

Embracing the Wonder of the Holiday Season Through Child-Led Learning

Dec 5, 2023



As the weather turns cooler and frost becomes to form, the enchanting holiday season is soon upon us. In many preschools, this time of year typically involves crafting classic handprint Thanksgiving turkeys and Christmas trees in festive hues. While undeniably sweet, it often follows a predictable pattern, leaving minimal room for individuality and imaginative exploration.

Here at [Stepping Stones](#), we dance to a different tune. Acknowledging the rich tapestry of holidays and festivals—

Christmas, Thanksgiving, Diwali, Chanukah, Kwanzaa—we celebrate diversity by fostering an environment where children can delve into various cultures and the special occasions they hold dear.



Nurturing Individual Growth through Play

At the heart of [Stepping Stones](#) is a commitment to a play-based approach, where we carve out space for individuality and curiosity to flourish. Our educators, attuned to the children's interests, guide them on a journey of self-discovery and curiosity for the environment. Holidays are seamlessly woven into our curriculum, becoming just one captivating element in the vast world of wonders explored by our young learners.

The benefits of this play-based philosophy are profound. Play researcher [Dr. Stuart Brown](#) found "The presence or absence of play, particularly in child development, has a great deal to do with competency, resiliency, emotional health [and] brain size," Brown said. Play is "not frivolous and not just for kids, but something that is an inherent part of human nature."

Empowering through Respectful Learning

I will be the first to admit, that in my early teaching days I would require all the children to line up while we placed their hands into the paint to create a hand-print craft to take home. In the spirit of teaching self-empowerment, we have now stepped away from the traditional handprint turkey or holiday craft. Recognizing that young children may object to forced participation in specific activities, such as hand-dipping into paint, we prioritize the importance of respecting their boundaries. After all, how can we instill a sense of healthy boundaries if we disregard such simple requests? You can read more about honoring the child's process [here](#).

Moving Beyond Generic Art



Ditching the identical, cookie cutter crafts also means steering clear of generic art projects that emphasize the end product over the learning experience in process based art. In our dynamic approach, the focus is on nurturing learning skills that empower children to explore the world on their terms. This departure from traditional teacher-centered methods aligns with the evolving nature of education in an age where information is readily accessible.

How to Celebrate from A Play-Based Perspective:

So how can we continue to celebrate the magic and wonder of the holidays through a play-based lens?

- Holiday materials (wrapping paper, ornaments, recipe books etc.) should be introduced into the classroom for play and open exploration.
- Art should be [process based](#) & can be inspired by traditional mediums, music, and color palettes of the season.
- The teacher's role is to inspire, provide materials for exploration, and support the child's motivations. [See here](#) for a wonderful invitation to play during the holiday season.
- Teachers should refrain from altering the child's work to make it more festive, choose to honor their process instead.

- Books and stories should offer multiple perspectives and be accessible throughout the day. They should include family stories collected from the classroom community.
- Involve your local community. Ask your families how they celebrate the holiday season then create a project that is meaningful to your children such as our [Community Cookbook](#).
- Let the children lead you to the aspects of a season or tradition that they are the most drawn to! If they show no interest in celebrating the holidays and sprinkling everything with glitter that's ok!

As the holiday season approaches, we eagerly anticipate weaving it into the myriad possibilities available to Stepping Stones children. While the handprint turkey may not make an appearance, we are confident that whatever path your child chooses to explore the holidays will be deeply meaningful to them. After all, the magic lies in their unique journey of discovery.

Are you looking for a unique and dynamic early childhood education for your little one? Find out more about spaces available at Stepping Stones. [Contact us today!](#)

Looking back at our Holiday Posts from Years Past:

- [The Holiday Season and Child-led Learning](#)
- [Thanksgiving from a Native American Perspective](#)
- [The Joy of Processed Based Art: An Argument for Leaning Away from the Traditional Turkey Handprint.](#)

- Exploring the Holiday with a Sense of Wonder



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