

Autumn | 2021

Learning through Sensory Play



Learning through our senses is an important part of children's development. As part of our continuous provision, materials including sand, water, paint, glue, dough and mud are available for children to explore over and over again.

The Early Years Foundation Stage framework places emphasis on sensory play:

The Natural World

Birth to 3

Explore materials with different properties.

Explore natural materials indoors and outside.

3-4

Use all their senses in hands on exploration of natural materials with similar and/or different properties.

Creating with Materials

Birth to 3

Explore different materials, using all of their senses to investigate them.

3-4

Explore different materials freely, in order to develop their ideas about how to use them and what to make.

This project developed from children being interested in using the herbs we had grown in the nursery allotment. We added them to the water with various containers, jugs and spoons and found that children were engaged with the mixtures and 'perfume' they had made in the process. We were able to introduce a variety of herbs and flowers from our garden; the room was filled with some lovely aromas. Following this we investigated citrus fruits and used teapots and teacups. This play led us to providing different types of tea bags to explore.

Later on in the term we found that hair conditioner made an excellent play material and discovered that mixing it with cornflour and then paint made it into a slimy material. Additionally we investigated a type of clear paste and found this a satisfying sensory material, especially when we discovered that we could make noises with it using our hands!

Other types of sensory experiences were introduced over a period of several weeks including shaving foam, coffee grounds and cloud dough.

R investigated grapefruit slices by squeezing and deconstructing them with his hands.



A squatted down next to a mud patch. He used his first finger to make dotty marks in the mud.



Over several days L explored herbs, flowers and water presented with various containers and jugs of water. L placed his hand into the water; “I’m dipping my hand in...it’s nice and cold” he commented.

He spent sustained periods of time investigating, removing the leaves and mixing them with water, sharing and discussing with the adult what they smelled like and offering the concoctions he had mixed to the adult. The adult demonstrated that the herbs had a smell by rubbing her fingers on a leaf and then L smelled the mint and commented “It smells like toothpaste”.

L squashed the leaves into a pot and stirred the mixture; “What does this smell like? he asked. “Sage” said the adult.

“I like sage...do you like all the ingredients I am putting in? I’m making perfume...do you like perfume?”

The adult responded she did like perfume and L replied
“It’s perfect...I do like it, my perfume got lots of things in it”.
“Yes it has got Sage, Lavender, Mint, Lemon Verbena and
Nasturtium flowers” replied the adult.



L continued this play when he took the herbs to the water tray and removed the leaves from the stems to add them to a bottle. He used his own idea to use a funnel to pour water into the bottle to make his perfume.



S chose to play at the tray of water presented with a variety of herbs and flowers. She dipped her fingers into the water, gently dabbling and splashing. Later she returned and used her index finger to make spirals in the water.





N is exploring the herbs and water in the black tray.

He pours the water over the herbs and flowers "I put some water in" he comments.

N then politely asks. "Can I have some more water?" "Lovely asking N".

I pass N the jug "Thank you" He replies.

C joins the adult at the sensory play with the tea pot and teabags. He watches what the adult is doing before he picks up the teapot and waits for the adult to fill the pot using a spoon. He holds on to the lid of the pot and slowly opens and closes the lid. Once the tea pot is full he pours the water into a cup.

"I've made you a cup of tea" he says. Thank you I replied just what I need as I'm really thirsty.

C smiles at me. He then begins to fill the tea pot again, after a while he asks "Can you fill this up for me?" He then repeats filling up the cup and handing me a cup of tea.





Over the course of the week C revisits the table and explores the different smells that have been added to the water. He is especially interested in the lemons. After playing at the table for a while C disappears and returned with a lemon from the display. I ask C if he would like to add it to the water and find out what it looks like inside. Another adult cuts up the lemon for C and he returns with them on a tray. He tips them into the water picking up one, which he squeezes into the water. He notices a pip which he picks up and shows to the adult. I explain about the pip being a seed. “I don’t want the pip” as he continues to squeeze the lemons.

C came to the easel, and, noticing the open paint pots he picked one up and tipped the paint onto the board observing it drip down. C then explored the paint with his hands and arms spreading it all over the board. C dipped his hands into the pots when he chose to add more paint and played here for a sustained period of time.



H explored shaving foam rubbing the foam all around his hands and arms and also Lou's hands. He described it as "washing". H also made large marks with the foam around the tray.



Y showed interest in the dry sand today. He watched as I poured the sand from a height. Y then held his hand out to catch and feel the sand as it came down.



E investigated the different types of teabags. She squeezed out her ‘spicy chai’ tea bag and the bag burst. As she stirred the mixture in her cup she commented she was “mixing all the spices”.



A is exploring the herbs and water. The adult encourages her to smell the herbs and then she does this independently. She pours water from a jug into some smaller containers commenting “Water, water in it”.



Over two days H explored a variety of herbs and water. The adult talked about the smell of the herbs and encouraged H to smell them. H said the Lemon Verbena smelled like “mango”. The adult replied “Do you think it is fruity? What are your favourite fruits?”

“Mango and grapes” replied H.

H particularly enjoyed pouring water into a set of three copper jugs and arranging the herbs.





E explores filling her tea pot and cup with lemons and limes, she spends time pouring water from her teapot to the cup, repeating this lots of times.

N was interested in the fruit pips he saw floating in the water.

“You’ve got a pip in your hand, it’s from inside the lemon”. He then picks up a piece of lemon.

“Look cucumber he says to the adult”.

“It does look like a piece of cucumber, it’s called a lemon, and can you see the yellow skin?

“Why don’t you smell it?”

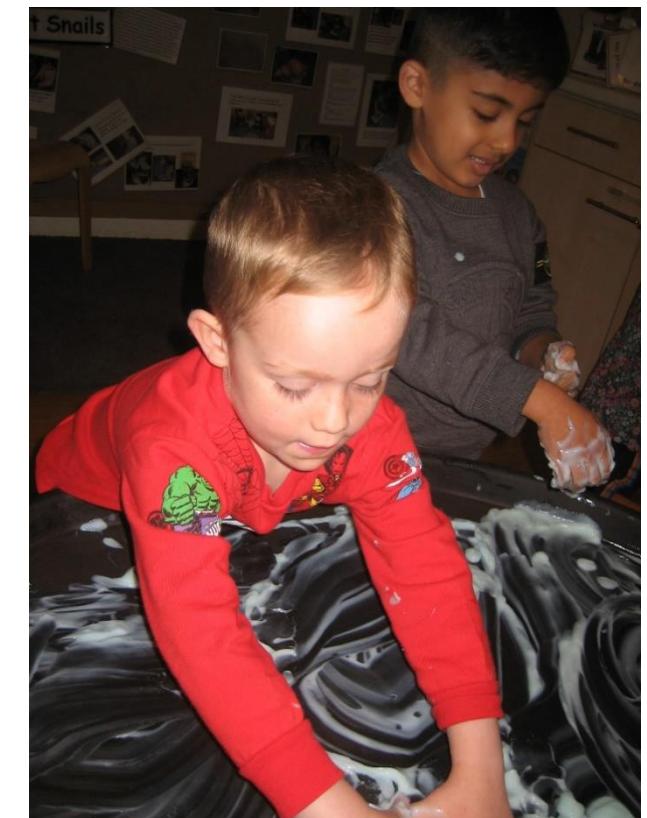
“Oh” he holds the piece of lemon near his nose, “It smells delicious” he says.



J was interested in the sensory activity which involved smelling different scented leafy herbs and plants and looking at their flowers. He focused as I held the Lemon Verbena close to allow him to smell it and he was able to shift his gaze from the plant to my face and back. Later that day I took J to explore the leaves in our garden, he looked up as the wind blew through the leaves making them flutter.



We discovered that hair conditioner provided a satisfying sensory material to use. We explored how it felt and smelt and made marks.



The cornflour was added to the conditioner and the children found this made a slimy material.





C walks over to the black tray and looks in at the cornflour. “Is this snow?” he asks.

I explain that it does look like snow and that it is cornflour in the tray. C investigates using his hands and then begins to fill and empty using the small pots and spoons.



L puts his hands in the cornflour “It’s very sticky” he comments.

He then begins to fill and empty a small container using a spoon “It’s like milk”.

Paint was accidentally added to the conditioner and then A,A,A and D began asking for more colours to be added.



The result of the conditioner, cornflour, water and paint!





M investigating and exploring the cornflour. He uses both his hands to move the cornflour around the tray watching the marks he was creating.

M explores pasta using his hands to pick it up. He fills and empties metal dishes and empties the pasta into the tray, repeating this for a period of time. I mirror M play and place pasta into similar containers and he looks, noticing my play. I then use the pasta to create sounds as I drop it into the metal containers. As I do this M stops his play and observes what I am doing. I pause and M resumes his play and begins to mirror my play making sounds with the pasta as he puts it into the metal dishes. As M hears the sounds he is creating he jumps up and down making happy sounds.

