



Dramatic Play

How Dramatic Play Promotes Development

Dramatic play is central to children's healthy development and learning during the preschool years. For this reason, every *Creative Curriculum* classroom includes an area designed to inspire creative and imaginative play. In the Dramatic Play Area, children break through the restrictions of reality. They pretend to be someone or something different from themselves and make up situations and actions that go along with the role they choose. When children engage in dramatic play they deepen their understanding of the world and develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

Social/emotional development. To engage in dramatic play with others, children have to negotiate roles, agree on a topic, and cooperate to portray different situations. They recreate life experiences and try to cope with their fears by acting out roles and situations that worry them. For example, a child who anticipates going to the hospital for an operation can pretend to be the doctor. By assuming this role, the child can switch from feeling out of control to being in charge. Research shows that children who engage in dramatic play tend to demonstrate more empathy toward others because they have tried out being someone else for a while. They have the skills to cooperate with peers, control impulses, and are less aggressive than children who do not engage in this type of play (Smilansky, 1990).

Physical development. Children develop small muscle skills when they button and snap dress-up clothes and dress the dolls. They practice hand-eye coordination and visual discrimination skills when they put away props and materials.

Cognitive development. When they pretend, children create pictures in their minds about past experiences and the situations they imagine. These images are a form of abstract thinking. When children set the table for a meal for two or use play money to purchase food at their grocery store, they explore math concepts. They also learn from one another as they share ideas and solve problems together.

Language development. To engage with others in dramatic play, children use language to explain what they are doing and ask and answer questions. They choose the language that fits the role they have selected. They use reading and writing skills when literacy props are included in the Dramatic Play Area.