to make their creations. There's an art to making art as opposed to just coloring something in, which can be art, too.

"They use skills to be creative," she said. "She's learning that this is how they did it, and she can do it, too."

Laura agrees with Kelly -- the time spent with her daughter alone is valuable. In addition to the classes, Laura takes Anna around the museum and lets her see the works on display. She does art in preschool, but it's something different to see it in a museum setting, then sit and let her inner artist emerge.

Laura enjoys seeing Anna express herself this way. "It's fun for me to watch her be creative," she said. "It's a child's interpretation, anything her imagination can come up with."

And Anna is happy to be participating, too. "I like doing art," she said. "It's fun."

FYI

- The Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, a non-collecting museum at 200 S. Madison St., Wilmington, offers a four-week Preschool Parent and Child Program for ages 3 to 5, with a focus on painting, sculpture, drawing and collage.
- Upcoming four-week sessions, which are \$35 per child, are: 10:30-11:30 a.m. Saturdays, Feb. 10, 17, 24 and March 3; 12:30-1:30 p.m. Sundays, March 11, 18, 25 and April 1; and 10:30-11:30 a.m. Saturdays, April 14, 21, 28 and May 5.
- Information: visit the DCCA link above or call Holly Bennett at 656-6466.