



Mud Kitchen Accessories

In this case study, Lisa Nelson, from St Edwards Primary School, Darwen, discusses the importance of the mud kitchen in their Reception outdoor area and the impact it has had on the children's skill development and learning.



Deciding to revamp our mud kitchen

One of the reasons why we decided to revamp our mud kitchen area was because we noticed that our previous Reception cohort were particularly sensory-seeking and had a real love for messy play. As most of our indoor classroom space is carpeted, this can be challenging to provide indoors. As a result, one of our key priorities for the year was to further develop our mud kitchen and expand the sensory and messy play opportunities available for our current cohort. This would allow us to better meet children's sensory needs while also supporting the development of communication and language skills through hands-on, exploratory play.

Supporting physical development in the mud kitchen

Physical development is always a strong focus in Reception, and year on year we are seeing children start school with less well-developed fine motor skills. We wanted to create engaging outdoor opportunities to support the development of these skills and encourage greater participation from all children.

We already had the foundations in place, including a designated area, wooden bench-style units, a table, and access to water. However, our resources to really enhance the space and provide those motor skills opportunities were limited. When the new mud kitchen resources from TTS arrived in September, it felt like Christmas — we couldn't wait to start using them with the children.

Resources we chose to use

Mud kitchen accessory set - EY07958
Metal jugs - EY06674
Nesting metal colander collection - EY07704
Assorted messy play scoops - EY06744
Giant potion bottles - EY07350
Messy maths measuring bottles - EY10361
Magical ingredient storage jars - EY07411

Why we chose the resources and how we used them

We chose the resources we did because they are wonderfully open-ended and can be used in a wide variety of ways. We introduced them gradually, a few at a time, so that an adult could be present to model their use and introduce new vocabulary.

Throughout the term, the resources were used regularly to create a range of different set-ups linked to the topics we were exploring in class. We also found that the children were highly creative, often finding their own ways to use the resources, with supporting adults following their lead. Our mud kitchen is located outdoors and is accessible to all children during free-flow times.

Learning that took place

We often linked the mud kitchen set-ups to our current classroom learning, giving children opportunities to apply their knowledge and consolidate new vocabulary and ideas in a meaningful context.

Pumpkin fun

One of the children's favourite activities involved pumpkins. During our Autumn topic, we shared the story Pumpkin Soup and enhanced the mud kitchen with pumpkins and a range of tools for scooping out the insides and exploring the flesh. The children were highly engaged and showed great determination to scoop out the pumpkins, which provided excellent opportunities to develop motor skills and wrist strength.



Bonfire Cafe

Another popular set-up was our bonfire cafe, which provided lots of opportunities to develop pouring and measuring skills. We talked with the children about their own experiences of visiting cafes and discussed the drinks they or their parents might order. Natural resources were used to enhance the activity and provide a further talking point.

This activity encouraged a great deal of cooperation, as children worked together to hold cups while others poured, took orders, and prepared drinks to order. The level of communication and language development that emerged from this activity was a huge added bonus.



Impact on learning

The introduction of these resources allowed us to be more creative and intentional in targeting specific skills through our outdoor set-ups. What began as a small corner of our outdoor area quickly became one of the most popular spaces, and within a few weeks we needed to extend the area to accommodate the growing number of children who wanted to play there. Our mud kitchen is now 3 times the size it was!

The range of resources helped to sustain children's interest and engagement in the mud kitchen for longer periods. With so many different tools available, each supporting the development of different skills, we observed higher levels of concentration, focus and involvement.

We were also able to use the resources to support specific children in developing particular skills. For example, pestle and mortars were used to build hand strength for some children. The children loved being invited to "do a job," without realising that their play was carefully designed to support their fine motor development.

Over the past few months, we have seen clear progress in the children's skills. They are now more confident and precise when lifting and pouring from a full heavy jug, more confident at using pestle and mortars to grind materials, and able to scoop with greater control. We have also seen a great improvement in the amount and accuracy of incidental mathematical language being used, which is another huge benefit to us.

Staff engagement within EYFS has also increased significantly. With more opportunities available in this area, there has been richer shared interactions between adults and children. This has led to children using more ambitious vocabulary, talking more openly about what they are doing, and demonstrating greater imagination. Staff have also become more creative in designing inviting set-ups and exploring new ways to use the resources, which in turn has resulted in even higher levels of child engagement.

The mud kitchen resources have been a great success, and we will continue to make excellent use of them!

How the mud kitchen started - small, lack of resources and not very engaging.



The mud kitchen now - a larger, well-resourced and much more inviting space.



With thanks to Lisa Nelson from St Edwards Primary School for writing and sharing this case study with us.