MUD Play: Rivers & Roads!

Messy engineering play

Play is a means of deep learning for young children. In Gaffield Children’s Garden, we provide rich, open-ended Nature Play experiences. We are committed to it, knowing that these experiences will become an essential part of the child, will be transformed into intellectual pursuits, imaginative pursuits, support physical and emotional health, and promote positive regard for the Earth now and into adulthood. We encourage families to participate and replicate what we do here, in their own homes, apartments, and parks. Here is a recipe for Nature Play at Home: Rivers & Roads!

**SUPPLIES!**
- access to a patch of open soil or a low-edged bin of soil
- small shovels, scoops, spoons, funnels, cups with spouts
- small foraged pebbles, stones, sticks
- small toy cars, boats, or cut up branches for symbolic play
- hollow tubes: bamboo sections, cut hoses or hula hoops
- hose access or pitcher of water for mixing mud and making rivers

**PLAY!**
- encourage child to forage supplies or adult can set up an accessible mud play tub/station
- model the digging of a trench for a river, add water to fill
- “I wonder if this boat can float down this river…”
- rivers might need bridges and roads and “underground” culverts
- turn em’ loose!

**MORE PLAY?**
- build boats of household findings
- create entire villages, ecosystems
- older children may enjoy making maps of their rivers and roads
- add animal toys
- visit a local river or stream

**CONSIDER**
- Remember to let the kiddos lead the way.
- The difference between play and “activities” largely comes down to who leads it. In play, children lead based on their own interests and curiosity. In “activities” the adult’s agenda is leading.
- Participating in transformation play is great brain play.
- As long as the soil is clean, soil play is healthy play.

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