

Benefits of woodwork

Woodwork is the perfect activity in which children can demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning:-

playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go';

active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and

creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Also all the seven areas of learning in the current EYFS framework will be developed:-

Physical development:- With the use of real tools and hard wood (rather than balsa wood), the muscles in the hands and arms become stronger and the children develop more control of these muscles. They learn to vary the amount of force used - with hammers and saws. They also develop hand-eye co-ordination in order to hit the nails. Fine motor control is developed as children hold the thin nails in place. Through experience they learn how to keep their fingers out of the way of the hammer.

Personal, social and emotional development:- children demonstrate deep levels of involvement when undertaking a woodwork task. It is often noticeable that children who normally will not persevere at a task are prepared to try for far longer at woodwork - perhaps because they realise it is something truly challenging but also "real". Children will return to unfinished work the following day if necessary. They learn to share and take turns, negotiating and discussing routines and rules. They learn how to keep themselves and others safe. They realise that a real hammer can do serious harm and they do treat the tools with respect. They learn to follow agreed rules. Children who find it difficult to conform are often so keen to participate, that they do manage to comply with requests and boundaries at the woodwork bench - just so that they get their turn. They take great pride in their achievements and therefore their self-esteem is boosted. For most children woodwork is a new activity and therefore they are taking a risk just by becoming involved - they take further risks using the equipment but learn to do this safely and independently and the results are greatly appreciated.

Communication and language development:- There is always a lot of discussion at the work bench and therefore language is developed. Children have to follow instructions and will often be heard explaining the rules to other children. They encounter problems all the time and discuss solutions. They explain what they are doing and learn the vocabulary associated with the activity.

Creative development:- With many activities for young children, the process is as important (if not more important) than the product. This is definitely the case when children are first starting at woodwork. They need to develop the techniques. Eventually, they will start to use their imagination, combined with their knowledge of the task, to plan what to make. With support, they will have learnt how it is possible to combine various materials and media and this will increase their

options and possibilities. Many of the models become the starting point for a story which also supports creative development (as well as language skills).

Knowledge of the World:- Clearly through working with wood, the children will learn about its properties and the properties of other materials that they combine with the wood. They will learn about how to use tools and how to combine different materials. With appropriate interactions, they could learn about the source of wood and various types of wood. They will be experiencing the process of 'design, make, review'.

Mathematical development:- This pervades every aspect of the task - from experiencing the weight and size of the wood to deciding how many wheels to add to a truck. Children will be thinking about size and shape, as well as number. Again, with appropriate interaction, their thoughts can be vocalised, refined and developed.

Literacy development:- Children will often combine mark-making with woodwork - adding drawn features to their models. They also add their name to ensure their work is not lost. They will use books to refer to for ideas or information. Also, as mentioned above, many models will feature in stories and the literacy possibilities within this are infinite.

Practicalities:-

Induction and access:- The bench is outdoors (the noise would be unbearable indoors) and in an area that can be seen at all times. When the children first start in the nursery, woodwork is available immediately and we have an adult beside the bench at all times. We encourage parents to help ensure that the children adhere to the very simple rules:- two children at the bench, two hands on the saw. There is zero tolerance of any dangerous behaviour and the children quickly learn to behave appropriately if they want to be involved. The woodwork is part of our continuous, outstanding provision – it is always available and, therefore, does not cause a 'mad rush' to have a turn. After the induction period, adults 'keep an eye' on the woodwork area, but an adult is not always 'stationed' there.

Equipment:- I would recommend small claw hammers, smooth fine nails (bought by the kilo from an ironmonger) and adult-size hack-saws (Saws are not essential and many wonderful models can be made without a saw). The work bench from 'Creative Cascade UK Ltd' is sturdy and a very reasonable price at £175. If the bench is not under a shelter, then cover with a tarpaulin at night or in heavy rain.

Additional resources:- We add a variety of resources for children to fix to the wood such as milk bottle tops, elastic bands, fabric, corex, corks, string etc. Paint, felt pens and pencils are available to decorate models as well. A good way to store these is in an ikea rail attached to the end of the work bench.

Wood:- Wood is too expensive to buy. The best option is to find a local timber merchant who offers a 'cutting service' for customers. They are usually happy to keep off-cuts for use in school – we have taken a large bin to the timber yard which they fill up and we collect the wood every few weeks.

Risks and actions:-

Hazard	Possible scale of injury	Precautions to put in place to reduce risk	Risk rating
General risk of injury through use & misuse of tools	Medium	Staff will ensure that children are closely supervised during the induction period until all children have been trained in the use of the tools and comply with the “2 children at each bench” rule. Staff will then remain vigilant in watching the woodwork area. Adults all aware of how to get first aid help if necessary.	Low
Children with behavioural difficulties/developmental delay might not adhere to the rules and might not use the tools safely	Medium	Staff will ensure close supervision of these children if they are near the woodwork area.	Low
Sawdust in eyes	Low	Children to wear goggles.	Low
Hit fingers with hammer	Low	Train children to tap lightly to fix nail in place and then move hand away when they hit harder.	Low
Children get hit by moving tools	Medium	Strict imposition of 2 children only limit at the bench. Staff will be scanning and monitoring the area at all times.	Low
Cut with saw	Low	Strict rule - 'wood in vice'.	Low
Splinters	Low	Wood will be checked. Children shown how to use sandpaper.	Low
Sharp nails cause injury	Low	Protruding nails will be hammered down. Children will not remove nails from work area.	Low