



Messy and Sensory Play: A Presentation and Discussion CECEK 2014

Rebecca Thistle B. Ed.



What is Messy Play?

- Play using any and all (safe) materials teachers can find to stimulate children's senses.
- Used to engage children in types of play that involve exploring their environment.
- Children are often told it's not okay to get dirty or messy but it's our job to provide a safe and comfortable environment to do so.



Why Get Messy?

- **Physical Development**
 - explore many different and new materials using their hands, arms, feet and bodies.
 - strengthen new motor skills.
 - practice fine motor skills and eye hand coordination.



Why Get Messy?

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**
 - encourages a positive approach to new experiences
 - builds self-confidence and self-esteem
 - develop concentration, problem-solving and planning



Why Get Messy?

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**
 - outlet for feelings, experiences and thoughts
 - observe how peers handle materials, try out the ideas of others, share their own ideas and discoveries
 - doesn't rely on words < ESL



Why Get Messy?

- **Language and Communication:**
 - learn new words that describe the things they see, feel, hear, smell and taste
 - Teacher support by introducing new vocabulary to describe what you are doing.
 - see [Huffington Post Article](#)



Why Get Messy?

- **Creative Development:**
 - opportunities with a variety of materials to build imagination and creativity
 - respond to what they see, hear, feel, touch and smell
 - express their feelings and thoughts through color, texture, shapes and forms in two and three dimensions



Stages of Messy Play

- Stage 1: General play
 - Most comfortable for children.
 - Materials that are hard and dry.
 - Familiar to children already.



Stages of Messy Play

- Stage 2: Soft textures
 - Materials that are wet and soft.
 - Can be put into ziplock bags or covered to reduce effect.



Stages of Messy Play

- Stage 3: Messy play using soft textures
 - Materials that are soft, wet and really messy.
 - Children may resist or need encouragement to partake.
 - Always show you are enjoying the experience (even if it's difficult for you!)



Why Do Some Children Not Like Messy Play?

- May be stuck at a certain stage
- An early negative experience with texture.
- Lack of experience with texture.



Personal Preferences

Just like adults, children have their own preferences or comfort levels when it comes to sensory experiences. By paying attention to children's likes and dislikes in other parts of their daily routine you can pinpoint what sensory activities will be fun or exciting for them.



Facilitating Messy Play

- Join in!
- Don't force them.
- Introduce sensory activities slowly. Let children move from stage to stage and have various stages available at all times.
- Provide tools for exploration.

