

Creativity & Play

Creativity is the freest form of self-expression. There is nothing more satisfying and fulfilling for children than to be able to express themselves openly and without judgment. The ability to be creative, to create something from personal feelings and experiences, can reflect and nurture children's emotional health. The experiences children have during their first years of life can significantly enhance the development of their creativity.

Importance of the Creative Process

All children need to be truly creative is the freedom to commit themselves completely to the effort and make whatever activity they are doing their own. What's important in any creative act is the process of self-expression. Creative experiences can help children express and cope with their feelings. A child's creative activity can help teachers to learn more about what the child may be thinking or feeling. Creativity also fosters mental growth in children by providing opportunities for trying out new ideas, and new ways of thinking and problem-solving. Creative activities help acknowledge and celebrate children's uniqueness and diversity as well as offer excellent opportunities to personalize our teaching and focus on each child.

Opportunities for Creativity

Children need plenty of opportunities for creative play and creative thinking. Start by providing activities that are based on the children's interests and ideas. This means learning how to listen intently to what children are saying. It is very helpful to tape record and transcribe children's conversations as well as take notes and review them with your co-teachers.

Be sure to offer children a wide range of creative materials and experiences. Being creative is more than drawing or painting. There's also photography, music, field trips, working with wire, clay, paper, wood, water or shadows. The possibilities are endless. It's important to provide children lots of time to explore materials and pursue their ideas. This includes time to think about how to plan, design, construct, experiment and revise project ideas. Don't forget to build in time to talk these ideas over with other people - both teachers and children.

Varieties of Experience

Look for ways to provide multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and other community experiences for children. Activities such as field trips, celebrating holidays and activities with other ethnic groups, and encouraging children to bring visitors to school enhances the creative process. The more varied experiences children have in their lives, the wider the range of creative expression. The more personal experiences children have with people and situations outside of their own environment, the more material they can draw on to incorporate in their play. Our challenge is to try not to be intimidated by the variety and diversity of artistic expression in our classroom.

Fostering the Creative Process

Encouraging children to make their own choices is important. Children should be permitted frequent opportunities - and lots of time - to experience and explore expressive materials. Put your emphasis on the process of creativity and not on the finished product. What children learn and discover about themselves is vital to their development. Show your support for the creative process by appreciating and offering support for children's efforts. Independence and control are important components in the creative process. This is especially true when working with children with disabilities.

Creative Play

One of the most important types of creative activity for young children is creative play. Creative play is expressed when children use familiar materials in a new or unusual way, and when children engage in role-playing and imaginative play. Nothing reinforces the creative spirit and nourishes a child's soul more than providing large blocks of time to engage in spontaneous, self-directed play throughout the day. Play is the serious business of young children and the opportunity to play freely is vital to their healthy development.

Even as early as infancy, play fosters physical development by promoting the development of sensory exploration and motor skills. Through play and the repetition of basic physical



skills, children perfect their abilities and become competent at increasingly difficult physical tasks. Play fosters mental development and new ways of thinking and problem solving. Through block play, children are confronted with many mental challenges having to do with measurement, equality, balance, shape, spatial relationships and physical properties.

One of the strongest benefits of play is the way it enhances social development. Playful social interactions begin from the moment of birth. Dramatic play helps children experiment with and understand social roles. It can also give them countless opportunities for acquiring social skills as they play with others. Through dramatic play, children gradually learn to take each other's needs into account, and appreciate different values and perspectives.

Through play, children are able to express and cope with their feelings. Play also helps relieve stress and pressure for children. They can just be themselves. There's no need to live up to adult standards during play. Play offers children an opportunity to achieve mastery of their environment. They control the experience through their imaginations, and they exercise their powers of choice and decision-making as the play progresses.

Play helps develop each child's unique perspective and individual style of creative expression. Play expresses the child's personal, unique responses to the environment. Play is a self-expressive activity that draws on the child's powers of imagination. Play is open-ended, free-form and children have the freedom to try out new ideas as well as build on and experiment

with the old.

Play provides an excellent opportunity for integrating and including children with disabilities in your program. The opportunities play provides for control and independence are important issues for any child but are especially important for these youngsters.

What are some of the ways we can encourage play in our classrooms? As caregivers, we must be careful to avoid dominating the play ourselves. Play should be the result of the children's ideas and not directed by the adult. Through play, we should try to foster children's abilities to express themselves. We should also try to help children base play on their own inspirations - not ours. Our goal is to stimulate play - not control it - and to encourage children's satisfaction in playing with each other.

Pay attention to play, plan for it, encourage it. Learn how to extend children's play through comments and questions. Stimulate creative ideas by encouraging children to come up with new and unusual uses of equipment. Try to remain open to new and original ideas, and encourage children to come up with more than one solution or answer. Be careful about over-restricting equipment and make sure to have play materials quickly available when children want them. Buy and use equipment in ways that encourage the use of imagination. Avoid toys and activities that spell everything out for the child and leave nothing to the imagination. Provide children with a good range and balance of equipment, and keep equipment exciting by changing it frequently or changing its location.