

One of the most wonderful experiences that I can have is to encounter a display of art by children and youth.

When I enter a school, I am drawn like a magnet to the sections in the hallways that hold the most recent creations of the kids. Sometimes I see murals on buildings or plywood barriers around construction sites that are exquisitely done and shout out with the talent of the young artists who prepared them and I can't contain my glee.

There is something primitive and exciting to me about the process of taking a blank space and filling it with colour and texture.

A great thing about introducing art to even the youngest children is that there are so many lasting benefits besides the beauty of the work they produce.

The latest news about the brain reports that artistic activities strengthen the synapses between the brain cells. Studies indicate that the synapses actually grow stronger with increased participation.

A while back I wrote about the healing power of music and now we can add art to the list of healing activities. Neurobiologists who map the activity in the brain have evidence that the arts help the brain develop in young children who have experienced trauma. Researchers tell us that the limbic and cortical regions of the brain respond to art, storytelling, play therapy, drama, and writing and that these responses promote healing and growth.

Children learn many skills through art. They improve their communication skills through expression and they can process what they have learned by creating a picture or putting colours together on a piece of paper. Art can bridge the gap when words are not available.

Artistic activities develop imagination and it provides a means for interpreting the world around.

It has cultural benefits that help a child connect with her culture through art as well as introducing other cultures into the child's world view.

The young have been encouraged to create with paint and clay and plain old mud since the beginning of time. Adults knew instinctively that this developed fine motor skills and was a tool for building confidence in children. Art also provides sensory learning when children choose their own art materials and then immerse their hands and feet into the texture of the product. Art is a way to physically connect with nature. Kids find leaves, shells, sticks, and nuts to build the perfect creation.

Humans like to express and we like to have many ways to do it. Our artistic side connects our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual sides. This is evident in the cave art that has survived for thousands of years, giving us insight into who the artist was and what his world was like. Art is the time capsule that has passed on the history of mankind.

Now most kids may not be a budding Michelangelo but they can impact the world with their imagination and their creativity in the most powerful ways. Check your art supply cupboard and see if you need to re-stock.