Junk Art

Junk art is a fun and exciting way for children to explore new ways of working with different materials. During junk art sessions, children should be able to make their own choice of materials for use and free to make their own creations. It is a great way for children to show how creative and talented they can be.

Providing Junk Art to Children

In an Early Years setting, some consideration should be made when providing junk art for children.

- The concept of junk art is to use recyclable materials that can be found around a setting or at home.
- They are all open-ended materials that enable the children to be creative in their own way which enhances their independence and skills.
- Children should have access to appropriate space to use the materials with access to a wide range of materials from which they can choose to work to the best of their ability.
- Children should be free to work on table tops or floor space. This supports their freedom of movement and independence of choice.
- All recyclable materials should be safe to use as harmful or unhygienic materials are toxic for children.
- All materials should be accessible to children by placing them on low shelving and labelled for them to access and use. This helps to increase their choice and independence.
- Babies should be provided with junk art that is safe and sanitized. Items must also not be too small for them to use.

Role of the Adult (Supporting/Extending Children's Learning)

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences to support and extend children’s learning while building on their interests.

The Adult’s need to:

- The child’s own work and choices should be encouraged as they are the key decision makers in what they want to use and the adult’s role should not influence them.
- There should be sufficient materials that are easily accessible for all children.
- Transporting junk art to the outdoors is a fun way for children to incorporate natural materials into their play.

Benefits of Junk Art

Playing with junk art promotes children’s development under the four themes of Aistear (Well-Being, Identity & Belonging, Communication and Exploring & Thinking). The four themes are linked through junk art.
Through junk art materials children will…

Well-Being:

- Children will learn to make their own decisions and choices for their own creations.
- Develop confidence as they exercise choice and control over the materials.
- Discover, explore and increase on their fine and gross motor skills.
- Express themselves creatively through their work with materials.
- Develop a sense of independence and belief in themselves as they practice using the materials.

Identity and Belonging:

- Understand that they are individuals in their own right and have their own abilities.
- Express their own views, interact and co-operate with others as they carry out their work.
- Become aware of their own unique strengths and abilities.

Communicating:

- Express themselves imaginatively using non-verbal communication and interact with others.
- Listen, discuss and take turns with other children and adults and be proficient users of their language to communicate with others.
- Solve problems and use a different variety of print in an enjoyable way.
- Learn skills such as painting, sticking, printing, sculpting etc.

Exploring and Thinking:

- Using different materials, learn to explore and engage with the environment around them and the material within it.
- Share interest in other creations.
- Express their own feelings and emotions through their art work.

Supplementary Information

Recyclable materials can be found anywhere. They can come in the form of:

- Egg cartons
- Juice or milk carton, snack wrappers
- Plastic containers, bottles and lids
- Cardboard boxes and tubes e.g. cereal boxes
- Bubble wrap

Resources may be purchase from the Recreate in Dublin or the Play Resource Centre in Belfast.

In Early Years Settings

Promoting Children’s Health, Well Being, Learning & Development Through The Art Forms

This project was carried out through collaboration between BCCN and DkIT 2014.
There is nothing quite like the magic of water. Splashing, swooshing and swirling, a young child will become completely captivated in placing their hands in this wonderful liquidy substance which has a range of different possibilities. It drips and drops, splashes, pours and flows, and has a variety of different splishy-splashy sounds (IPPA 2007).

Providing Water to Young Children

In the Early Years setting, particular considerations should be taken into account when providing children with the opportunity to play with water:

- The tray should be in close proximity to the sink or water supply both indoors and outdoors
- There should be natural lighting present
- Floor covering should be considered e.g.: a non-slip mat underneath
- Adequate space should be available

- Ensure that the water tray is at the child’s waist as they can play most comfortably at this level (if they have to reach up over the edge of the tray the water will trickle back up their arms)
- For infants the practitioner can put them in their high chair and add water to the tray. This can give them the opportunity to explore its properties at their level
- For infants who can sit upright water trays or basins can be provided to them on the floor
- The water tray should be available to bring outdoors
- Children can be provided with basins and pots filled with water. This can support them to experiment with water in the outdoor environment

The Role of the Adult (Supporting/Extending)

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences for children and to support and extend their learning while building on children’s interests. To encourage children to play with water the adult can:

- Show interest and use encouraging descriptive language
- Listen and respond to children’s comments and ideas
- Encourage the child to experiment - water can be easily cleaned up. It should also be available to bring outdoors to extend the child’s learning experiences
- Provide water on a daily basis and add different materials and resources, colouring or bubbles to extend their learning and create new learning opportunities when age and stage appropriate
- At times play alongside to observe the children’s different interests and where and when appropriate this can enhance and extend each child’s play

The Benefits of Water

Playing with water promotes children’s development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link the water play to the Learning Experiences under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity & Belonging

The child will:

- Learn about personal hygiene e.g. (using soap, washing baby dolls and clothes)
- Learn to work individually and along with others e.g. (holding the funnel while another child pours)
- Discover how to co-operate, take turns and share tools and equipment
- Gain a respectful understanding of others ideas
- Experience new materials such as marble inks
Communicating
The child will:

- Discuss the different properties of water such as cold, wet etc.
- Learn to describe their actions and others actions e.g., (filling, pouring, emptying etc.)
- Extend their vocabulary with water play
- Describe differences, changes and similarities of water e.g., (what floats/sinks and what happens when water freezes)
- Discuss what is happening when the water wheel is turning

Exploring & Thinking
The child will:

- Explore the sensory element of water and experiment how water feels with the addition of ice, glitter etc.
- Extend their imagination by adding other play resources such as heavy and light objects
- Become confident learners in relation to water activities e.g. (blowing bubbles or pouring from a watering can)
- Observe the changes that occurs with water e.g.: (freezing water to make ice)
- Explore the effects of water by adding natural and man made materials
- Engage in exploratory, creative, imaginative and even role play when playing with water

Well-Being
The child will:

- Experience the therapeutic values of water – it is an extremely relaxing activity
- Develop fine motor skills through the manipulation of tools, filling and pouring, squeezing, slapping and stirring the water
- Develop hand/eye co-ordination through filling and emptying containers of different shapes and sizes
- Become aware of the space at the water tray and share it with others around them
- Use play/household materials to gain an understanding of cause and effect as well as safety

Supplementary Information
For a child to engage in water play they can be provided with a basin, a large bowl or a baby bath. However a water tray is a good investment for an early years setting as it can allow a number of children to play together at the same time. These can be purchased online or in early childhood equipment suppliers nationwide. Also providing water butts to the outdoor environment can be of great benefit for the children. These can be purchased in local DIY shops or can be home made using old wheelie bins, piping and taps.
In contrast to water, sand is rough and gritty. Similar to water, sand is wonderful for filling containers or sifting through sieves. It can be of even greater benefit to the child when it is damp as it can hold its shape for the construction of sand towns, farms, tunnels and bridges. Children can use resources such as buckets, shovels, trucks and cars in their sand worlds (IPPA 2007).

Providing Sand to Young Children

- Within the Early childhood setting the sand and water tray should be side by side and of easy access to the child which can allow for interaction
- Adequate space should be available;
- By having the sand area clearly labelled (at child’s level) and with separate storage for tools materials e.g., (buckets, spades, shells, stones etc.) for sand play, this can allow the child to access these materials and put them away again without adult assistance
- Providing shallow trays with sand for babies to sit in will allow them to explore and investigate its properties
- There should be natural lighting present
- If there is no sand pit present in the outdoor area, a sand tray which can be brought outdoors would be of benefit to the children to enable them to experience sand in the natural environment
- Provide sand play outdoors as well as indoors. This will extend the children’s learning opportunities and experiences
- Spend time in the sand area with the children. The adult can observe the child’s play and build on their interests which will in turn enhance and extend the children’s play

The Benefits of Sand

Playing with sand promotes children’s development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link sand play to the learning experience that can be gained under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity & Belonging

The child will:

- Learn how to work independently and choose and replace their equipment and tools
- Co-operate, take turns and share equipment and tools with others
- Learn to respect and understand others ideas and views
- Use the sand as a method of mark making to make shapes, write their names of draw a picture of themselves using their hands, fingers or utensils
- Discuss what they have done in the sand with confidence and with a sense of achievement
Communicating
The child will:
- Learn to discuss the different properties of sand such as smooth, rough, sticky, dry and wet
- Extend their vocabulary linked to sand play such as pour, fill, empty, full, sand wheel, sieve, rake, spade, bucket etc.
- Describe and discuss their actions and also the actions of others e.g. (pushing, building, piling)
- Show a growing interest by asking and answering questions
- Use props to create and tell their own stories

Supplementary Information
Sand can be a sensory adventure for young infants’ right up to pre-school aged children. It is an extremely easy activity to provide for children and they love it. It can be provided to children in large containers, basins or baby baths, although this is a more effective method for individual play. Sand is a fundamental need within an early childhood setting, and sand trays are useful for group play as it allows them to play there at the same time. Sand trays can be purchased from early childhood stores and a good quality tray can last forever. Sand can also be purchased in early childhood suppliers for a reasonable price. Outdoor sandpits can be invaluable for the child’s learning and development. These can be provided by a large box on the ground filled with sand and resources such as trucks, diggers, buckets and spades, sticks, shells and stones. This will allow the child to “get down to work” as well as having the chance to wiggle their toes in the sand (Pre-School Learning Alliance 1993).
Children love to play with dough—it is a fun, exciting and beneficial activity. Not only can children enjoy playing with the dough itself, but becoming involved in the actual making process can be a great learning experience also. Children will enjoy adding the different ingredients such as flour and water, and then explore the actual dough itself by patting, pinching, squashing and stretching it (IPPA 2007).

Providing Play Dough to Young Children

- Allocate a particular space or spaces for children to play with play dough i.e.: the messy play table or the home corner
- The play dough area should be clearly labelled at the child’s level and separate labelled storage area for the play dough tools e.g. (cutters, rolling pins etc.)
- When preparing the play dough, have all ingredients to hand such as flour, salt and water and have a pictorial recipe which children can follow themselves
- Have enough utensils for each child
- Placing paper/plastic sheeting on the floor will catch any spills and provide an easily cleaned environment
- When children have become confident with exploring the play dough, different utensils such as rolling pins, scissors, shapes, cutters, butter knives, spoons and forks can be provided to enhance the child’s learning experience
- Different types of play dough can be prepared such as play dough which can awaken the child’s five senses
- Take pictures of the child’s play dough creations and display them in the classroom to encourage the child’s self confidence and self esteem
- When the children are ready, provide a range of different resources and utensils which can extend the child’s play and also create new learning opportunities
- Become involved in the activity alongside the children. This can encourage apprehensive children to take part and to experiment with the play dough

The Benefits of Play Dough

Playing with play dough promotes children’s development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link play dough to the learning experience that can be gained under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity & Belonging

The child will:
- Learn to work independently and create new ideas when playing with dough
- Learn to work co-operatively with other children, take turns and to share the different tools and utensils with others
- Develop their self-esteem and self-identity by observing their work i.e.: modelling dough creations on display or photographs of the child assisting in making the play dough
- Recreate models of themselves and their families from the dough can enhance their self identity and sense of belonging

The Role of the Adult (Supporting/Extending)

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences for children and to support and extend their learning while building on children’s interests. To encourage children to play with play dough the adult can:
- Listen to the children and observe them as they plan and work on their models
- When preparing the dough, ensure the children are involved in the process. Asking them to add the flour or salt, or getting them to help mix the mixture will make them feel included in the experience
- Becoming involved in the activity alongside the children. This can encourage apprehensive children to take part and to experiment with the play dough
Exploring & Thinking

The child will:
- Extend their imaginations when developing their unique ideas for playing with dough
- Discuss with adults and other children about the different ingredients that are needed to make the play dough, how much is required and so on
- Think creatively when deciding what should go into their play dough i.e.: cinnamon for aromatic play dough or rice for tactile play dough
- Explore the properties of play dough and experiment using other materials such as pasta, spaghetti or stones
- Think creatively when deciding what it is they are making with their dough e.g.: (space ship, a house, a birthday cake etc.)

Well-Being

The child will:
- Experience the therapeutic value of making play dough and also when they get to play with the dough itself
- Develop their fine motor skills through manipulating the tools, rolling, patting squashing, thumping and poking the dough.
- Develop fine motor skills through preparation of the dough by pouring, stirring and mixing the different ingredients
- Enhance their hand/eye co-ordination skills through pouring the ingredients from jugs to bowls etc.
- Gain an awareness of space at the messy table area or the home corner and understand how they can share this space with others

Communicating

The child will:
- Develop the language to describe the different properties of play dough e.g. (sticky, soft, dry, wet, bumpy etc.)
- Extend their vocabulary associated with making play dough e.g. (pour, fill, cupful, flour, cream of tartar, oil, mix etc.) and also when playing with the dough e.g. (mush, pound, squash, pat, poke etc.)
- Describe actions also, such as rolling the dough or mixing the ingredients
- Get the opportunity to ask questions and also to answer questions
- Discuss their experiences from observing photographs of preparing the dough or after making a salt dough model
- Engage in social play

Supplementary Information

One of the great joys of play dough is that it is extremely easy to make and the ingredients can be purchased in local shops at a reasonable price. As there are so many different types of play dough recipes, every cupboard at home will have the ingredients to make some type of play dough for the child. A list of recipes for different types of play dough has been included with accompanying leaflet.
### Basic Play Dough
- 3 cups of plain flour
- ½ cup of salt
- 1 tablespoon of oil/washing up liquid/or baby shampoo
- Food colouring or paint
- Cup of water

Add water slowly to the mix until it makes a firm dough.

### Stretchy Dough
- 2 cups of self raising flour
- Cup of water

Add water slowly to the mix until it makes a firm dough.

### Cooked Dough
- 2 cups of salt
- 8 teaspoons of cream of tartar
- 4 cups of water (food colouring is added if required)
- Half a cup of cooking oil
- 4 cups of plain flour

Mix the ingredients in a saucepan (the child can assist with this part). Stir over a medium heat until the mixture thickens and forms a big lump. Pour it onto a wooden board and when it cools down knead until smooth. This dough can be kept in an airtight container.

### Chocolate Play Dough
- 2 cups of water
- ½ cup of salt
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 tbsp cream of tartar
- 1/3 cup of cocoa
- 3 cups of flour

Bring the water and salt to the boil. Stir in the remaining ingredients. Allow to cool slightly and knead until smooth.

### Gingerbread Play Dough
- 1 cup of flour
- ½ cup of salt
- 2 tsp of cream of tartar
- 1 cup of water
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- Cinnamon, allspice, ginger, nutmeg etc.

Mix all the ingredients. Experiment with the spices until the desires scent and colour is achieved. Mix the water and oil together first and then add them to the dry ingredients and stir. In a pot, cook the mixture for 2-3 minutes stirring frequently. The dough will start to pull away from the sides and stick together. Remove the dough from the pan and knead until soft and smooth. Allow it to cool and store it in an airtight container.
Salt Dough

- 1/2 cup of salt
- 1/2 cup of water
- 1 cup of flour

Add the 1/2 cup of salt and the 1 cup of flour to a bowl and stir in the 1/2 cup of water slowly. All the water may not be required and if it gets sticky add more flour. Knead the dough and cut out or model shapes as the child wishes. The shapes need to be dried out for painting and they can be put in the microwave for 3 minutes. If they are still slightly wet they can be put in the microwave for a further 20 seconds. Let them dry and then paint.

Modelling Play Dough

- 1 cup of salt
- 1/2 cup of corn flour
- 1/2 cup of water (added slowly)
- Food colouring (optional)

Mix the ingredients in a pan, cook over a low heat, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens. Remove from heat immediately and leave to cool.

Sparkling Snow Dough

- 2 cups of water
- 2 cups of flour
- 1 cup of salt
- 4 tsp of cream of tartar
- 4 tsp of oil
- Glitter

Combine all the ingredients in a saucepan. Cook over a medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until the mixture thickens and pulls away from sides of the pan. Roll into a ball, place on a wooden board and leave to cool.

Don’t forget to add aromatic ingredients to make the play dough smell different e.g. (lavender, mint & cinnamon).
Gloop is a curious, but fascinating substance for children as it’s neither a solid nor a liquid. It’s an extremely messy and hands-on activity, and young children are sure to love it! Gloop is a fantastic sensory experience for children and adults, and is easily made by mixing corn flour with water (and food colouring for fun) until a strange mixture unfolds (Early Childhood Ireland 2014).

Providing Gloop to Young Children

- As gloop is an extremely messy activity, this play should be designated for a messy play area and even outdoors. Floor coverings should be considered e.g.: a special mat underneath
- Adequate space should be available
- Gloop can be made up in the water tray or each child can be given individual basins for their gloop

The Role of the Adult (Supporting/Extending)

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences for children and to support and extend their learning while building on children’s interests. When the child is provided with gloop, the adult can support and extend their learning by:

- Involve the children in the preparation process. Asking them to add the corn flour, water and food colouring and asking them to help mix will provide them with the learning experience of how to make the gloop
- Create discussions about the texture, smell and colour of the gloop and their thoughts and experiences
- Create opportunities which will encourage the child to talk in an imaginary context

The Benefits of Gloop

Playing with gloop promotes children’s development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link gloop to the learning experience that can be gained under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity and Belonging

The child will:

- Develop the skills to take turns, share and co-operate with others
- Learn to work independently and choose equipment and tools which they want to engage with during gloop play
- Increase in confidence, self-assurance whilst also demonstrating curiosity
- Express their own ideas or preferences when playing with gloop e.g.: choosing to colour their gloop or keep it plain
**Exploring & Thinking**

The child will:

- Extend their imagination when developing ideas for playing with gloop e.g.: (filling a watering can with gloop and pouring it out)
- Think creatively and explore when they are exposed to new and different ideas i.e.: ice cubes and gloop
- Express themselves and explore their creativeness in the way they wish when offered choice i.e.: creating gloop cakes or creating a space environment with different props
- Think creatively by observing that there is not just one form of gloop and that they can make different types of gloop together with the adult

**Well-Being**

The child will:

- Experience the therapeutic value of making gloop
- Be content as there is no right or wrong way to play with gloop
- Develop their hand/eye co-ordination by participating in the making process
- Develop fine motor skills by poking, pinching, pulling and grasping the gloop in their hands
- Gain an awareness of the space around them and learn to share this physical space with others
- Increase their dexterity skills when handling and manipulating the gloop

**Communicating**

The child will:

- Have the opportunity to learn a range of new vocabulary including grab, grasp, hold, cold, slimy, sticky, corn flour etc.
- Learn to describe the different properties of gloop such as firm, runny, cold and wet
- Explain what is happening when the gloop is touched e.g.: (it's hard to touch but then it melts in the hand)
- Have discussions with adults and other children about this curious material
- Ask questions and answer questions when playing with the gloop
- Have discussions and conversations with other children, and through this friendships and relationships can be developed through this activity

**Gloop Play**

In Early Years Settings

Promoting Children's Health, Well-Being, Learning & Development Through Open-Ended Materials

**Supplementary Information**

Gloop is a fun and extremely easy open ended material to make. The ingredients are priced reasonably and they can be purchased in everyday shops. Gloop play does not just end at corn flour and water and for more gloop recipes and ideas see accompanying leaflet.
Quick Sand Gloop

- 1 box of corn flour
- 3 cups of sand
- Water

The best place to make the quick sand is in a shallow tray on the ground (the child can assist in making it). The corn flour and sand can be mixed together first and then add the water slowly until the right consistency is made. This is a wonderful sensory activity for the child and encourages exploration of two different open ended materials—gloop and sand!

Ice-Gloop

- Ice cube tray
- Poster paints
- 2 cups of corn flour
- Water

To make this fun sensory activity, have pre-made ice cube paints. Add some paint and water to an ice cube tray and freeze for two hours. When the ice paints are ready prepare the gloop as normal (2 cups of flour, 1 cup of water and mix). Add the ice cubes to the gloop and watch them melt. The child will have the opportunity to explore the cold melting effects of the ice along with the curious properties of the gloop. Watch as it creates a fun colourful exploratory journey for children.

Basic Gloop

- 2 cups of corn flour
- 1 cup of water

Gloop Prints

- 2 cups of corn flour
- 1 cup of water
- Marble inks

To carry out this activity it can be done outdoors or indoors with protective sheeting on the floor. The gloop can be made up in a basin or even on a table surface. Prepare the gloop and allow the child to mix all the ingredients together. When this is carried out, give the child a blank sheet of paper and press to make a gloop prints.
Spray Gloop
- ½ box of corn flour
- An empty spray bottle
- Powder paint or water colours
- Water

Add the corn flour to an empty tray or basin. In an empty spray bottle, add water and the paint and shake well. Have a range of different spray bottles with different colours to offer choice. Allow the child to spray the mixture on the corn flour and mix well. It may take a while but it is a creative fun activity which increases both fine motor skills and hand eye coordination.

Glitter Gloop
- 2 cups of corn flour
- 1 cup of water
- Food colouring
- Glitter

Make the gloop as normal- 2 cups of flour, 1 cup of water and mix. Then add the food colouring and gloop to the mixture and mix well. Allow the child to put as much food colouring and glitter in as they please.

Tapioca Gloop
- Tapioca
- Hot Water
- Food colouring

Boil the tapioca in water for 30 minutes along with the food colouring. Allow the child to play with it while it is still warm.
Exploring & Thinking

The child will:

- Use clay to learn about how it is used in different cultures e.g.: in cooking and lighting equipment
- Gain the opportunity to explore the different properties of clay in a creative way
- Will be encouraged to use their own imaginations which assists in the development of creativity
- Explore natural materials such as stones, twigs and leaves along with the clay and experiment different prints and patterns they produce

Well-being

The child will:

- Manipulate the clay, which will develop fine motor skills, by pulling, poking and stretching the clay
- Develop hand/eye co-ordination through cutting shapes with their shape cutters
- Be at ease with this material as there is no end product when working with clay— it is a no pressure activity
- Gain an awareness of other children playing around them which will assist them in developing spatial awareness
- Express their emotions e.g.: if they are frustrated or angry as playing with wet clay can be very therapeutic

Communicating

The child will:

- Play with clay to encourage the use of new vocabulary including malleable, mould etc.
- Have discussions with other children and adults and talk about what they are making
- Learn how to describe the different properties of clay such as dry, soft, sticky etc.
- Hold discussions in regards to people who use clay as a living e.g.: artists, potters etc.
- Develop socially, as clay is usually played with in groups of children it can

Supplementary Information

Children proceed through different stages when they are playing with clay. To start off with, they explore and experiment with the material, they repeat their experiments and practise handling the clay until it leads to controlled use and creativity. Clay along with gloop and play dough is necessary for messy play in young children. Modelling clay can be purchased in any good art suppliers and if it is maintained and stored properly it can last a long time.
The Role of the Adult
The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences for children and to support and extend their learning while building on children's interests. When the child is working with clay the adult can support their play by:

- Listening and observing the children as they play. The adult should concentrate on the process of playing with clay rather than the product.
- Encouraging them to try playing with the clay (for children who do not like to get messy)
- Supporting the child to create their own creations instead of making something and getting the child to copy. It is about the process not the product
- Becoming involved in this play. By showing enjoyment and enthusiasm from working with the clay, children who are not enthusiastic about this material may feel they want to try it
- Having a bucket of soapy water and a hand towel present may encourage these children to try

The Benefits of Clay
Playing with clay promotes children's development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link clay to the learning experience that can be gained under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity and Belonging
The child will:

- Be encouraged to work independently and make choices in what resources they want to use
- Learn to respect other's thoughts and ideas
- Be inspired creatively by using other natural materials to make patterns, shapes etc., whilst appreciating other children's work
- Recreate models of themselves and their families from the clay which can enhance their self-identity and sense of belonging

Providing Clay to Young Children

- As this can be a messy activity, it can be designated to a particular area e.g.: the messy play table/area or even outdoors. Floor covering should be considered e.g.: a non-slip mat underneath & a wipe clean tablecloth
- Adequate space should be available
- As clay can dry out quickly and becomes unusable it is important to store it in an air tight container with a fitted lid. Prior to putting the clay away it can be kneaded into a round shape and if it does dry out it can be immersed in water until it is soft and then remould.
- Wrap clay in damp tea towels to keep moist and replace regularly
- Clay like other open ended materials should be available to the children on a daily basis

Similar to sand, clay is not typically played with at home. It is a fun and messy activity for children and the caregiver preferably needs to have a relaxed attitude about the mess, as the value of this open ended material for the child can be lost (Hobart and Frankel 2002).
Treasure baskets are a fun way for young infants to explore, touch, taste and experiment with real life authentic materials. Young infants under the age of one have a primal instinct to explore and experiment objects by feeling them and also putting them in their mouths. By providing heuristic and natural materials in the treasure baskets, it can stimulate the child’s senses and provides them with a rich learning experience (Early Years – The Organisation for Young Children 2012)

Providing Treasure Baskets to Young Children

- One basket can be presented to two children, however it is important to provide enough resources in the basket i.e.: two wooden curtain rings etc.
- Treasure baskets should also be provided to the children in the outdoor environment to allow the child to experience these heuristic materials in the natural environment
- When the children get used to the contents of the particular treasure basket, they can be changed to other items such as wooden pegs, egg cartons, sea shells etc.
- Treasure baskets can also be incorporated when planning. They can be separated into specific themed baskets such as musical (with home made musical instruments) colours (representing different colours using fruit) and wooden (all materials included are made from wood).

The Role of the Adult

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experiences for children and to support and extend their learning while building on children’s interests. When the child is engaged with the treasure basket, the adult can:

- Provide a range of different materials to the treasure basket (about 20 items)
- Encourage the child to explore the different materials within the basket. Taking a few objects out for the child can encourage this
- Provide time for the child to explore and experiment with all the different materials in the treasure basket

The Benefits of Treasure Baskets

Playing with treasure baskets promotes children's development under the four themes of Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework). The adult should link the treasure basket to the learning experience that can be gained under the four themes of Aistear (Identity & Belonging, Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being and Communicating)

Identity and Belonging

The child will:

- Enhance their curiosity which can assist them with problem solving in later life
- Develop self expression through the manipulation of different objects
- Be encouraged to think creatively and aesthetically which in later years is fundamental to successful learning
- Use their senses to connect with the natural materials provided and explore these items using their five senses
- Master the manipulation of specific objects e.g.: putting the pine cone into the tin can (mastery play)

Treasure Basket Play

- Sit nearby, observing closely what they are doing without talking or intervening unless the child needs attention
- Change the items in the basket regularly to enhance the babies learning, while maintaining each object by cleaning daily or replacing damaged items
Exploring & Thinking

The child will:

- Gain early experiences of choice i.e.: choosing what material to experiment and manipulate with
- Have the opportunity to play autonomously
- Enhance their concentration as they can direct their attention to one single object for longer periods of time after each use
- Be supported which encourages exploratory, creative and symbolic play.

Well-Being

The child will:

- Experiment and manipulate specific objects in the treasure basket which can begin to develop the child’s fine motor skills
- Develop gross motor skills as playing with objects can strengthen back, shoulder and arm muscles
- Develop strength whilst developing early co-ordination skills
- Develop hand/eye co-ordination skills by bringing a specific object to the mouth
- Be encouraged to appreciate natural objects

Communicating

The child will:

- Be encouraged to use their language and communication skills
- Vocalise, make sounds, use eye contact, facial expressions and gestures communicating in a non-verbal manner whilst using their entire bodies expressively
- Be aided in concentration and exploratory play
- Begin to understand the different qualities of the materials and objects as they start to make decisions and choices
- Engage in social play whilst playing along with others

Supplementary Information

Treasure basket play is a fun and interesting activity for young babies to explore, experiment and discover the world around them. Treasure baskets are easily made and are easily filled. For different ideas to keep this play interesting for the child different themed baskets can be provided (See accompanying leaflet for themes and ideas).
Mark Making

Children enjoy mark making for a variety of different reasons. Some may do it for the physical enjoyment of just being able to feel the soft chalk as it grates over rough tarmac, the smooth gliding of a marker across a page or even for babies, the sensation of the sticky glue running through their fingers. On occasions like this, children have no interest in the finished product but enjoy the pure experience of mark making and experimenting with their senses, developing their dexterity and competency.

Providing Mark Making for Children

Some consideration should be made when providing mark making for children in an Early Years Setting.

- A simple pencil and paper can give the children the opportunity to be creative and imaginative. Providing a wide range of open ended mark making materials for children, will enhance their ability to be creative.

- The art area should be spacious and clear from obstruction as mark making is a very physical experience for children.

- Provide sufficient storage space and then a large table, floor or wall space to experiment mark making on

- Provide lots of opportunities for children to choose the mark making materials and the surface to make their mark on.

- The Art Materials should be made easily accessible for children as it will enable them to be independent in their work and in their choices.

- Good lighting is essential for mark making activities

- The materials should be on low shelving and labelled so that children have access to them whenever they need or want them.

Why not paint with:

- Spray bottles
- Shoe polish applicators
- Fly swatters
- Cotton buds/balls or bubble wrap

Role of the Adult

(Supporting/Extending Children’s Learning)

The role of the adult is to provide opportunities and experience to support and extend children’s learning while building on their interests.

The Adult needs to:

- The main aspects of mark making is that it is the child’s own work and perspective, adults should not influence or dictate how a child’s mark making should be. The child should make their own choices and decisions as it is their own thoughts, ideas and feelings they are expressing.

- All sorts of materials should be made available for children for their mark making so they can have a selection from which to choose.

- Adults should provide children with opportunities to mark make indoors and outdoors.

“Babies should also be able to participate in highchairs or on the ground using a large sheet of paper. They can also use a range of materials such as paint, chalk or even glue with various materials. An edible paint can be made using Greek yogurt and food colouring so babies can experience mark making in a fun and tasty way!”
Benefits of Mark Making

Mark making is beneficial to many aspects of child development. The four themes of Aistear (Well-Being, Identity & Belonging, Communication and Exploring & Thinking) are linked through mark making.

Well-Being:
- Improve on their relationships with other children and adults. Children will share and gain experiences by making marks together or separately.
- Discover, explore and refine their fine and gross motor skills as they naturally unfold.
- Express themselves through their art work and the mark making process.
- Be independent in own decisions and choices, take risks by using different tools and learning to respect others work as well as their own.

Identity and Belonging:
- Feel individual from others as it is their own unique work.
- Feel part of the group with other children and adults as they can share experiences and show others their background.

Communicating:
- Use non-verbal communicate with others through taking turns with materials, listening and discussing.
- Expand their understanding of different symbols around them.
- Share their feelings, thoughts and emotions through mark making.

Exploring and Thinking:
- Learn about different shapes, space, time etc.
- Develop their skills and recognise their abilities to work with growing confidence.
- Feel that their ideas will be taken seriously and develop a higher level of thinking.

Types of Mark Making Materials
- Pencils and Crayons
- Markers and Colouring Pencils
- Paint brushes and Paint
- Chalk, Charcoal and Chalkboards
- Using their fingers, arms, hands, feet and toes
- Different food such as fruit and vegetables (Epstein, A and Hohmann, M, 2012)
- Natural objects such as leaves, rocks, twigs, branches

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