Dramatic play: Let’s think beyond the housekeeping corner!

Most early childhood classrooms have a housekeeping area that is used for dramatic play. Did you know that dramatic play is much more than one little activity area?

Dramatic play allows children to rehearse or practice new situations or events that they may be worried about. Children are able to express themselves, be creative, develop their imaginations, and try out new tools as they play. Dramatic play can be used to introduce new concepts and reinforce others. It is a great way to build cooperation and communication between children while extending and building language arts, math, reading, writing, social skills, fine motor and gross motor skills.

Consider other ways children’s learning can be enhanced through dramatic play.

Plan dramatic play activities
- Observe to find out what interests the children.
- Consider ages and abilities of children to ensure safety.
- Use low cost or no cost recycled items if possible.
- Provide props for children to reenact a favorite story or book.
- Create a wish list of items and ask for family and community help in gathering materials.
- Include functional print such as magazines, newspapers, receipts, pens, note pads, maps, brochures, calendars, appointment books.
- Choose safe, unbreakable props (avoid glass or sharp objects).

Props boxes
Gather items and store them in labeled boxes for easy access.

Start here and then add more!
- Florist: Silk flowers & plants, baskets, vases, empty seed packets, gift cards, apron, ribbons.
- Beach: Umbrella, towel, empty sunscreen bottle, folding chair, beach ball, pail, shovel, hat.
- Office: Calculator, pens, paper, telephone, stapler, paper clips, calendar, stickers, envelopes.
- Veterinarian: Stuffed animals, stethoscope, lab coat, pet carrier, brush, safety mask, bandages.
- Birthday: Party hats, crepe paper, birthday decorations, play dough, party plates and cups.
- Camping: Flashlight, pup tent, sleeping bag, sticks for campfire, pot, binoculars, folding chair.
- Ice cream shop: Bowls, spoons, large pompoms or cotton balls as the ice cream, paper cones and hats, confetti.
- Farmer’s market: Baskets, plastic fruits and vegetables, paper for signs, clipboards, pens, bags.
- Bath time: Dolls, towels, wash cloths, squeeze bottles, baby shampoo, water table with water.
- You decide: Empty cardboard boxes, tubes, markers, tape, scissors, paint, paper, etc.
Consider culture

- Visit area restaurants for menus, boxes, and other props such as chopsticks.
- Cut up yarn for spaghetti or Chinese noodles.
- Make tacos from felt circles.
- Include items printed in different languages.
- Provide dolls with different skin and hair coloring.
- Look for clothing, musical instruments, and other props representing various cultures.
- Ask families to share photos, traditions, and materials.

Choking Cautions

Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts. All items used for children under three years of age and any children who put toys in their mouths should be at least 1¼ inch in diameter and between 1 inch and 2¼ inches in length. Oval balls and toys should be at least 1¾ inch in diameter. Toys should meet federal small parts standards. Any toys or games labeled as unsuitable for children under three should not be used.

Follow their lead

If no one is engaging in the dramatic play that is offered, change it or add to it. The activities are only valuable when children choose to play with them.

Look to the season

- Add clothing that is seasonally appropriate.
- Provide seasonal decorations that children can use.
- Add photographs and pictures related to the season.
- Display seasonal books for role playing.
- Enhance the sensorial table with seasonal items:
  - **Fall** – pinecones, colored leaves, acorns.
  - **Winter** – ice cubes and mittens for building ice sculptures.
  - **Spring** – sand, pots, plastic flowers, shovels.
  - **Summer** – water, toy boats, buckets, and shovels.

Keep that housekeeping corner but jazz it up with:

- Purses and wallets
- Play money
- Jewelry
- Food boxes and cans
- Scrub brushes and buckets
- Area rugs, quilts
- Tablecloths, placemats
- Flowers, vase, and mats
- Clock and timer
- Clipboards and paper
- Newspapers
- Coupons
- Shopping bags
- Napkins
- Toy “pet” animals
- Framed art
- Music (CD player)
- Pictures of the children

Capture the fun!

Take photographs, videos, and audio recordings of the children at play to share with families via newsletters, back to school activities, or on the bulletin board.

Educate families by drawing attention to the skills children are acquiring through their play.

Make the recordings available for children to view.

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