

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.

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Dramatic Play

By Meghan Pallante

Play is a NECESSARY part of childhood. Children learn best through play, for a variety of reasons, including:

- Children are natural explorers; play gives them a chance to make sense of the things they encounter in their world.
- Play is one of the first ways that children learn to communicate.
- Children learn to work together cooperatively through play and have their first experiences with conflict resolution.



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How can teachers encourage this inherent curiosity? By providing children with stimulating, hands-on, child-led activities. A thoughtfully planned dramatic play area supports opportunities for children to try out new language and vocabulary, develop social skills, improve motor skills, and be creative. And, because dramatic play offers so many growth opportunities, we want ALL children to participate. It's a great way for teachers to support learning through play.



- For infants and toddlers, educators can provide words that describe and support their play. If a toddler is giving a baby doll a bottle, an educator could say, “Oh, I see you are feeding your baby, he must be hungry!”
- Educators can support older children through scaffolding. If an educator is a “customer” at the children’s restaurant, while looking at the menu they could ask if there are any specials for the day. This could add a new element and an opportunity for the children to learn something new!

Dramatic play is also an excellent forum for observations- there is so much to be learned about a child while observing any type of play.

Dramatic play is for boys, too

We often hear, “The girls love dramatic play!” But what about boys? As early childhood professionals, what are we doing to encourage and interest boys in dramatic play so that they too can benefit? Educators need to be prepared and confident in explaining why dramatic play is important for boys. Playing in the kitchen area may develop into a culinary interest. Playing with baby dolls encourages them to be loving and nurturing, which will help them in potential future caretaking roles. Adding themes that are not tied to traditional gender roles such as a restaurant, veterinary office, or school can make the dramatic play area appealing to more children. With a thoughtful approach, all children can experience the benefits of dramatic play.



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Tips for enhancing dramatic play for every age

- For **infants**, create a dramatic play basket with materials such as baby dolls, soft food, small pots and pans, and toy phones. Introduce these items during playtimes.
- For **toddlers**, start out simple with a few items connected to a theme. Too many items can be overwhelming for younger children. For example, consider putting out a veterinarian kit with a few stuffed animals. Observe how the children interact with the materials. Educators may need to support and guide the play with toddlers.

- For **preschoolers**, ask the children for their ideas! Pay close attention to their interests and pick themes based around them. You can add items in phases by starting out with a few things and then adding items as you observe the children's play growing and evolving.
- Ask **school-age children** to write and act out stories. In a mixed-age environment, they could even perform them for the younger children.

Inspiration for your dramatic play area

- Use “prop boxes.” Put together boxes of materials for different themes that you can rotate. This will help save space in small classrooms or family child care homes.
- Ask families to contribute. Old clothes and accessories could be used for dress-up. Empty food boxes could be used for a grocery store theme.
- Incorporate dramatic play in other areas of your space. For example, you could create a construction setup in the block area. Add some hard hats, blueprints, paper, and pencils.
- Start with the dress-up clothes in your dramatic play area. Add some props that go with the costumes. If you have a doctor's coat, make sure you have a doctor's kit to go with it. If you have a mail carrier outfit, add a mailbag with letters and “mailboxes” around the room to create a delivery route.
- Look at your curriculum for inspiration. Are there any dramatic play ideas to go along with what the children are learning about this month? This is a great way to tie your curriculum into the interest areas!

Dramatic play provides a range of learning and development opportunities for children. Be intentional about this area of your space. Focus on adding variety. Look to the children for ideas and inspiration. Don't forget to join in the play and have fun!

Professional Learning Experiences

[The Role of Play in Any Setting \(Self-Paced\)- DIEEC](#)

Resources

[Supporting Language: Culturally-Rich Dramatic Play \(NAEYC\)](#)

[5 Ways to Play....With a Cardboard Box \(Zero to Three\)](#)

[Dramatic Play Beyond the Housekeeping Corner \(Penn State Cooperative Extension\)](#)