

# "The Messy Teacher"

May 11, 2023



I remember a great compliment I received when I was teaching preschool in a Head Start program. The maintenance worker came into my classroom carrying a large tarp. He said "we found an extra one of these in the shed and I thought you might want it." Not an intended compliment, per se, but that's when I knew that I was known as the "messy teacher."

As the messy teacher, my kids were given space to explore and change the properties of materials. To pinch, poke, dump, pour, add water & glue, stir, transfer & transport. As the messy teacher, my kids engaged their play urges to fill, dump, transfer, arrange, travel & transport, deconstruct, bury, splash, and spin.

Learning is messy! It involves experiments and mistakes. It involves using all of your senses for investigation. It involves connecting new experiences to prior schema. I knew I had found my place at Stepping Stones where messy teacher energy is welcomed and celebrated, and where rich outdoor play spaces invite it. In the spring time you can see us playing in the messiest of nature-based play...MUD!

## The Benefits of Messy Mud Play:



**Inclusive and invites cognitive exploration** – messy play is inherently open-ended. It welcomes participants of all ages and developmental capacities, because it insists that one explores using their own ideas and play urges. It welcomes investigative questions like "what would happen if..." and experimentation with concepts like cause & effect and manipulating properties.



**Supports gross & fine motor development and hand-eye coordination** – Messy play invites the opportunity to work with our whole body. Gross motor opportunities like lifting, transporting, and pouring. Fine motor work like scooping, pinching, patting, rolling, and the use of tools. Hand eye coordination to mix, balance, and sculpt.











**Play Invitation:** We brought our sensory table outside with the invitation to add water from the rain barrel! We saw a couple of our big play urges at work here- some children collected rocks to hide in the water and soil and then used tools to find them, and some were using scoops and cups to transfer water and mud to another vessel!









**Inspires rich sensory input vocabulary development** – Messy play with our littlest friends inspires rich sensory input as they touch, smell and even taste materials offered for exploration. The teachers supporting this exploration can offer descriptive vocabulary like squishy, wet, cold, gritty, or action words like pat, pinch, splash, roll, and form.







**Play Invitation:** Parents and teachers engaged with our infant investigators to manipulate mud, dirt and soil, talking through the process as their little ones explore.



**Provokes creativity and imaginary play** – The concept of the mudpie is as old as dirt (see what I did there?). Mud kitchen play inspires storytelling, engaging in social role playing, following steps of a recipe or process, and sharing space and materials with peers. Mud painting is another favorite for us as Stepping Stones!









**Play Invitation:** We discovered the mud puddles worked as a wonderful medium for art creations! Our Buds classroom used the puddle water as watercolor paint, and then used the mud as well to create darker marks with more texture. For Family Night we invited parents in to do some mud painting in the classrooms.



**Sparks joy!** Saying YES to messy play sparks joy! Find the nearest mud puddle and jump in!

#### Further Reading on Messy Mud Play:

- [Embrace the Mess](#)
- [Mud-luscious Play](#)
- [Benefits of Mud Play](#)



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