

Extending Children's Learning with Sensory Based Practices

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Abstract

The primary education across the nation should be designed in the frame of New Education Policy 2020 that envisages a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3 to 18 years. In the new scheme a strong base of early childhood care and education from age 3 is also covered ensuring overall wellbeing and strong foundations of learning for all the children. From the early stage, children use their five primary senses to explore and seek out to make sense of the world around them. For optimal brain development it is important to actively use their senses. As they explore their world through 'sensory play', children develop the understanding of the world around them. For this, it is important to plan and provide opportunities where children can actively use their senses. The school and home environment should provide for space and opportunities for extending children learning through sensory practices. Especially early childhood education should be built on the foundation of sensory learning. Some interventions for sensory learning at primary level is referred that can be carried out in schools and at home for holistic development of children at primary ladder of education. The sense of vision, sense of hearing, sense of touch, sense of smell and sense of taste must be crafted in a well planned manner.

Keywords: *Sensory based practice, Sensory Learning, Learning Environment*

Introduction

The purpose of education is to nurture good human beings capable of taking wise decisions. Human beings who are rational in thought and action, who possess compassion, courage, scientific temper, creativity and hold ethical moorings above all. For this, we need to build the primary education in a safe and stimulating environment where children feel valued. A major development in this regard is right of children to free and compulsory education act 2009 that laid down the course for universal elementary education. A wide range of learning experience must be designed with appropriate resources and quality physical infrastructure. The primary education across the nation should be designed in the frame of New Education Policy 2020 that envisages a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3 to 18 years. In the new scheme a strong base of early childhood care and education from age 3 is also covered ensuring overall wellbeing and strong foundations of learning for all the children.

In the earlier period, the early childhood care and education of the child was mainly informally carried through the caregivers at home in joint family system. This beautiful practice declined in the wave of urbanization and so called

modernization where nuclear family system replaced the existing family structure. Children are now in the hands of teachers and dependent on the learning exposure given to them in educational institutions. It is important to have an understanding and child friendly atmosphere based on fundamentals of child psychology. An environment which focuses on foundational literacy and development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities. For this sensory based practices play a crucial role in extending children's learning.

Sensory learning

From birth to early childhood, children use their five senses to explore and try to make sense of the world around them. For optimal brain development it is important to actively use their senses. As they explore their world through 'sensory play', children develop the understanding of the world around them. For this it is important to plan and provide opportunities where children can actively use their senses. In infants, babies and young children sensory exploration comes naturally and enhances with the kind of environment they are provided. On this basis children build an understanding of objects, spaces, people and interactions around them.

As adults, our senses provide us with vital information that we use to make decision most of the time in a day. We may take this ability for granted and barely notice it, but it's for this reason that helping children to learn about their own senses is so important.

Role of sensory learning

Sensory engagement in recreation includes all actions that stimulate a young child's senses of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing, as well as anything which engages movement and balance. The easiest way to facilitate children connect their learning with senses is by playing outside with nature, movement, colours, textures, sounds and smells. Picking things up and feeling their texture is what people often associate with sensory play, but it's about a lot more than touch. Sensory learning is infinite and it is only really limited by your own imagination. So early childhood education should be built on the foundation of sensory learning. When one thinks of sensory learning some questions crop up in the mind like:

- Why is the physical environment important for learning and play?
- How can we use nature for sensory learning?
- What makes for sensory learning environments?
- What are the developmental characteristics of play?
- How do we distinguish play from other behaviors?
- How can teachers use play to help children learn and develop?

The answer to these questions can be discovered through execution of sensory play in learning situations. For the optimal utilization of sensory play, the readily available material like sand, mud, cooked, uncooked food items like rice, beans, popcorn or lentils, water, ice or snow, small pebbles or stones, cut up pieces of clothes, jute, paper, straws, cotton balls or craft material can be used in school and home. Teachers and parents should be cautious when using physical play material and also ensure supervision of young children closely when using smaller items that could be choking hazards. In a more planned manner art and craft, drama and role play with the help of props and musical instruments can be used in play way educational settings. Through

this the child can express freely and help to develop psychomotor skill among them. Music, drama and art in education develop communication, language skill and creative expression in the children.

Effect of Immediate Environment on sensory learning

Small children are always enthusiastic towards "hands-on" learning. They learn by exploring and manipulating objects in their environment using the five senses: seeing, touching, tasting, smelling, and hearing. Eating and preparing foods can be a great sensory experience for children and a fun learning opportunity. The children at this primary stage are able to represent the world internally through mental imagery and language. They are capable to symbolic thinking i.e., the ability to engage in make believe play by imagining the things as real when they are not e.g. pretending a stick as a sword. The most common play amongst young children is 'ghar ghar' literally translated to "house-house" that involves children pretending to have tea parties having imaginary guests, cutlery etc. Through this memory and imagination are developed.

Because of their age and fine motor skills, infants and toddlers use their fingers to eat, and meals easily become sensory activities! Especially when trying foods for the first time, they often "play" with foods squishing food, pushing it around, licking, smelling, and finally tasting it. For preschoolers, the expectation at mealtimes is to develop social and cultural meal skills, and "playing" with food is discouraged. Yet, it's still natural for preschoolers to enjoy the sensory properties of foods.

Kitchen at home is very practical place in the house to encourage sensory learning where child can see, touch, feel and explore the world around him. Things like measuring cups and spoons, scoops, cups, strainers, or anything else that children can play with provides for play material. Practice scooping, dumping and filling containers with your child. Teachers and parents during the play can narrate what they are doing together with dialogues, such as, "Look how much water we can fill in the jug, glass and a cup." Ask questions that help children think about what they are doing, such as, "What if we mixed water and milk together"? It will lead to development of thinking skills among children at a tender age. As the child grows, the need to

provide them with learning experiences to engage all senses to understand the environment emerges. Same way the teachers of preschoolers must keep a class space for activities that promote sensory learning and may themselves participate to develop the learning better.

Some interventions for sensory learning at primary level is referred that can be carried out in schools and at home for holistic development of children at primary ladder of education. The sense of vision, sense of hearing, sense of touch, sense of smell and sense of taste should be designed appropriately in curricular frame of learning. Some activity examples are listed below in reference to sensory learning.

Sense of Vision: A young child tries to make sense of the world around them by “seeing” it. Eyes are used to see the surroundings and to identify shape, size, colors and to read. Eyes give us a great deal of information to understand the world around us.

Activity 1: Provide the children with color cards. Make a game of color matching by using different colors and different shades of a color.

Activity 2: Show children some items, then ask them to close eyes. Take a few items away. Now ask them which items are missing.

Activity 3: Take some glasses. Fill them with a liquid at different heights. Ask them to arrange the glasses from full to empty.

Sense of Hearing: Referred to as auditory sense, it aims at improving listening skills, recognizing, attending to and responding to sounds in the surroundings and be able to discriminate between them.

Activity 1: Take the children outside in garden/ playground, ask them to listen to variety of sounds such as of birds, animals, humans, vehicles and ask them to share how many they can identify.

Activity 2: Ask the children to close the eyes or blindfold them, now let their friends speak. Ask them to name the child who they think is speaking. They can also be asked to identify soft and harsh sounds, to identify one particular sound among others or to concentrate on a moving sound and point to its moving direction.

Activity 3: Make the child listen to silence. Make him sit quietly and ask what all they can hear

e.g. clock ticking, their own breath, faint outside sounds etc.

Sense of Touch: Referred to as tactual sense, it helps grasp a number of features of objects such as hard, soft, texture, temperature etc. and in framing concepts about them. For this, the children must be allowed to explore the characteristics of things around them by touching.

Activity 1: Let them make a variety of toys, animals, objects etc using clay or blocks.

Activity 2: Provide some daily life objects such as banana, pencil, stone, ice cube and a sun warmed metal scale and make them identify properties as hot, cold, rough, smooth etc.

Activity 3: Play the game - rock, paper, scissors. Provide them all three and make them identify differences among them on the basis of size, shape, texture and touch.

Activity 4: Put different things like grains, stones, nuts of varying sizes in boxes in which children can insert their hands but can't see them. Ask them to identify.

Sense of Smell: Sense of smell helps child understand and learn about what to expect in situations or objects. Sense of smell is particularly linked to sense of taste as food flavours are tied to it. Thus, an emphasis on teaching children to be able to identify and discriminate between different smells would be helpful in providing them better understanding of their environment. It is particularly helpful in avoiding dangers and mishaps.

Activity 1: Smelling bottles activity involves giving children two sets of bottles. Both sets have bottles with matching smells of strong scented objects like cinnamon, peppermint oil, vanilla extract etc. Children have to identify and match the pair of bottles in each set that smells the same.

Activity 2: Provide the children some fresh and stale food items; clean and polluted water and ask them to share what they feel about the condition of these based on smell.

Activity 3: Take them to school garden and ask them to collect three flowers each of different smell.

Sense of Taste: It aims to make the child aware of different kinds of food flavours and to identify them by taste. Taste is an important sense as it

helps us determine flavours of food and other substances. Historically, it has been closely tied to human survival as it gives an indication of what's safe or poisonous to eat.

Activity 1: Provide food items that are salty, sweet, sour and bitter, and ask them to separate them by tasting them.

Activity 2: Give them two bottle sets of each type of taste and ask them to match the pair.

Sensory activities allow children to refine their thresholds of sensory information, helping their

brain to create sturdy connections to sensory information and learn which are useful and which can be filtered out. It helps to build nerve connections in the brain and encourages the development of motor skills. language development is excelled in sensory learning activities. It also encourages 'scientific thinking' and problem solving. The longing to engage with sensory play comes naturally for children and should be encouraged and supported both at home and in early learning environments.

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