



Putting Learning into Play

How the Ontario Early Learning Framework is Making its Way into Home Childcare

Submitted by: Ontario Early Years Centre:
Haldimand-Norfolk

Recently, while on a hike with the Ontario Early Years Centre, one of our local home childcare providers stopped to take a picture of a little one she was caring for that day. He decided to sit on a little bridge and look at the flowers sprouting on the ground. She sat beside him and pointed out that it was a new flower growing for this year. Later, she told me that the agency she was with wanted her to start taking pictures of the children while they were playing so they could show the parents what their children were learning. She was being introduced to the Ontario Early Learning Framework (OELF) which is part of the Early Learning for Every Child Today (the ELECT document). For the purpose of this article, I will use the OELF.

The document is a tool for those of us who work with children that helps us to guide our practice and to help us to be mindful of the learning that takes place while children play. It is a common framework that lays out – in a way that is relevant to all early childhood programs - what and how children learn. It is based on 6 principles:

- Early childhood development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health.
- Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.

- Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children's rights, optimal development and learning.
- A planned curriculum supports early learning.
- Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.
- Knowledgeable and responsive early childhood professionals are essential.

Kim was recognizing that James was interested in the little sprouts. She knew James' mother would like to see a picture of him exploring nature and being interested in his field trip with the OEYC. She took the time to let him sit for a few minutes and explore what captured his interest and she sat and engaged herself in that learning while he was playing. Later at home, they did a planting activity.

The OELF includes a Continuum of Development that outlines the sequence of skills that children develop at different ages. It encompasses a broad range of domains (physical, social, emotional, communication/language and cognitive). It provides examples and it supports us as educators who are interested in providing quality childcare to observe and document the children's activities and learning in order to help us plan for continued learning to take place.

To learn more about the OELF, please go to www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/

Source: *Early Learning for Every Child Today*
A framework for Ontario early childhood settings
Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning,
January 2007

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Professional Education Opportunities

Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) - Hamilton

ASCY offers a range of educational/training opportunities for early years, child care and home child care practitioners.

Emergency First Aid/CPR

Presented by: Hearts Helping Hearts

Professional Firefighters teach Emergency First Aid/CPR in a clear and easy-to-understand format.

Please bring your own lunch.

Saturday, November 2, 2013, 9:00 am to 2:45 pm

Cost: \$70.00 for ASCY Library Members/\$80.00 for Non-Members

Location: ASCY

Networks: Please check the ASCY insert for area network information and dates.



Early Childhood Community Development Centre - Niagara Helping You Achieve Your Training Goals...

The ECCDC Team is committed to offering workshops and training sessions with exactly the right mix of information, inspiration and interaction so you leave with new skills and renewed passion for the work you do every day. We are also committed to providing you with access to state-of-the-art learning resources and classroom equipment and to giving you the skills and insights you need to put these items to their most effective use. Drop in to the ECCDC to have a look at all the learning equipment that may be borrowed for your home child care program and visit our website at www.eccdc.org for a list of upcoming training sessions. We look forward to seeing you at the ECCDC soon!



Ontario Early Years Centre: Brant

For information on workshop options and to see a current copy of our Professional Development Newsletter, log onto www.eycbrant.ca/oeyc. A copy of the current newsletter will be available for you to see what is being offered.

When fees are associated with a workshop, you are required to register in person or by mail and payment must be received prior to completing your registration. Programs with approved billing can register by phone. If there is no fee associated with a workshop, you can register in person, by phone at **519-759-3833** or email registration@eycbrant.ca. Please note the cancellation policies associated with paid workshop registration.



Ontario Early Years Centre: Haldimand - Norfolk

The Home Child Care Network of Haldimand and Norfolk meets from 6:30-8:30 pm the first Tuesday of each month from September to June at the Ontario Early Years Centre - Haldimand and Norfolk, 12 Colborne St. North, Simcoe, ON N3Y 3T9.

We ask you to please call **519-429-2875** or **1-866-463-2759** at least one week in advance to register for the meeting.



Child's Play...

The Building Blocks for Lifelong Learning

Reprinted with Permission, Hamilton Best Start Magazine, 2010/2011

The play-based learning article printed here gives valuable information for all who live or work with young children...from parents to home child care providers to those who work in licensed early learning settings to those who teach in Early Learning Kindergartens and in primary and junior classrooms.

Child's play really matters.

Play is the fundamental component of early learning. Children explore, investigate, create, use their imagination, reflect and express their own experience, feelings and ideas and come to understand themselves, others and the world around them. Play builds vocabulary and motor skills, helps children problem-solve and think critically, and encourages them to work with and learn from others.

In fact, play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a child's right. Play is also at the core of the new full-day kindergarten curriculum being introduced in Ontario in 2010.

The Association for Childhood Education International states that play is critical to optimal growth, learning and development in children from infancy through adolescence. The absence of rich play deprives the child of healthy development and learning.

In the words of Dr. Charles Pascal, Premier Dalton McGuinty's special advisor on the early years: "Research indicates clearly that a deliberate and effective play-based approach supports young children's cognitive development. It generates highly motivated children enjoying an environment where the learning outcomes of a curriculum are more likely to be achieved."

Before a child enters the classroom, however, play has a considerable role in brain development in the early years.

Play Is Active Learning

What exactly is happening inside a child's brain when they are at play?

Evidence from neuroscience shows that the years from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, build the base for competence and coping skills that affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life. In fact, a person's ability to concentrate and quickly process information is predetermined by the neural wiring – the connections formed in the brain – developed in the early years of life.

Play provides the educational experience that supports and strengthens the connections between neurons and provides the essential opportunity for children to grow cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally.

"Play is active learning that builds the brain in many ways. It engages children's senses and it's how they come to understand their life," said Lois Saunders, project leader at Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) in Hamilton.

"It accepts that children have their own ideas and their own thoughts. It encourages children to build from what they already know. That de-assembly and re-assembly of information is learning how to learn."

Through play, children "try things, take risks, ask questions, and build self-confidence. It's a secure base from which to explore," said Wanda St. Francois, executive director of ASCY.

But the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning concluded that one-quarter of children entering Grade 1 in Canada are vulnerable. They have learning, health and behavioural



Child's Play... (continued)

problems that are likely to interfere with their ability to learn and to form relationships, and to achieve academic success.

According to Dr. Jean Clinton, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and an assistant clinical professor at McMaster University, it is easier to build a house well from the ground up than to have to renovate later. In other words, crucial learning skills missed early are harder to build in later life.

“If those early years before school aren't done right, a child won't be ready for the structured school environment.”

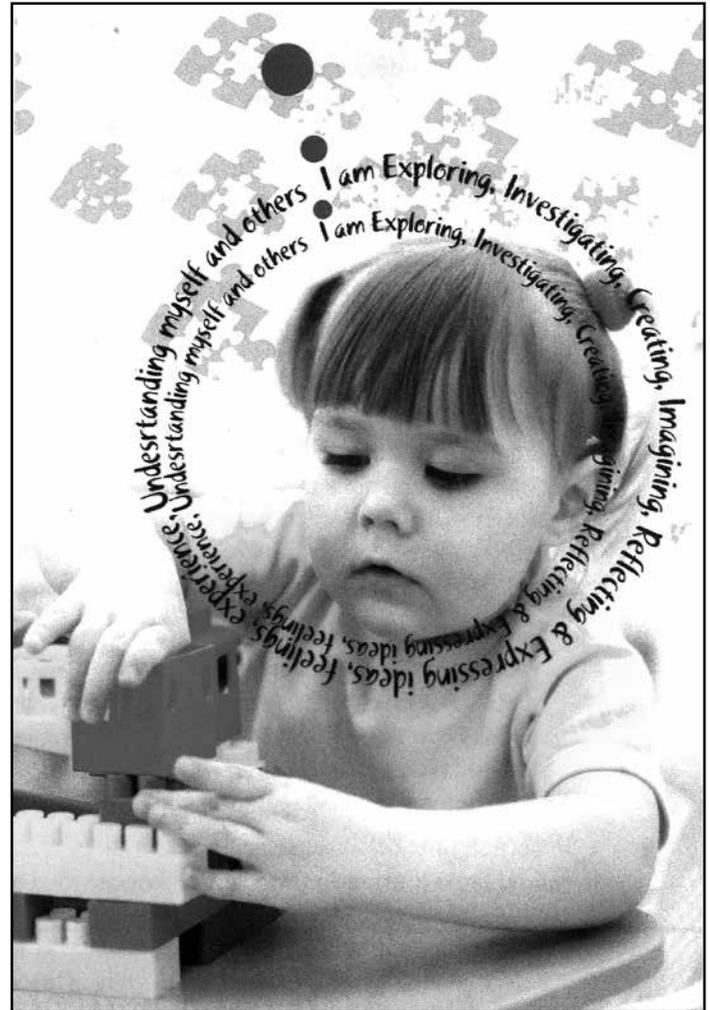
Play-Based Learning Starts at Infancy!

Infants

Play was once passed over as the diversion of children not yet ready to learn. The time spent in child care centres was seen simply as babysitting until a child's brain was developed enough to be filled up with knowledge through a work-oriented, rigid and adult-directed approach. But a vast array of research has shown that play-based learning begins in infancy during a child's first interaction with his or her parents. Play is essential to building an infant's capacity to learn, and it motivates a lifelong love of learning.

Firstly, an infant will develop an attachment and interact with his or her parents through touch, voice, and facial expressions.

“The first play initiatives are gestures, noises, and facial expressions, which help to stimulate an infant's senses,” said Saunders. That includes mimicking or laughing when others make faces or noises. Eventually, infants learn cause and effect by banging things together to produce noise. Parents can further encourage their infant to learn by introducing rattles, musical toys, and textured toys in contrasting colours.



Toddlers

Learning through play comes naturally to toddlers. Children from 12-36 months are constantly in motion, and with increased play they develop better muscle control, balance, and coordination.

Toddlers also like to model play in pretend scenarios, like driving or caring for babies. They are really exploring cause and effect. By making things happen, they are discovering their own power. Children might sit beside each other and play independently but observe and learn from what each other is doing. That's called parallel play.

“As toddlers develop, their play becomes more complex, more interactive, and more abstract,” said Saunders. “You see them scripting their play and they're seeing

Child's Play... (continued)

relationships and connections. They're applying language, whether that's spoken or a mental script. They are relating with others and beginning to understand that people think differently from them."

Preschoolers

As children reach 3-4 years of age and continue to engage in pretend play, they are learning to get along, make compromises, tolerate the ideas of others, resolve conflicts, regulate emotions and develop friendships – all essential social skills for the future.

"When a child doesn't have these skills, if another child takes his truck, he might bite or hit them," said Saunders. "If those skills are there, the child might look around and find another truck to play with." Preschoolers need clear and simple rules so that they understand what behaviour is and isn't acceptable.

Because of their developing imaginations, preschoolers may have trouble separating fantasy from reality, and may start to refer to imaginary friends.

Through play-based learning, preschoolers also become more developed in their language, and have an easier time expressing themselves. They will begin to ask "how" and "why" questions. They will also start to communicate their fears, such as being apart from their parents or being in a new situation.

Kindergarteners

Sometimes it's difficult for adults to understand the importance of play in school, especially because they grew up under a different model of learning. When adults see children using school time to play, they believe that little or no learning is taking place. It is easier for adults who don't understand play-based learning to want to see results that are measured through marks and scores when children read aloud or do tasks in their seats.

"Learning doesn't always hang on a fridge," said Saunders. "Focusing on those products of learning misses a lot, if not all, of a child's learning."

Teachers and early childhood educators (ECEs) learn much more about a child's development by observing and interacting with him or her as they independently explore the classroom, express ideas to a friend, or develop vocabulary by answering questions related to their play. Higher-order questions challenge the child to think about what they see, and how or why things happen. Play rich environments respect children's innate competence and ingenuity.

For instance, an ECE might sit with a child and ask what he or she is building, why they chose the red blocks over the blue ones, or what would happen if they took the bottom block away. Some ECEs are even using cameras to capture play and to document a child's learning and development.

Play-Based Learning Throughout the School Years

Playful exploration and investigation should be a part of learning, after kindergarten through to high school, says Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister in the Early Learning Division at the Ontario Ministry of Education. A former Geography teacher, Grieve said practical, hands-on learning is essential.

"Play shouldn't end at kindergarten... It was amazing to watch Grade 9 students working together and conducting an experiment to understand how water flows. That had much more of an impact than reading from a book. Play is the way that kids want to learn, and we as educators should do everything we can to support that."



Defining the Domains of Development in Ontario's Early Learning Framework: Early Learning for Every Child Today

Submitted by: Early Childhood Community Development Centre

“Early Learning for Every Child Today is a guide to support curriculum and pedagogy in Ontario’s early childhood settings, including child care centres, kindergarten classrooms, home child care, nursery schools, Ontario Early Years Centres and other family support programs and early intervention services” (Early Learning For Every Child Today, p. 3). As reflective home childcare practitioners, we understand child development evolves through a sequence of skills. Early Learning for Every Child Today contains a Continuum of Development which supports our ability to observe and document children’s activities and interactions in order to plan meaningful environments, materials, activities and interactions with caregivers. The Continuum of Development outlines a sequence of development within different domains. The appropriate sequence in each area of development is an important indication that the child is moving steadily along a sound developmental continuum (Allen & Marotz, 2006). The Continuum of Development helps practitioners see individual growth, strengths and challenges for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children. It is comprised of root skills and their indicators which are organized into developmental domains.

There are five broad domains of development: social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical that are interrelated and used in most early childhood education curricula in Canada. Root skills are the abilities that exist within a domain. Indicators of root skills show what a child does or knows and are displayed in progression. The Continuum of Development also gives examples of possible child-adult communications that support the related skill development.

The **Social** domain consists of root skills that reflect children’s understanding about themselves in relation to others and to the world. Some root skills in the **Emotional** domain contain the development of self-concept, self-reliance and self-regulation as well as identity formation. The **Communication, Language and Literacy** domain includes root skills for spoken, written and visual communication. Children develop

and demonstrate their mathematical understanding, as well as build upon their natural curiosity and sense of wonder for the world around them through the root skills in the **Cognition** domain. In the **Physical** domain, the root skills specify the various types of movements necessary for children to strengthen both their large and small muscles. The following is an example of each domain as shown in the Continuum of Development:

Infants (birth to 24 months)

Domain: 1. Social

Root Skill: 1.2 Imitation

Indicator of the Skill: Imitating adult behaviour

Interactions: Opening your arms wide, saying, “Big!” then pause and look directly at the infant. Repeat. When he imitates this action, say, “You did it!”

It is important to clarify that Ontario’s Early Learning Framework is not a locked step, universal pattern of skills that should be achieved according to a specific timetable or in a specific sequence for all children. Nor is the Framework a curriculum and/or a screening or assessment tool to identify developmental concerns or to assess a child’s progress against a set of benchmarks or outcomes.

As children enter Full-Day Kindergarten, early learning and child care professionals follow the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program. This Ontario Early Learning Framework relies on the same six overarching principles of the Early Learning for Every Child Today Framework.

Source: Early Learning for Every Child Today

A framework for Ontario early childhood settings

Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, January 2007

The Smaller the Better: The Value of Small Group Activities in Home Child Care Programs

Submitted by: Ontario Early Years Centre: Brant

Albert Einstein once said “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” What a powerful and humbling thought! As Home Child Care Providers, it should be our objective to encourage our children to be inquisitive learners, excited to explore the world and all it has to offer. In the smaller group size that is prevalent in home child care environments, providers can focus on the individual needs and interests of each child. The program timetable can also be made flexible and changeable in order to offer learning activities to follow the children’s interests. When this happens, learning just seems to take off!

The ELECT Document (Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings) describes how young children learn and develop. It also provides a guide for curriculum in Ontario’s early childhood settings, including home child care programs. Information about the ELECT Document and a downloadable PDF copy can be accessed at: <http://www.cfcollaborative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/ELECT.pdf>. This key document looks at the learning domains and the sequence of development of children from birth to age 8 years. When developing activities and programming for the children in your program, the ELECT Document provides valuable information on the learning domains: social, emotional, cognition, physical plus communication, language and literacy.

Current research demonstrates the value of following children’s interests in their learning about new concepts and topics. We also know that when learning opportunities happen in smaller groups so that every child has lots of opportunities to ask questions, explore the materials and take an active role, the learning takes off. Here are some programming ideas that you could incorporate when the children in your care are showing an interest in the topics suggested:

Cooking with Children: Cooking and baking with children, right from the time they can hold a spoon, can be great fun and provide wonderful learning experiences as well. Although the goal is to create something yummy for everyone to enjoy, it is also a wonderful way to develop math skills through counting and measuring ingredients, making predictions about what they are making and learning to follow a sequence with their recipe. You might choose to develop a chart for the children to make predictions about their creations. “How many of us prefer carrot muffins and how many prefer oatmeal raisin?” You might also develop a hand-drawn recipe of a favourite item to make such as playdough so younger children can follow along the recipe and sequence what happens next.

Science: Science learning is everywhere. Young children are just beginning to explore their world and catching these key moments when they are inquisitive in learning about something that catches their interest is the “key”. As autumn harvest time is approaching, take time to:

- Go on walks to look at the indicators that fall is here. Discuss how the leaves are falling from the trees and small animals such as squirrels are gathering nuts for the winter ahead. By venturing outside to explore with your children, countless opportunities for learning become available.
- Go to a grocery store or farm to purchase fall vegetables, gourds, apples and pumpkins. When you go back to your home daycare, prepare these with the children so they can explore all of the components that make these foods special. You may want to have the children help prepare foods to make fall soups and homemade applesauce. Little ones can help to wash their treasures and cut them under your watchful eye. Take time to purchase tools that are designated as child safe for your kids to use but are still very effective.
- There are so many small-group science activities that you could do together when your children show an interest. If you go onto the internet



The Smaller the Better... (continued)

you will find countless learning ideas such as: vinegar/ baking soda volcanoes, cornstarch goop, making windsocks, planting activities, exploring water properties, preserving fall leaves, creating worm farms and bug viewers, etc. The possibilities are endless!

Little Readers and Writers: You may choose to focus on a much-loved book such as “Red is Best” for a whole week. Offering lots of red in your creative area, making red snacks together, creating a book of children’s red artwork and matching it with their word descriptions are all good ideas to celebrate this special book. Why not also create photo albums together showing the children at play and doing special activities? All of these can be put into your book area for children to go to again and again.

Creating Together: Although it is important for children to explore art media on their own, it is also valuable to take time to do it as a group.

- Pudding or yoghurt painting can be great fun to do at a table together. Make sure you join in the fun so you can model exploring the properties of the materials, provide some new vocabulary during the activity and discuss what you observe them doing with their creations. It’s also a tasty experience but make sure you all wash first and that each child has their own tray or paper with their pudding.
- Holiday gifts and cards are also fun to do together. This can be an ongoing project that you can go to again and again until it is completed.

As a Home Child Care Provider, you often have put on hold what you were planning to do in order to learn all about the fascinating bug they all just discovered. This can add extra work to your already busy day but when you look at their delighted faces, it will be worth it!

“How paramount the future is to the present when one is surrounded by children.”

~Charles Darwin



Exploring with Blocks = Learning

Submitted by: *Affiliated Services for Children and Youth*



One of the principles of the ELECT/OELF Document is: “Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance.”

Block play allows children of all ages to explore and learn in all the domains of the ELECT/OELF.

In 2006, Dr. Paul Cappon (Canadian Council of Learning) stated: “Stacking blocks, and mixing sand

and water, encourages logical-mathematical thinking, scientific reasoning and cognitive problem solving... the learning that occurs is a by-product of play.”

At a recent Home Child Care Network workshop, I was asked what the numbers and writing on pictures and artwork displayed at an Ontario Early Years Centre meant. The numbers refer to the domain and skill. The writing with it will tell a learning story relating to the indicator of the skill and/or the interactions of the adults and children involved in the learning. This type of documentation is being displayed at many Early Years Centres and early learning programs including home child care settings in Ontario.

The charts below list some of the skills (but not limited to) that children of all ages can attain through playing with blocks. Several of these skills can be developing when multi-ages of children are playing in the block area at the same time. The home child care provider can help foster skill development.

Social

Age Group	Domain and Skills	Indicators of the Skill
Infant	1.2 Imitation	- imitating adult behaviour (building towers, banging blocks together)
Toddler	1.3 Parallel Play	- playing in proximity of peers with similar playthings
Preschool/Kindergarten	1.5 Interacting Positively and Respectfully 1.9 Interacting with Adults	- beginning to show respect for other children’s work/ play - seeing adults as resources in exploration and problem solving
School Age	1.3 Co-operation	- co-operating and sharing frequently

Emotional

Age Group	Domain and Skills	Indicators of the Skill
Infant	2.3 Sense of Self	- showing pleasure in mastery
Toddler	2.5 Autonomy	- initiating activities
Preschool/Kindergarten	2.5 Regulating Attention, Emotions and Behaviour	- focusing attention - persisting when frustrated
School Age	2.6 Positive Attitudes towards Learning	- increasing pride in work and interest in learning new things



Exploring with Building Blocks... (continued)

Communication, Language and Literacy

Age Group	Domain and Skills	Indicators of the Skill
Infant	3.2 Receptive Language Skills	- pointing to objects' names (props such as cars, animals, etc. added to the block area)
Toddler	3.2 Expressive Language -words	- using common verbs (such as build/fall) and adjectives (such as down, big)
Preschool/Kindergarten	3.5 Using Descriptive Language to Explain, Explore and Extend	- spontaneously using the language of mathematics (size, shape, patterns, etc) inquiry and reasoning as they play
School Age	3.6 Reading	- reading to find fluency and meaning (add books about structures or measurement to the block area)

Cognitive

Age Group	Domain and Skills	Indicators of the Skill
Infant	4.5 Spatial Problem Solving 4.9 Sorting	- sorting blocks - grouping like objects together (big/small)
Toddler	4.3 Cause-and-Effect Exploration 4.4 Spatial Exploration	- responding with joy to the predictable outcomes of exploration (knocking blocks down) - exploring containment by putting objects in containers and by dumping them.
Preschool/Kindergarten	4.17 Understanding Two-Dimensional and Three-Dimensional Shapes 4.18 Identifying Patterns 4.19 Measuring Length, Weight, etc.	- recognizing names and shapes - counting sides and corners - recognizing and naming cubes, rectangular prisms, cylinders, spheres - creating patterns with blocks and art materials - using vocabulary of measurement (tall/short) - using non-standard measurement tools such as blocks, hands, feet when they build or create
School Age	4.7 Measuring Length and Weight 4.8 Patterning	- using conventional units of measurement, metres, centimetres, etc. - representing and describing patterns

Physical

Age Group	Domain and Skills	Indicators of the Skill
Infant	5.1 Gross Motor - Coordination 5.3 The Senses - Tactile	- transferring object from hand to hand - touching, rubbing, squeezing materials
Toddler	5.3 Sensory Discrimination	- using all senses to identify and differentiate properties and materials
Preschool/Kindergarten	5.3 Fine Motor Skills-drawing	- copying triangles, etc. (Add paper and drawing materials for children to copy or plan their block creations)
School Age	----	----

Source: *Early Learning for Every Child Today*

A framework for Ontario early childhood settings

Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, January 2007

Caregiver Asks

Submitted by: Ontario Early Years Centre: Haldimand-Norfolk

“Whenever I go to the Ontario Early Years Centre or neighbourhood drop-in program, they have playdough and a sensory table out for the kids to play with. The facilitators were talking about the importance of sensory play, and I was wondering if you could tell me more.”

Right from day one, children have been seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting everything. And this is how they learn about their world. When we include and deliberately plan for sensory play, we are opening doors for them to increase their knowledge of the world around them.

When children get to manipulate materials and real objects, meaning is added to the play. It is not an abstract concept; it becomes real and it's in their hands. It's important to include sensory play so children can manipulate the materials and problem solve, figure things out and learn. When we provide real things, we provide opportunities to add meaning to what they are doing. Not only does sensory play keep children busy and occupied, they are learning about science, language, social and dramatic play. Their small and large muscles are working and creative thinking and problem-solving skills are developing. Stimulating the senses strengthens the pathways in the brain that lead to learning in many areas and the more senses that are involved in an activity, the more learning that will take place.

Sensory play is one of the most open-ended activities that exists. There is no wrong way to play and it provides opportunities for every child to succeed. No matter where a child is developmentally, he/she will succeed. You really can't go wrong with a bin of beans or a ball of playdough. Feeling water run through your fingers or raking your hands through a bin of beans is calming and soothing. It can distract a sad or nervous child. Children can play in a group or on their own.

As children explore with their hands, they experience how things feel. They learn about the different attributes of a substance. Is it warm, cool, rough,

smooth, hard or soft? This learning then transfers over into categorizing things, which is the first step in scientific learning.

Sometimes we think of the barriers to sensory play and find many reasons why it won't work in our setting. It's important to understand why it's so important and to find ways of making it work. Let's explore some of the barriers and solutions:

- There isn't enough floor space. At the OEYCs, they often use large sensory tables but providing sensory play in smaller bins is also acceptable. You can put them on the table or right on the floor.
- It's too messy! Sensory play is messy but it's also important. Look at the environment and make changes as necessary to make it workable. Sometimes we just have to take a big breath and jump right in. Take it out at certain times in the day or put a floor mat under it or take it outside; but do it! Give the children the opportunities to explore and have fun and learn. Enlist the children's help in finding solutions to keep mess to a minimum and how to clean up. That develops creative problem-solving skills and it teaches them responsibility. But remember, sensory play comes with a certain degree of mess.

By providing open-ended learning materials, children will develop into strong thinkers who are ready to take on the world. It's our job to give them the opportunities to explore and learn and to find ways to be mindful about planning for playful learning.



