

Playdough as a Teaching Tool

You can squish it through your fingers. You can roll it into a ball. You can do pretty much anything with it! It's playdough! But did you know, playdough can also provide valuable hands-on learning experiences to support your child's growth in the classroom?

Playdough Power!

Playdough can provide enjoyable and satisfying experiences for young children, but it is not just a "fun" activity. Teachers can use this pliable learning tool to address early learning standards and observe children's progress in numerous areas of development.



Alice Sanders is the Regional Supervisor at Tulare County Office of Education child care. She explains that toys such as, playdough and blocks, can be used to enhance learning. Young children learn best by essentially playing with these items. "Because children really need hands on experience. They need to be able to feel and touch. By doing that, they're problem solving. It's trial and error. No one item is just a mistake. They're learning from those areas."

Say It with Dough

Melissa Velasquez, a preschool teacher at the London Child Development Center in Dinuba, says playdough is a part of her classroom's everyday free flow time. Playdough is also used in specific lessons to reach certain learning standards. Today's lesson is called "Say It with Dough." Velasquez explains, "And it was an activity that has placemats with the letters and the objects on there. And what gives them in this lesson like I said I was trying to push the letter recognition, word recognition. But with playdough, it just expands. It takes off."

Playdough Lessons

- Social and emotional development
- Language development
- Creative arts
- Science
- Math
- Fine motor skills

Teachers like playdough because it helps them recognize a child's unique strengths, needs and interests. Lessons that include playdough satisfy early learning standards like social and emotional development, language development, creative arts, science, math and fine motor skills.

Social and Emotional Development

Sanders says, "Well with social and emotional development, they're learning to communicate with other children. They're learning to express their feelings. They could role play with the actual material."

Language Development

Language also develops through play as children understand and use language to communicate information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs and questions. Sanders gives an example of a conversation, "'This is my snake. Well what can your snake do? My snake can slither. My snake has friends. Look here's a lot of snakes.'" So they start exploring that vocabulary. "They start using those words."

Creative Arts

Creative arts skills are achieved through exploration and imaginary play. Velasquez says, "They can realize that they can make something with their hands and it can be beautiful and people can really enjoy it. It's not so much pressure where they have to make something that looks like everything else. So it's something that's their own creation, their own imagination."

Science

Teachers also incorporate the making of playdough in the classroom, reaching both science and math standards. Math skills are also enhanced when comparing or estimating the amount of playdough needed to make a letter or fit a mold.

Math

Sanders says, "With counting, more than, less than. Look teacher, he has more playdough than I have. Oh how do you know he has more? Well let's look. Are you comparing?"

Fine Motor Skills

Playdough is also a tool that can help with the development of fine motor skills. Kneading, rolling and manipulating it develops strength and dexterity. Sanders explains, "It's a natural thing that you want to reach and start rolling it. And so you see the children and that's what they do, they start rolling it, they start exploring with it."

Playdough invites children to engage in meaningful and creative play. Teachers can best support and nurture learning by providing creative play experiences and tools that build a solid foundation for learning.

Resources

London Child Development Center
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Playdough Recipes:

<http://babyparenting.about.com/cs/activities/a/playdough.htm>
http://www.valleypbs.org/0to5/ready_to_learn/show_106.php

National Association for the Education of Young Children – Playdough: What's Standard about It?

http://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/TYC_V3N3_Swartz.pdf

Tulare County Child Care Programs

<http://www.tcoe.org/ChildCare/ChildDevCenters.shtm>