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A Sure Start Children's Centre

Teaching and Learning Policy

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TEACHING & LEARNING POLICY

How do young children learn?

- Children's brains, from birth, have immensely powerful and flexible capacities to attend to sensory information (seeing, hearing, touching and tasting), including a developing awareness of the body, and the bodies place and movement in space. From birth, the brain has a very powerful capacity to organise experience into categories and make connections between experiences. We view the 0-5 age range as a "sensitive period" for children's learning and development
- Both under and over-stimulation are potentially damaging to children during sensitive periods of development. Therefore we always offer a rich, stimulating, multi-sensory environment for children, whilst avoiding over stimulation
- Children have very different temperaments. Some children need stimulating, questioning and communicative adults in order to encourage them to explore and experiment. But more outgoing children can have their development hindered by this type of approach, experiencing it as interfering. All children need adults who can respond to conversations, and develop them, and sustain thinking with them
- Children need to feel emotionally secure at nursery, if they are to have the confidence to explore and learn. They need to feel confident about the transition between home/parent and nursery/key person.
- Children's powerful learning mechanisms mean that a considerable amount of their learning is built by playing and experimenting with high quality learning materials. For example, through many experiences of playing with water and other liquids, children move from simple actions (e.g. a baby flicking water with her fingers) to more complex, co-ordinated actions (e.g. a four year old carefully pouring water from one container into another and then carrying the container over to the sand and mixing the two substances together) Through repeating and practising these physical actions and experiments, children develop concepts about shape, space, and the properties of substances
- Children are also learning through the movement of their bodies, and feeling sensations on their bodies. Moving the body builds the brain as well as muscles; movements that start off with the body can then be extended to movements of tools and play materials. It is difficult to learn to write if you haven't mastered big movements with your shoulders and arms
- The acquisition of language from the second year onwards give children an additional and immensely powerful mechanism for organising experience and learning from it. Through talking with other children, and real conversation with adults, children are increasingly able to distance themselves from what they are doing and reflect on it, or see another point of view. When adults engage with children co-operatives (e.g. thinking over a problem together; guiding a child by discussion through a process like cooking a cake which the child could not do independently), they are providing a very powerful structure to support children's learning
- Play is an integrating mechanism in children's learning, bringing together learning and experience in the different domains: social, emotional, sensory, linguistic, physical movement and sense of self in space
- Resources, adult help, and teaching need to be geared to the development of the child. For example, the first symbolic play is with props which closely resemble real things (a pretend tea cup, a pretend telephone) and is generally imitative. So resources and adult involvement in play need to be geared to this. In the third year, more complex pretend play soon develops, where an object can stand for almost anything the child imagines, and

where the ideas for play are increasingly thought up by the child, rather than simply in imitation of adults; therefore resources which closely resemble real things start to become a hindrance to developing play, whereas previously they had been helpful

What is the adult's role?

Adults are needed to:

- Organise an environment which is rich in learning opportunities.
- Organise an environment that promotes play, enabling children to integrate their learning across different learning zones
- Structure the environment so that it is geared to the child's development and progress. A logically ordered environment enables a child to move from simple and inflexible symbolic play, to rich more imaginative play for example the use of tools (ranging from big brushes, to very fine brushes) and all other aspects of the organised learning environment. However this should not be understood as an across-the-board assumption that children's learning develops in an orderly way from simple to complex. Some children will show little interest in 3-wheel pedalled toys but want to go straight to using the 3-wheelers. The accessibility of resources at different levels of complexity, with help, guidance and teaching from adults, ensures that the right conditions for the child's learning and development are available
- Interact with children's play and learning, showing due sensitivity (not interfering when children are deeply involved, and giving children time to explore objects, ideas and equipment without being directed). Adult interaction can be:
 - An adult-led experience. Here, an adult plans an experience which is matched to the interests and development of a group of children. The adult provides encouragement and guidance for the children to work collaboratively together towards a shared end, sharing discussion and tasks along the way. This will often include the adult directly teaching new skills and ideas.
 - An adult becoming involved in a child's play, or the play of a group. Here the adult shows an interest, takes part, and may suggest some ideas, but does not attempt to steer the direction or the theme of the play
 - An adult may shift from observing a child, to interacting, through spotting a "teachable moment". If a child really wants to cut a piece of paper to a particular size, this is usually the right time to teach the use of scissors!
 - An adult may discuss with a child or a group – what they are doing, what they have found, do they need some more resources or equipment?
- As a guide, the ratio of time children are engaged in self-initiated experiences and experiences where an adult co-operates or leads should range from:
 - 75% child-initiated: 25% adult-co-operating/leading for children from birth to 2 years old
 - 60% child-initiated: 40% adult-co-operating/leading for children who are four years old
- Conversation with children should be respectful and authentic. Trivial and fleeting comments ("that's lovely" as you pass a child painting) are worse than silence! Where an adult starts a conversation with a child, it should as far as possible be a

sustained, two-way process (“that’s an interesting painting ………”) which involves the child in being thoughtful, and becoming aware of the adult’s point of view as well as clarifying hers or his.

Where does planning come from?

The majority of our planning is underpinned by the Early Excellence Model. This enables children to build learning over time. Continuous provision experiences covers all 7 areas of learning, as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The nursery is organised in to learning zones to ensure all areas of learning are accessible.

Our curriculum is freeflow and play-based. The high quality of continuous provision ensures that whichever choice a child makes, he or she will access a learning experience which offers access to a broad, balanced curriculum.

Children are not able to choose experiences which are poor in potential for learning: we do not offer them. Our long term planning is linked to core experiences which include planning linked to seasonal and cultural events. Planning to celebrate festivals focuses on learning, not end products. We don’t get children to produce rows of identical Christmas cards.

A further element of our planning arises from observation and assessment (individual, or at a group level) which analyses children’s interests, their current level of learning/development, and children’s individual or special needs. This includes what we learn from parents about their children.

No planning is plucked from the air (“shall we have books about trains on Wednesday then and a colour table on Friday?)

Nor do we plan by topics. What if a group of children are interested in the hairdressers but the topic is “The Jungle?”

Working in a Children’s Centre

Our approaches to planning for learning are consistent – they apply to the nursery school, to planning for stay and play groups and home visits. Parent groups and individual discussions with parents provide an opportunity to engage in dialogue and to explain our rationale. We are learning a great deal from other professionals who work with Haven, leading to improvements in our specialist knowledge (e.g. speech and language therapy) and planning.

Because we are an integrated Children’s Centre, all planned groups and experiences here, whether led by Haven staff or other professionals are consistent with our approach to planning.

Systems and Management

The day-to-day responsibility for planning across The Nest and The Hive is with the Deputy Head.

Children and families learning English as an additional language, parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs, and parent involvement in the planning process, are the lead responsibility of the Deputy Head. Termly monitoring reports are completed by the head of centre and then taken to the Governing Body. Regular fortnightly meetings (Standards and Curriculum) are held with all managers where the curriculum is discussed to

ensure a consistent approach across the centre. 'Non negotiables' are at the heart of the meeting to ensure high quality is maintained.

The Deputy Head is responsible for co-ordinating special educational needs. The SEN centre team meet fortnightly. Hive staff and Nest staff meet regularly, focussing on key relationships, the learning, development and wellbeing of focus-children, and the overall "environment plan" indoors and outdoors.

An overview of the planning is displayed in The Nest and The Hive entrance and the meal room and weekly planning is displayed in family areas.

The Early Excellence Pedagogical Model

We use the pedagogical model from Early Excellence at Huddersfield to demonstrate our view of a quality curriculum for children from 0-5's.

The Key elements in effective learning

The green triangle: this is the first layer and represents the elements Early Years Practitioners need to understand most clearly if they are to build an EYFS curriculum which responds to children's learning.

The dynamic process of effective learning

The second layer is the overlapping triangle shown in dotted lines! By adding this layer we can represent the processes involved in effective learning and teaching.

- Play – which we see the dynamic relationship between the child and the environment
- Planning – which is the way in which early years practitioners structure the environment, adapting and enriching their provision in response to children's interests and emerging ideas
- Interaction – which is the voice of teaching and learning. It is the communication between the adult and the child, in which through sustained shared dialogue, ideas are exchanged and shared

The culture of effective learning

The third layer is the circle surrounding the two triangles. This represents the culture or ethos in which teaching and learning take place across the whole centre! This is the ethos that pervades what we do and how we do it and defines the quality of our practice.

A supportive culture of warmth and respect fosters children's confidence, motivation, independence and well-being enabling every child to feel valued and successful.

(This model is taken from 'Looking closely at Learning and Teaching – a journey of development' Liz Marsden and Jenny Woodbridge)

Each key person at Haven – will begin by carefully observing each child and assessing their interests, choices, strengths and needs. Then we work closely with the parent or carer to

observe, support and extend each child's learning. During this process, each key person will relate back to the principles using a range of strategies and drawing on knowledge of child developments in order to plan to deepen each child's understanding by playing, talking, observing, planning, questioning, experimenting, testing, repeating, reflecting, problem solving, reasoning and responding to other adults and peers alike. All this is done with great sensitivity to the child.

Seasonal themes form part of our mid term planning and are delivered through real experiences, such as cooking, gardening and enhancements, drawing the children's attention to the changing seasons and exploring their sense of awe and wonder.

The needs and interests of the children are also engaged through recurring interests that the children have. Some of these recurring interests are: babies, hairdressers, hospital, birthdays to name a few. These are developed alongside the continuous provision. The interests and experiences of one child may often become a central experience for a group of children, so that they can share and extend on each other's learning.

In summary, the learning environment is based on:

- the biological processes of child development and learning;
- the socio-cultural context in which learning and development takes place;
- the areas of knowledge to which the child is introduced (the curriculum)

At Haven Continuous Provision offers a quality learning environment indoors and outdoors that allows these elements to come together.

Our planning and assessment system is linked to the EYFS framework (2012) (see App 1)

The Learning and Development Requirements:

- seven areas of learning and development.

All areas of learning and development are important and interconnected. There are three prime areas

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal and social development.

The four other specific areas of learning are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design.

Progression and Continuity within the Continuous Provision

At Haven we emphasise building learning over time. Continuity is important for progression. By providing all of the core experiences through continuous provision all of the time, we are enabling development and learning to take place.

Core Experiences sets out challenging expectations for children’s achievement. It builds on what the children already know and can do, therefore encouraging a positive attitude and disposition to learn. Well-planned play experiences are central to each child’s learning and development. Children’s learning does not fit neatly into separate compartments; continuous provision will develop skills and understanding across several areas of learning. An example of this can be seen when a child is building with wooden blocks: she or he is learning to develop physical, creative and numerical skills. The child may also be developing play with a friend, learning skills of negotiation, and other social skills, as well as using language for communication and thinking.

It is through an experience being provided CONTINUALLY, and allowing the child to revisit it whenever appropriate, and through the adult’s skilled intervention and direct teaching, that progression takes place.

Rhythms of the year at Haven

	Festivals (visits/links)	Seasonal	Educational Visits
Autumn Term (September-December)	Diwali – Hindu temple, candles and lamps Harvest – food grown in the Haven allotment Guy Fawkes – Sparklers, bonfire Christmas – cooking, church	Fallen leaves in the Forest/park Harvest Haven Forest – autumn - winter	Walk in local area Library visits Fortnightly visits to Haven Forest Visit to St Matthews Church - Christmas
Spring Term (January- March)	Chinese New Year (cooking, Chinese dragon) Easter	New Life Blossom on trees in Haven garden/local area Haven Forest – winter - spring Planting seeds	Visit to St Matthews Church
Summer Term (April-July)	May Day Country Fayre Summer Fun Day	Haven garden Haven Forest – spring-summer Allotment	Fun in the Hive – family day Walk in local area

The rationale for the festivals chosen is that they are celebrated by groups of people together with traditional practices. In early childhood, the emphasis is on togetherness and participation, mirroring some cultural practices from home in the nursery. Children experience

togetherness, and there are rich learning opportunities in the visits and other aspects e.g. cooking and enjoying special food together. Other festivals (e.g. Mothers Day) we see as most appropriately celebrated by families in individual ways.

Additional festivals may be celebrated at Haven, depending on the cultures and faiths of children on roll.

We use <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/> for background information in all cases, attempting to represent each religion and festival in an appropriate way. We always invite families to lead aspects of celebrating different festivals.

Children's time at Haven has its own cyclical rhythm. On starting, a welcome story is written for each child and parents are invited to share information about their child which starts each child's Learning Journey.

When children leave Haven, they are given a special goodbye and a certificate at a celebration service.

Core Learning Experiences at Haven

The key person relationship

Relationships are in the foundations of children's development and learning. The first, and most important, and most enduring relationships are between children and their parents. The key person relationship is additional and complimentary to this.

All children at Haven have the experience of having a key person. The key person visits the child at home; works closely with the parents to settle the child in; and is a special person to the child throughout her or his time in nursery. By providing a safe and reliable relationship, the key person first works with the child's need for dependency. This dependent relationship is the starting point for independence in the nursery: the confidence to explore, make choices, play with friends or alone, safe in the knowledge that the key person is available to help when needed, but will not interfere or get in the way.

The key person therefore gives the child a model of a good relationship within a group: available, helpful, respectful, and consistent. The key person relationship is not trivial or fleeting. With this model, the child is helped to develop the idea that she or he is special, and matters; that emotions, though often overwhelming, can be recognised and acknowledged; that persisting and engaging over time means more than flitting and skipping from one person to the next, from one experience to the next.

Children make sense of time passing, through the routines of interaction with their key people. For the young children, nappy changing, bottles, and sleep times punctuate the day. For all children, greetings, goodbyes and key group time are all important and consistent features of life in nursery.

Key group time (family time) provides a particular point in the day when the child is in a special place, in a close-knit group, and where there is time to speak and listen during what can be a busy and energetic day.

Block Play

Children need many opportunities to become competent in their block play, to master, control and practise their skills. The experience starts with the babies and toddlers, when the young baby grasps, sucks, releases, bangs and plays hide and seek with a single block. At Haven we provide carefully designed blocks easy for the youngest children to hold, manipulate and explore.

Gradually, through this exploration and interaction the child explores the properties of each of the different blocks, separating out their differences and similarities, establishing common physical characteristics, and 'knowing the blocks'. Through block play children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas of area, shape and spatial relationships. By playing with blocks children acquire a basic repertoire of building techniques. These sequences of planned physical actions are described by Bruner as 'modules' and by Piaget as 'schemas'. As the children get older, more complex building schemas co-ordinate with imaginative schemas: their symbolic representations and abstract sculptures become more detailed and intricate.

Introducing children to literature and books

The youngest children are introduced to songs and rhymes with whole-body movement, finger play and actions. Gradually props and pictures are introduced to support the nursery rhymes. This gives the children the opportunity to experience the text and see literature as (and in) action. Nursery rhymes engage children in small manageable chunks of text, giving children experiences of alliteration, rhyme and rhythm in a context which develops their speaking and listening. 'Over and Over' books are introduced to the youngest children.

Towards the end of the second year, simple stories are introduced, again supported by props. Props match well to the developmental emergence of symbolic understanding where there is a close relationship between the symbol and the real object. Simple stories for young children deal with familiar events; props represent familiar objects and animals. Through involvement in stories and playing with props, children move from beyond the "here and now" enhancing their imaginative life. Towards the end of the fourth year, children rely less on props and can sustain involvement in more complex stories through the text and illustrations alone, though props remain important to play with the ideas and storylines.

We keep groups of children as small as possible, so that we can tailor the experience to the individual needs of each child, and so that children have an opportunity to speak and actively listen. Children are asked to 'sit comfortably', rather than 'sit nicely'. The pace of group sessions is carefully planned, with a mixture of stories, songs and rhymes.

The skills of segmenting and blending are founded on the earlier experiences of enjoying rhymes and songs, and developing an ability to focus attention to sounds. They are developed through in-context fun with words and sounds: alliteration, stumbling as we say "p-p-penguin" and breaking words down into onset and rhyme (e.g. reading *The cat in the hat* and getting children to guess the word from just the onset or the rhyme sound) and then further breaking words down (segmenting into their individual phonemes). Letters and Sounds (Phase 1) is introduced to the children in The Hive.

Through the enjoyment of stories, the children learn about the characters, about the formal arrangement of books (with covers, titles, text and sometimes speech bubbles) and that a story has a structure – a beginning, middle and end. All story books are very carefully

selected for rich and engaging language, often with repetition and refrains; for high quality illustrations; and to show a range of ethnic groups, cultures, types of families, women and men in various roles, different places, etc.

Non-fiction books begin with the simplest board books about familiar objects, people and animals for babies, and range to carefully structured and accessible books (e.g. books which categorise birds into different species) that help children to structure and reflect upon their experience the world around them, and learn new facts. These books are used to support displays, and to add information to enhance and deepen the experiences that the nursery provides.

The library and book areas are places where children can share a book with another adult. Children are able to borrow books and to repeat the experience of their favourite stories in the intimate environment of their homes.

Emergent writing

At Haven young children focus on responding to the world with marks and symbols, exploring experimenting and playing. Discovering that one thing can stand for another. Creating and experimenting with one's own symbols and marks and recognising that others may use marks differently. The older children are given a variety of different mediums with which to write or mark make. They are encouraged to make books, represent their life experiences, their family, to try to write for themselves. There is a specific mark making area with the equipment such as stapler, tape, hole punch etc, but mark making is encouraged in other areas, such as role-play and the garden, so the children can write a list for shopping etc.

Children at Haven are regularly involved in book-making: enjoying home-made books about life at home and in nursery, and making their own books, including the use of digital photography.

Cookery

This is influenced very much by the changing seasons, and linked to gardening. So the crop of vegetables harvested in the autumn are used as ingredients for bread and other cooking. Special winter crops of potatoes and sprouts are cooked and tasted; and the excitement of the first spring vegetables, usually chopped and eaten raw on their own or mixed as salads. Younger children will mainly engage with knowing the names of different foods, cutting and holding them, and of course tasting them. Simple cooking ingredients will be combined together for the experience of mixing and transformation (e.g. adding water to flour and making a sticky mixture). Older children gain increasing mastery of cooking, following recipes from beginning to end and gaining experience of how to gradually add liquids, to stir, beat, and fold ingredients together etc.

The whole cooking process is important, from the decision to choose a recipe, to the washing up at the end, sharing food (or taking it home) and reflecting on the processes of change.

Role Play

For the youngest children this is initially based on their experiences of their home life, and very much on the domestic side of what they perceive their parents/carers doing and other children. Role-play begins with props which closely resemble real objects in the world (pretend telephones, pretend cups and saucers, etc); for older children, the transformative power of their imagination enables one thing to stand for almost anything else they choose. Therefore the home corner for younger children is mainly resourced with props which resemble real objects, whilst the home corner for older children has more open-ended and adaptable resources. For all children, the potential for sustained play is developed through adding different sensory experiences to the home corner by the inclusion of pasta, dough, flour etc and the use of real objects such as pans, wooden spoons, to stir and mix with. Other opportunities are available for older children to participate in, they can make their dough and have a say in the experiences that they want to be offered in the setting. These add more sophisticated layering which support and enhance the imaginative and pretend play. This is based on observations of where the children are and what they are seen to need to progress their play and learning so that it moves forward.

Outdoor play (Forest School – see app 2)

There is a special quality to being outdoors: experiencing the changes in natural light, feeling wind, rain, snow and sleet, or getting ward in the sun. So we don't think of the garden as an outdoor classroom, any more than we think of the nursery rooms as indoor gardens. Nor do we aim to offer the same type of experiences outdoors as indoors. So whilst we offer a broad and balanced curriculum outdoors, covering all seven areas of learning, that does not mean that all indoor experiences are available outdoors. Outdoor experiences are on a larger scale.

Being outdoors has a special importance to children growing up in a busy town. The garden has been very carefully planned to give children a sense of tranquillity and an enjoyment of natural textures and colours in a densely built and large-scale environment.

We provide a range of learning opportunities outdoors at Haven for children of all ages, and the environment particularly enables children to make strong progress in their physical development. High quality wheeled toys, from the push-along trolleys which help young toddlers with balancing and walking, link to small trikes and then to our collection of 2-wheeled bikes enabling children to develop their balance, co-ordination, stamina and strength. Climbing equipment is available in the nursery garden. Children have opportunities for large-scale building in the garden with the crates. A range of ball and bats is available, in different sizes and with different levels of hardness/softness.

Emergent writing is supported with clipboards, and with paintbrushes and pots of water to "paint" the wall. Large-scale and whole-body painting can also be provided outdoors. Imaginative play is particularly supported in the small world area. Many of the design features of the garden (for example, trees to hide behind, hills and hidden corners), encourage imaginative play and hide-and-seek.

For the youngest babies, we provide secure spaces for crawling and exploring the outdoors, with large rugs and baskets/boxes for a sense of enclosure. Children can also sleep outside under the covered area.

The all-weather clothing (for children and staff) enables the garden to be accessed in any weather and for children to have the experience of standing in the rain, splashing in puddles, and experiencing and building the snow.

Gardening

In the early stages the younger children enjoy digging and turning the soil, finding the creatures and minibeasts that live within it. Exploring the sensations of the soil, looking for stones, feeling the different textures of wet, dry, clogging etc. They would with the help of the adult pick the strawberries and fruits that are available, also to pick the produce that is grown.

As they get older they would learn about the changing seasons in the garden, how weather affects plant growth, the need for sun, light and water. They would learn about the life cycles of the spider, snail, butterfly, how the bees drink the nectar from the flowers, the garden is their open air scientific eco-system. Learning how to aerate and prepare the soil for planting, cyclical planting so that the soil is properly fed.

Small World

Small world play offers some special learning opportunities for children. Acting out narrative and ideas through the manipulation of small equipment (animals, dolls, Lego people etc) helps children to reflect on feelings and events in their lives in a safe way. Small world play is also rich in possibilities for learning about spaces and positions, with many opportunities for putting things inside structures, on top, next to and underneath. To enhance learning across the curriculum, the quality of the materials is critical and consistency. So collections of animals are of the same scale, and of good quality (to enable identification and discussion). Dinosaurs are not mixed in with people. Small world apparatus is supported by posters and books.

Doll play is also carefully presented and structured. Each doll has a name, and clothes, bedding all reflect a range of cultural practices. Whilst children are encouraged to take dolls out, push them in prams and take them around, we discourage the naked doll face down in the water tray, and other forms of play which devalue the dolls and limit the imaginative richness of play. If children simply want an object to put somewhere or transport around, then an alternative is found.

Creative Studio

Painting

Using the core experiences progression can be seen, an example of this is when a child is learning to paint, initially a child may feel, taste, smell and explore the texture of the medium between their fingers, toes and all over their body. Gradually the child learns the names of the colours and learns how to mix the different colours. Over time and lots of repetition the child will be able to mix paint to the consistency that he/she needs to paint, learning the names of the primary colours. Then using this knowledge the child will be able to mix paint to reach the specific shade or tone needed for their painting.

Painting develops from the first – usually accidental – experiences the child has of making marks, often by running a finger or hand through split liquid or through food. Painting with the body remains an important part of the experiences of paint throughout nursery, with hands, fingers, feet. Creativity begins with the confidence to explore and enjoy the materials.

As children's control and their planning develop, this is matched by the provision of small and delicate brushes alongside big chunky ones, and opportunities to observe closely and remain involved in painting for periods of time. The process of creating (with paint or any other material) is what matters, not the product: so children are not guided into producing identical daffodil paintings with the same shades of yellow and green, but they are encouraged to enjoy and respond to objects, and express themselves using the materials freely. Children are encouraged to mix their own paints in the creative studio.

Textiles

Experience of textiles might start babies feeling and mouthing fabric, yarn and ribbon in treasure basket and heuristic play. Young children should have ample opportunity to play freely and explore fabric, yarn and buttons in a range of textures and colours. Following this, children might begin to find ways to combine textiles with each other and other materials using techniques such as collage and weaving. There should be opportunities for children to change the materials for example through the process of felting or painting/dyeing fabric. As they gain skills and experience children might explore how fabric and yarn join to make items such as bags, clothes and decorative items such as tapestries and begin to acquire basic skills such as sewing, knitting or weaving.

Malleable Materials

From the earliest days of infancy, children need experiences of different types of materials. Blockplay gives children the experience of playing with a solid material which cannot be stretched, pulled or altered – whereas malleable materials can be transformed into different shapes and sizes, and their properties can be changed (e.g. by adding water). Playing with them provides for thinking about shape, space and area – and the foundations of chemistry.

Malleable materials encourage children to use each of the five senses. They are planned to provide satisfying experiences for children (where sensory feedback has to be strong, in order to help the nervous system to a state of equilibrium – so children can bang, bash, and push hard) and equally to help children who have a highly-aroused nervous system (who are easily overwhelmed by sensory experiences, and so have to be introduced to them gradually, perhaps a tiny dot of shaving foam on a fingertip or just a few grains of sand to touch). This approach helps children manage the flow of sensory information, integrate it, and enjoy the stimulation of their senses.

Malleable materials can also be used by children from the third year onwards to express symbolic and creative thinking – for example, the bowls of porridge for the three bears. Children can talk and think about the transformation of materials from one state to another (what happens when you put water in the freezer; when you add cornflour to water, baking powder to flour in cooking). They are given experiences of reversals (from water to ice back to water). Children are helped to develop technical competences and skills – for example, learning the different ways of making pots (thumb and coil). The children learn facts about materials to supplement their experiences: that the natural material of clay comes from the earth in our garden that flour comes from the crushed corns of wheat etc.

Every day, malleable materials are presented at floor and table level, to encourage different styles of interaction, and to suit the different ages and levels of development of the children.

Box modelling

Cardboard boxes, tubes, plastic bottles and other recycled materials are enjoyable in their own right (as containers to fill up with sand, water or other materials; as props for play) and also provide for rich creative experiences, creating artefacts that have a special meaning for the child. Box-modelling can be a powerful medium for exploring the imagination and developing narratives. During modelling work, children can practice and develop their skills in cutting, gluing and sellotaping, exploring the property of materials by finding out what you can (and can't) glue together, and how strong sellotape joins can be.

Music, movement and dance

This starts with the younger children with action songs and nursery rhymes, children are encouraged to actively participate in being a 'Little Bunny', or Winding the Bobbin Up'. A lot of work goes into turn taking and call response games.

As they grow older children experience different rhythms and have access to a range of melodies on the CD player and on musical instruments. They learn loud and soft, they learn staccato, high and low etc.

There is always a music area on offer to the children across the nursery supported by the CD player with music from around the world with different styles such as jazz, big band, pop, classical music, opera and music from a range of cultures ("World Music") etc. Children have access to the performance area where different styles of music and dance are always available.

A lot of time is spent on how to play the instrument correctly and the how to get best sound from their choice of drums, shaker etc.

Sand and Water

Sand is an adaptable natural material. Indoors, the younger children have a mini-beach-like experience where they can sit in sand, wallow and feel, using all five senses. This is mirrored in the outdoor experience of sand where they can do deep digging; where it can be transformed into castles or shapes.

The older children can transport the sand, add water to it, mix it or use it for their imaginative play, cook with it, make a hole to go to another place etc. In the sand pattern making, footprints and shoe prints can be carefully examined and various mark making materials such as combs, sticks can be used to experiment with the material of sand.

Water is another natural material that is therapeutic and supports well-being. With the younger children it has to be carefully supervised, and can vary in temperature. Children again use the five senses to explore it. Suitable clothing is provided so that the children can experience the rain, splashing in puddles, both on bikes and on foot. They can feel the rain running over the exposed parts of their bodies.

The older children learn the uses of water, for drinking, washing, cleaning and its importance for life. The domestic home uses for water, how in some countries throughout the world the water is pumped from a well or a river. Our pump helps children to experiment with the sensations of running water, to observe levels changing and how water cascade downwards, and experience how much energy is needed to move water.

Water also adds to the children's play scenarios and is experienced, like the sand, both indoors and out.

Treasure Basket and Heuristic Play

The treasure basket (Goldschmied, E and Jackson, S, 1994: 85-100) offers babies the opportunity for exploring and playing with objects from the real world instead of toys. Objects in the Treasure Basket have interesting textures, shapes and smells which babies can explore by touching, dropping, sucking, smelling. Because the baby takes the lead in the exploration of the objects, the experience is stimulating without being over-stimulating and it allows babies to control the amount of time they spend exploring, and also to return to favourite objects. The Treasure Basket also enhances the social awareness of the baby, with several babies sitting around the basket often interacting with each other and starting to mirror each other's movements and communication. The role of the adult is primarily to provide secure space and time, with emotional security from her/his presence close to the baby, but sensitive interaction and communication will add to the richness of the experience.

For babies not yet sitting up, materials from the Treasure Basket can be presented hanging from an arch (in the style of a "baby gym") or by the adult carefully holding materials for the baby to explore with her/his feet in an age-appropriate chair. The youngest babies can explore more with their feet than with their hands.

As babies start crawling and moving around, their mobility enables them to extend their exploration of objects. A large tin or a number of large tins, placed near the Treasure Basket will support their desire to transfer objects in and out of different containers.

Heuristic Play (Goldschmied, E and Jackson, S, 1994: 118-131) extends this opportunity by providing the child with a large number of different kinds of objects and containers to explore and play with. As with Treasure Basket play, the structuring of the materials, the place and the time are all crucial to the quality of this special part of the nursery day for children in their second year. Driven by the child's impulse to explore and discover, heuristic play matches the young toddler's fascination with materials, how they behave in space, and how they can be moved from one place to another and scattered, piled or contained.

The resources for heuristic play are special (they are not available in the free-flow environment) and time and space need to be carefully organised and protected by the adult. As with Treasure Basket play, the objects are a large variety of things from "real life", not toys, and the children make their own choices as they explore without interference or guidance, but with the warm and secure presence of adults who interact with sensitivity and care. The resources are carefully selected, and specially organised in draw-string bags, and the children are provided with large tins to support the play.

