

CHILD CARE

plus +

SUMMER 1998

Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

Vol. 8, No. 4

+ It Just Makes Sense

Everyone learns through their senses. Touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing are important learning tools for young children. Some children have disabilities which limit their ability to use one or more of their senses. A child with a visual impairment, for example, must rely on other senses to gather information from the environment. Providing learning opportunities using the senses is one way to create an environment which encourages young children to learn. By incorporating activities which use all of the senses, you stimulate different kinds of play and a lot of learning.

To build sensory experiences into play, you can:

+ ADD SOUND. Many toys include interesting sounds. Adding sound to toys (bells, crinkled paper) or making toys (home-made shakers) can increase exploration.

+ ADD TEXTURE. Velcro dots on blocks, sponges in the water table, and sand in the finger paint are all examples of adding texture to toys and play activities. Take care to make these activities comfortable for each child or offer alternatives; some children have adverse reactions to certain textures.

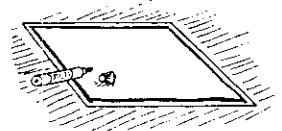
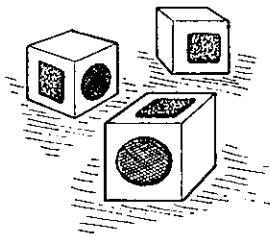
+ ADD SCENT. Adding scent to play materials using food extracts or perfumes and providing clean, empty food cartons (plastic chocolate syrup or liquid dish soap containers) may result in children's using materials in different ways or exploring a toy or play item more fully because of the familiar smell. A scrap of coconut or lemon-scented cloth in the housekeeping area might be used as pretend food. Vanilla extract on a rattle may encourage a child to grasp and bring the toy to her mouth for exploration.

+ VARY TEMPERATURE. In a typical environment, children are exposed to hot and cold air, water, and food but are seldom exposed to temperature changes in toys. Much like the addition of scent or texture,

temperature can change the way children explore a particular toy. Guard against temperatures that are extremely hot or cold, but try to incorporate toys that are different temperatures. If your program has a clothes dryer on site, a stuffed animal may be warmed to encourage cuddling—think of how a blanket feels when it first comes out of the dryer. You can change the temperature in the water table by adding ice cubes one day and heated rocks another. Teething toys or other soft vinyl toys can be placed in the refrigerator or on top of a warm stove to vary their temperature.

+ INCREASE VISUAL CONTRAST. When a child has difficulty seeing the space a puzzle piece should fit into or cannot distinguish between two parts of a snap-together building block, increasing the visual contrast may provide the information the child needs to be successful. Using paint or a marker, you can outline or fill in the space where puzzle pieces fit to help children see the contrast between the space and the rest of the puzzle. Accent one part of a block with a different color so there is a visual difference between the two pieces. When a child is given white paper on a white table, he may be unable to see where the paper stops and the table begins. When children are coloring or painting, it helps to offer colorful paper (neon works well) or draw a dark outline around the paper's edge.

Making adaptations that add sensory input to the play environment takes advantage of all possible learning channels, AND it's fun for the kids! + SAM/SLM



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+ FROM THE SOURCE

Deaf-Blind Services

Each state has a Coordinator of Deaf-Blind Services who identifies children with both vision and hearing loss and provides technical assistance to support children's inclusion in their individual communities. The amount and type of support provided for each child with deaf-blindness (also called dual sensory impairment) and their families differs from state to state. The Coordinator can provide specific support for child care professionals providing care and education for young children with dual sensory impairment.

When the Coordinator gets a referral from you, a child's parent, or other team members, the first step is to assess the child's vision and hearing. To qualify for services, a child does not have to be completely blind and/or deaf. If the child qualifies, the Coordinator gathers additional information about the child's strengths, special interests, and family goals. The Coordinator then makes recommendations and provides access to support and/or technology to promote the child's success in day-to-day routines and activities. You can find your state coordinator by contacting your state's office of education. + SHW

+ MAKING IT WORK

Using A Sensory Checklist

To make an activity truly multi-sensory, ask yourself:

Does it promote: hearing? seeing?
 smelling? touching? tasting?

A simple painting activity usually means paper, brushes, and paints. What senses does this activity promote? You could check "seeing" because of the paint on the paper. What about other senses? Here are a few ideas that ensure opportunities for children to explore other senses while engaged in a painting activity:

- Add food extracts or a drop of perfume to the paint to stimulate the sense of smell.
- Paint on sandpaper or corrugated cardboard which makes a sound when painted with a brush and feels interesting and unusual when painted with fingers.
- Have tiny sponges instead of brushes to encourage children to use their fingers to touch the paint.
- Offer colored and scented whipped cream to paint with so children could taste as well.

Not every activity can incorporate every sense, but you can often use seemingly ordinary activities to create a world of sight, smells, textures, tastes, and sounds for the children in your program. + KMG

+ NOTES FROM HOME:

Sensory Sorting

I learned about the importance of adding sensory experiences from my child's therapist not from her child care provider. Amanda was almost three years old, and we had been trying to help her learn to sort either by color or shape for a long time. She did not seem to be learning this important skill, and I began to think that she would never be able to do it. Then one day, the therapist arrived with a set of hand-made fabric circles. The circles included different colors and interesting textures (corduroy, velvet, terry cloth, silk, etc.). I knew that she hoped Amanda would match the ones that looked alike.

Amanda began playing with the circles and put several of them down the front of her overalls and others in a pile on the table. She was engaged in playing with the circles, but she certainly was not matching the ones that were alike. Just as I was about to voice my frustration, I noticed that Joy, the therapist, was watching Amanda with great excitement. Apparently, some of the circles were scented with perfume, and others were not. Amanda had taken the circles that smelled pretty and put them in her overalls and discarded the ones that did not smell in a pile on the table. She was showing us that she knew how to match, but that sorting by color or shape was not her thing.

I shared this discovery with the child care provider and both of us looked for ways to increase our use of scent, temperature, and other sensory experiences so that Amanda would be surrounded by the kind of experiences that seemed to spark her learning. +

+ SPOTLIGHT: Child Care plus+

Deaf-Blind Partnerships Project

More than 8,000 children in the United States today are affected by the loss of both vision and hearing—a condition called deaf-blindness. Communication, interaction, and learning success for children with deaf-blindness are greatly enhanced through early identification and support. This support is reinforced in Montana through a unique blending of services called the **Deaf-Blind Partnerships Project**.

Like all states, Montana has a designated Coordinator of Deaf-Blind Services responsible for the identification of children with deaf-blindness (sometimes called "dual sensory impairment") who qualify for services. Once identified, the coordinator works with the child, family, and appropriate team members to assess the individual child's strengths and needs and make recommendations for support services. However, Montana is a vast state with many small rural communities spread over great distances. It is not uncommon to find rural areas that do not have local access to specialists that can carry out the recommendations of the state coordinator. This is where the **Deaf-Blind Partnerships Project** steps in. A collaborative effort between the Office of Public Instruction and the Rural Institute on Disabilities at the University of Montana, the project was designed to build the capacity to effectively meet the needs of each child—regardless of the distance between the child and needed services.

To meet rural needs, the **Deaf-Blind Partnerships Project** provides education and support in a variety of innovative ways. Support strategies include:

- ★ State lending libraries related to children with dual sensory impairments are available in three locations across the state including the state office, the Rural Institute on Disabilities, and Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK).
- ★ On-site technical assistance specific to an individual child's interests and needs is provided for staff members in schools and child care programs, bringing training and resources directly to team members in rural areas.
- ★ Additional training and awareness institutes are

offered at various locations across the state and are available for any individual interested in obtaining general information about children with deaf-blindness.

- ★ Financial support is available to ensure that training institutes are accessible for all team members including professionals (child care professionals, teachers, early intervention specialists, etc.), parents and family members, and individuals with deaf-blindness.
- ★ An assistive technology loan bank provides no cost loans of assistive technology and augmentative communication equipment.
- ★ Mentoring and/or shadowing opportunities with professionals and parents are organized by the project. People already providing quality services for children with deaf-blindness are identified as mentors and in-person meetings or distance technology interactions are arranged and funded according to requests for assistance.
- ★ On-site assistance for individual children is available upon request by parents, child care professionals, teachers, support staff, or youth with deaf-blindness, focusing on the development of an individualized plan and creating access to needed technology and resources.

Project resources are available for children or young adults up to age 21, their families, and support staff in child care programs and public schools. Contact one of the individuals below if you have concerns about a child with possible hearing and vision loss or if you want to know more about this unique partnership. + SHW

Ellen Condon
Deaf-Blind Partnerships Project
The Rural Institute on Disabilities
(406) 243-4134 or 1-800-285-5390

Francisco J. Roman, Coordinator
Montana Office of Public Instruction
(406) 444-4426
TDD (406) 444-1812

+ What do I do when . . . ?

QUESTION: My program has a great sensory play area. Isn't this enough?

ANSWER: It is clear that you value sensory play or you would not have an area devoted to it. However, the most obvious response to your question is another question: Is there ever enough sensory play for young children?

Children learn by doing. Offering experiences that appeal to their touching, hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling across the early childhood environment increases children's interest in doing. Providing a variety of these kinds of experiences promotes and expands children's learning, especially when they have limited use of one or more of their senses because of a disability.

Early childhood activities (and routines) tend to emphasize hearing and/or seeing. Let's take a simplistic example, such as reading a story book, and look at how you can add the senses. If you just read the book aloud, you are encouraging hearing. If you read it and show children the pictures—provided they are in a position to see them—you are encouraging hearing and seeing. By giving each child something mentioned in the book like a crown or a leaf or a piece of cut-up apple, you have given them the opportunity to hear, see, touch, smell, and even taste what you are reading to them about, all by making simple additions to the activity.

While tasting is pretty much confined to snack or meal time, there is no end to the ways you can use the other four senses across your play environment. And while you are at it, remember that snack or meal time is also a time for smelling and touching (do you think you could eat a piece of kiwi without touching those seeds first?).

Sensory play areas offer children one place to go to

experience learning through their senses. When you embed sensory experiences in many different learning activities throughout the environment, you open up a whole world of learning through the senses. + SLM

Child Care plus+ staff are available to answer questions, brainstorm, problem-solve, and provide resources and information about offering sensory experiences.

Call 1-800-235-4122

+ RESOURCE REVIEW

The Hundred Languages of Children—Advanced Reflections (2nd Edition, 1998) edited by C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman is an integrated set of essays on the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education. In the foreword, Howard Gardner writes "the book constitutes a profound meditation on the nature of early human nature and the ways in which it can be guided and stimulated in different cultural milieus. Anyone with an interest in the education of children should read it; few who do so will remain unaffected by the experience." Available from Ablex Publishing Corporation, PO Box 5297, Greenwich, CT 06831 at (203) 323-9606 for \$39.95.

CHILD CARE plus+ is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

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