



CURIOUS TOTS

Resource for Early Years
Educators and Practitioners



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An Introduction to Elaine Winter, Creative Practitioner, Curious Tots Lead at Ignite!

'I devise and deliver the weekly creative sessions for the F1 children at Crabtree Farm Primary & Nursery School, a selection of which are in this booklet. The sessions are all about creative discovery. Rather than having a focus on a specific outcome, I focus very much on fostering the creative process and the possibilities of working with the materials. All of this allows for lots of imaginary play too and the children always lead the way!'

A testimonial from Crabtree Farm Primary and Nursery School

'We have been delighted with the positive impact the project has had in our setting. The nursery children responded extremely well to Elaine and the activities on offer. We saw increased vocabulary and curiosity in the children. Engagement with Elaine from parents and carers during our Stay and Play sessions also increased.

CPD opportunities and professional dialogue between Elaine and our practitioners allowed for reflection and continuous development in our setting. Although it was only a two year project, the success will be seen in the legacy it has left at Crabtree Farm.'

About Curious Tots



Ignite! is a Nottingham-based charity that has been developing programmes nurturing children's creativity and curiosity since 2007. In 2018, we embarked on a journey into early years; we wanted to see how our approaches, techniques and ways of working, which aim to develop children's confidence, communication skills and engagement with the world around them, could be adapted to support development in younger children.

A year of development and exploration in the academic year 2022 - 2023 led us to introduce curious objects and prompts for children to explore at drop-in sessions in libraries, delivering boxes to family's homes during lockdowns and producing resource booklets full of ideas for nurturing curiosity. We saw that the activities we were delivering were different to what children usually had access to, and feedback from parents, carers and early years practitioners encouraged us to recognise the positive impact the project was starting to have.

We decided the next step was to embed our project in a nursery setting so that we could see the impact of regular sessions on individual children, and bring in a creative practitioner, someone whose own exceptional creativity, skills and imagination could truly nurture and model these skills in young children. Elaine Winter has spent a full day each week of the last academic year with the F1 pupils at Crabtree Farm Primary and Nursery school, carefully devising activities that respond to children's interests, the needs of the staff team and capturing the learning and impact of each session.

We now want to share some of this learning and our bank of activities with early years practitioners. We recognise that our intended audience for this resource book have far greater experience, deeper knowledge and everyday understanding of early years development than we do. We know that early years practitioners are some of the most creative, inventive and resourceful people out there. But we also know that they don't have the same luxury of time and resources that we've had through this project. So the intention of this resource book is to share the ideas we've been able to develop and to give tips and suggestions for activities that can be tried out, dipped into and adapted for a range of settings.

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How To Work With This Resource

Starting points

Activities in this resource can be linked with a school's curriculum and programme themes - increasingly Elaine has taken inspiration from the termly topics at Crabtree Farm. But the activities are designed to have child-led learning at their heart, which means that sometimes children might take the ingredients of the plan and make a very different recipe. So these activities throughout this resource are starting points and we encourage educators to approach with flexibility and to be responsive to children's curiosity. We believe that working with children intuitively can open up endless possibilities for new communication, language and imagination, all of which we may not have had the foresight to plan for, but nevertheless are hugely valuable opportunities for learning through play.

Timings

All of these sessions were all originally done using child initiated learning or 'choosing time', where children move between activities, some staying for only a few minutes while others spend a much longer time, and some of the children who stay at nursery all day even taking part twice in the same day. As with all child-led learning, there is incredible variation in the duration of which the children will engage with the activity - some will spend 50 minutes, others only a minute.

Materials

The materials listed in these activities are suggestions, you will be able to adapt and find your own replacements of any materials you can't lay your hands on. We try to use cheap and commonly available materials as well as recycled/repurposed materials; throughout this book you'll see some frequently used materials that are incredibly multi-functional. Elaine rarely has all the materials out at once and rather tends to feed in and scaffold their use as the activity goes along. But another option is to have the materials available in the learning environment but allow the children to discover them and use them when they feel it is right. It all depends on the location, session type, activity and so on.

Mess

Through this project we have the luxury of a creative practitioner to lead and monitor the activities, a space that has easily cleanable areas and the time within the nursery day to tidy-up and reset. The result is that the children are able to interact with these activities to their full extent and that mess isn't a barrier to their creativity and curiosity. But we recognise that this isn't practical in all settings, and suggest that you might want to do some of these activities outside or pare them back to reduce the need for lots of clean-up time.

Warm Ups

Because a lot of the activities we do focus on the senses, many of the them begin with the children 'warming up' their senses. This is usually a practitioner-led activity that involves directing the children to wiggle their noses, fingers or ears, or opening up their eyes big and wide and then narrow again. This helps to focus the children's attention on that part of their body and that particular sense, tuning them in and preparing them to pay close attention to how their body helps them to experience the world.

Multisensory Learning

Activities in this resource help children to make connections between things they see, smell and taste, exploring an object through different sensory interactions. This helps children to see the different properties of an object rather than just focusing on one element as they are likely to do at this age (Piaget's theory of centration). The brain uses different sensory inputs to make sense of the world and our experiences via a process called multisensory integration. Children's multisensory systems are developed through these activities as they are encouraged to experience; colour, smell and touch of objects all at once, making connections in the brain to help them to recognise and learn about new materials.



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Outcomes for Children

One of the ways we can evaluate and quality assess the activities we're developing through Curious Tots is by referencing the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework. For each session idea we refer to the areas we think that session connects with.

We recognise that children develop a kaleidoscope of important skills through every activity they take part in and this is very much our experience of observing the children taking part in Curious Tots activities. So throughout this booklet we will map each activity onto these areas to highlight the range of ways these activities support children's learning and development.

Characteristics of Effective Teaching & Learning	Prime Areas of Learning	Specific Areas of Learning
<p>Playing and exploring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Finding and exploring- Playing with what they know- Being willing to "have a go" <p>Active Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Being involved & concentrating- Keeping on trying- Enjoying achieving what they set out to do <p>Creating and Thinking Critically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Having their own ideas- Using what they know to learn new things - making links- Choosing ways to do things and finding new ways	<p>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</p> <p>Physical Development</p> <p>Communication & Language</p>	<p>Literacy</p> <p>Mathematics</p> <p>Understanding the World</p> <p>Expressive Arts and Design</p>



Becoming Familiar with Smells

**Exploring sensory materials and experimenting to make paints.
The smell of the materials is the central focus of this session.**

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

Start by everyone warming up their noses to get them ready to explore smells by wrinkling them and breathing in using the nose only.

Ask the children what they can smell when they breathe in - anything at all?

Go round and ask children what their favourite smells are - encourage everyone to answer, share and follow up with lots of questions.

Getting Started

Bring out some of the items to smell

- lavender, cut lemons. Discuss the smells
- do we like them? Do they remind us of anything? Have we smelt them before or are they new smells?

Bring out some of the leaves to smell and discuss - do you think we can make paint from them? How?
What might we add to them?

Invite the children to tear up the green leaves into a coffee filter, lined bowl, add in water and salt and mash them up.
Children can then squeeze the green water out of the coffee filter and use this to make a green paint.

Going Further

What other colours could we try?

Keep going with colours, adding in:

- Yellow Paint (Turmeric + Water)
- Brown paint (Coffee + Water)
- Purple paint (Red Cabbage + Vinegar/Lemon juice + Salt) - this also needs to be mashed up like the leaves
- Blue paint - add half a spoonful of bicarbonate of soda to the red cabbage purple paint and see what happens (it turns it first to pink and then with a bit more added it turns to blue) Why does this happen? Why is it fizzing? How are the cooked ingredients different from non-cooked ingredients? What other colours could we try to make next time? What happens if we mix the colours together?

As you go, keep asking the children to describe what's happening.

What they want to try out next?
What are they experimenting with?

Materials Check List

- Table top and/or clear floor - line with paper
- Aprons and table covers
- Kitchen roll
- Trays for ingredients
- Cloth/antibacterial spray to wipe down
- Masking tape
- Pipettes
- Paintbrushes/sponges for mixing
- Cotton buds for painting
- Spoons (1 spoon per colour mix)
- Small bowls (1 bowl per colour mix)
- Small jug of water - ideally warm
- Safety scissors
- Instant coffee
- Ground turmeric
- Fresh Coriander leaves
- Lemons
- Lavender - sprigs or flowers
- Red cabbage
- Bicarbonate of soda
- White vinegar or lemon juice
- Table salt
- Coffee Filters
(or nappy liners for washable nappies)
- Pre-cooked spinach
- Pre-made tea
- Pre-cooked red cabbage

Understanding the Senses

These activities open up a conversation around smells, food ingredients and different plants and how they make them feel. Smell is processed in the same part of the brain that controls memory and emotions: the limbic system, which explains why smells can be so associated with emotions and feelings of familiarity. This activity encourages children to explore how different smells make them feel and what it reminds them of, allowing them to develop curiosity towards the connections of smell, memory and feeling. The development of children's multisensory systems is developed through this activity as they are encouraged to experience the colour, smell and touch of objects at once, making these connections in the brain to help them to recognise and learn about new materials.

As with all our activities, questions and conversation are key to the way they are delivered. While of course there are correct answers to what certain ingredients are, there's no right answer to how it makes the children feel, or what it reminds them of, or what they can do with it. The next step of being able to make paint with that object is really exciting for the children too - they get to make something they are familiar with, they know what consistency they want it to be, but they have to experiment and problem-solve to get it the way they want it to be.

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How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- Some of the children were very interested in the mixing element, adding different ingredients together and seeing what happened, and especially squeezing the coffee filters to get the paint out
- Some children were more interested in the painting element, experimenting with mark-making on the paper
- One of the children wrote her name out on the paper in the paint
- Inviting children to respond to the different smells of the ingredients brought out some conversation and lots of facial expressions
- The coffee granules had dried up meaning there were clumps in the paint, but this was interesting to the children who played with the clumps to make thicker and thinner paint on the paper
- The children were very keen to try out adding the bicarbonate of soda themselves and make the mixture fizz

Key Reflections From Elaine

The thing about this activity is that it wasn't just about making paint from natural materials for the children to paint with. At Crabtree Farm there is another painting area that children can go to to paint.

The activity was about the process of smelling the different ingredients, thinking about how much of each different ingredients to add to make the paint, about mixing things together and combining colours to see what happens.

The children didn't paint pictures with the paints, they experimented with the consistency of the paints, made patches of colour and played around with different strokes.

Coffee was a very strong and overpowering smell - we suggest that this is introduced more towards the end to avoid it overwhelming the senses.

Ideas for Future Sessions

You could try this with other ingredients at different times of year - perhaps with flowers or berries in the summer.

The cabbage colour-change activity could be something you try another time as a stand-alone activity - it is quite an impressive colour change and introduces conversations about changes in materials and reactions.



Woodland Walks

**Exploring nature and creativity through
story-telling and role play**

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

Warm up hands for making by wiggling the fingers in succession and also warm up the eyes and ears for looking and listening.

Do some simple stretches to get ready for a 'walk'. Now talk about a related story book (e.g Goldilocks & The Three Bears) and how the story starts with Goldilocks walking through the woods.

Ask lots of questions: what could the character see? Hear? Smell? Feel and touch?

Getting Started

If you have an outside space available, take children for a short walk outside. Explore the hedges by pretending to look for blackberries and notice what you find together along the way. Throughout the walk, ask lots of open-ended questions for the children to respond to with imagination and creativity.

Alternatively you could discuss the children's journey to your setting.

Coming back inside, you now use the large paper on the floor for everyone to draw their own pathways and tell their own stories about what they found on their journeys. Demonstrate and scaffold how to use the materials: you can use the stamps to make animal tracks, use paints to add colours, use clay or cardboard to create 3D objects and use natural materials to represent things that we saw along the way on our walk.

Going Further

- More materials can add more variety and are good for developing language and communication by discussing and naming things that children may not have seen before or be familiar with.
- Could the children go back outside and collect materials they want to add to their story?
- Use objects to further exploration and conversation e.g with a feather - name different birds, with an acorn - discuss the life cycle of a tree, where and how they might grow, with paw prints and animal tracks discuss different animals and where they live in the woods.
- Introduce more opportunities for moulding the clay and mark making on the paper, all are good for motor skills development.

Discuss what they find there, what they might see, where they are going, and encourage children to tell you what they're doing as they're doing it.
How might they use the materials to make an idea a reality? How do the materials feel?

Allow for lots of play with the materials to test out what they can do with them, how they can be used for building and making. What else could these materials be used for?

Encourage lots of imaginary play by prompting and encouraging conversations; what might there be in the woods? What animals did they see? What did they sound like? What was the weather like?

Materials Check List

- Tuff tray or table top
- Long roll of paper to make a path way / track
- Different tapes
- Natural materials:
leaves, branches, flowers, feathers, egg shells,
stones, sprigs and twigs etc
- Clay
- Paints
- Stamps for tracks
- Pieces of sponge
- Paint pads
- Boxes for building cottages
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Wax crayons

Understanding role play

In this activity, children take on the role of the storyteller, rather than listening to a predetermined story, it is up to the children to select materials and determine the direction of the story. Whilst they might use a familiar story or character to form the basis of their story, the activity encourages their own imaginary play where they can create their own scenes and share ideas with the rest of the group. This supports the development of children's own sense of agency, voice and confidence.

Imaginary or pretend play is highly beneficial for young children because it encourages them to be curious, and enhances their creative skills by exploring new ideas and scenarios. Children are encouraged to think about the actions, choices and feelings of a character and how they interact with others and the environment as they journey through it. By working on one large piece of paper, the children will have to be aware of other children's pathways and work around one another - or even with each other and combine their stories. This form of play builds on social and emotional skills too as children play, interact and empathise with each other to coordinate a story that they are all engaged with.

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How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- One child used crayons to create grass and puddles, they made leaves from green paper and glue.
- Some cut up blue paper and green paper to make water.
- A lot of the children were very interested and enjoyed looking after an imitation bird's egg. One child made a den under the table using ribbon around the table legs, this was to protect the imitation bird's egg and nest.
- Another child collected feathers in the basket to add to the bird's nest.
- One child really enjoyed walking up and down the path and doing drawings of what she was imagining then telling others about what she had drawn.
- One child enjoyed talking about what she had seen and heard in the woods before, including an owl.
- We discussed animals that they imagined seeing in the woods including elephants, turtles and dinosaurs.
- Some children made maps: one of these was to find the bears' cottage, and they talked a lot about the names of trees, mentioning Birch, Oak, Pine and Chestnut.
- One child made some 'food' so that everyone could have a picnic in the woods.

Key Reflections from Elaine

At Crabtree Farm, the story of Goldilocks was our inspiration, but you could just as easily take any other storybook you might be reading with the children, as many are based around journeys, adventures and things that happen on a 'pathway'.

The story provides a basis for the children to imagine their own journey through an environment, but so too does the environment surrounding them. Being able to take at least part of this activity outside is a great way to use outdoor spaces, and works whether you've got a woodland area close-by, or a playing field, or simply some weeds and trees hanging over the fence. Physically going for a walk outside, observing what's around them, and using found objects from their environment, whether these are natural or not, also supports children's ability to be resourceful, make connections and think creatively.

Ideas for Future Sessions

- This activity could be linked with other activities, for example wooden building blocks could be used to build structures, talk about the material of trees.
- The activity could be led with a specific focus on mark making for fine motor skills development by using clay, paint and pencils for mark making.
- The paper could be laid down in different ways, in a straight line, in a circle, with different tangents running off it to create more opportunities for stories to go in different ways.



Sound

**This session focuses on sound,
and developing children's listening skills**

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

Warm up the ears for exploring by moving to music and trying to wiggle them.

Have a moment with no music and no one talking and listen to what you can hear, encouraging the children not to shout out and take it in turns to say what they can hear.

What can we hear that's close?
What can we hear that's far away?

Getting Started

Play some of the music on a playlist. How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of anything?

Give the children crayons so they can make marks as the music plays, how might the marks for classical piano be different from African drumming?

Introduce the different materials and discuss the different sounds that they make. How are they different? Why are they different?

Fill cardboard tubes with different materials: pompoms, lollipop sticks, bits of felt, big seeds, rice.

Seal these using cardboard on each end and tape, to make your own rain sticks.

Going Further

- Invite the children to add in the different materials to their cardboard tubes and shake them in different ways to see what noises they might make.
- What are the differences between the sound one grain of rice makes compared to lots of grains of rice? Does it make a difference how you pour the materials into the tube ie. sprinkle, pour, spoon, drop? What makes the loudest noise? Are there things that barely make any sound at all?

Listen to some of the instruments that you have made and the ones that you have around, what kinds of noises do they make? Are they loud? Quiet? Tinkly?

What other words can we use to describe the sounds?

Encourage children to keep drawing as they listen to the sounds.

Materials Check List

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Table top and/or clear floor in an area where sounds can be heard <input type="checkbox"/> Speaker and short playlist of interesting and different music/rhythms eg. birdsong, jazz <input type="checkbox"/> Lining paper and scissors <input type="checkbox"/> Masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> Chunky crayons or felt tips <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical and gaffer tape for the rain stick seals <input type="checkbox"/> Children's instruments - including rainsticks <input type="checkbox"/> Dustpan and brush | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Extra containers with lids <input type="checkbox"/> Cardboard tubes, such as strong postal tubes <input type="checkbox"/> Bowls or jars containing different items to try in the tubes to see what it sounds like ie. pompoms, lollipop sticks, other sticks of different lengths, bits of felt, big seeds, rice (being careful to manage any small items that pose a choking hazard) |
|--|--|

Understanding Sound and Listening

By inviting the children to pay close attention to the different noises, they are not simply hearing, but are processing information, making sense of how the sounds are being made and are understanding how to interpret and respond to sounds around them. The children are encouraged to experiment with the materials and create different sounds and volumes, building awareness of how their movements affect the external world. This session encourages children to listen, notice and reflect, translating their experience of sound into movement, shape and colour, bringing their sensory systems together and aiding the development of multisensory processing in the brain.

Crabtree Farm's handwriting lead remarked upon the way this activity supported children's fine motor skills through mark making. This activity is especially interesting for mark making because the children are making marks in response to different types of music - they are attributing meaning to their marks and they are considering how and why they might make marks in particular ways.

This session also involves opening up conversations about shapes and introducing materials that children might not be familiar with, such as dried chickpeas, corn, grain and pastas. This opens up new conversations about what these items might be and if the children have any personal memories or ideas of what they could be used for.

Characteristics of Effective Teaching & Learning	Prime Areas of Learning	Specific Areas of Learning
<p>Playing and exploring: - Finding and exploring</p> <p>Active Learning: - Being involved & concentrating</p> <p>Creating and Thinking Critically: - Having their own ideas - Choosing ways to do things and finding new ways</p>	<p>Physical Development</p> <p>Communication & Language</p>	<p>Literacy</p> <p>Understanding the World</p> <p>Expressive Arts and Design</p>

How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- The children responded to a wide range of different types of music and the children had lots of observations of what the sounds were like.
- The paper was taped to decking outside on the floor, which had its own texture, which the children remarked upon as they made their marks. The grooves in the floor made their own rhythm as the children moved their crayons over it.
- Some of the children used crayons in both hands when doing the mark making activity.
- The children began to compare the instruments they have in the nursery with the ones they made, thinking about what might be inside the plastic ones.
- The children began to explore the sounds made by different objects in the nursery that were not part of the selection we had brought for that purpose.

Key Reflections from Elaine

In a busy nursery setting it can be a challenge to have a moment of quiet, but it's really important to the activity for the children to not make a sound but instead listen to what they can hear. So ideally try to find a quiet corner or run the activity in a separate space maybe with a smaller group of children to help them to focus on the quiet.

As with many of these activities, the key thing here isn't for the children to make a rainstick and be done with it, it's for them to experiment with the different noises that can be made using different materials.

Ideas for Future Sessions

- Could the children then decorate the outside of the tube to show what kind of sound it makes?
- Could they colour an ocean on a tube that sounds like waves crashing?
- Once the children have created their different instruments they could play them all together along with some music.
- You could make other types of instruments, like clackers and bells using different materials too.
- There are a few different activities that lead on from one another in this description, but they could be done individually if you have a shorter amount of time.



Fruit and Vegetable Printing

Exploring natural materials, colours and making marks.

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

- Start by warming up everyone's hands - wiggle the fingers, move the arms around (big movements and little movements).
- Introduce the vegetables one by one, asking the children if they know what each one is. Can they describe the shape and texture of them? Can they describe what they are like to eat, taste and smell? What do they like and dislike?
- Let the children touch the vegetables and talk about what they feel like.

Getting Started

Explain to the children that they're going to be using the vegetables to make patterns and shapes using paint. Invite the children to help prepare the vegetables, using safe equipment or their hands they can peel, break, squeeze the vegetables to make different shapes and reveal different textures for printing. Ask how it feels? What colours, lines, patterns do they notice? What do they think the prints will look like?

The children can plan the images that they would like to make by cutting or arranging the veg in certain shapes or they could be more abstract and experiment with colour, texture and form. Demonstrate and scaffold how to use the ink/paint pad and some options for how they could make a wide range of shapes, patterns and colours with the materials in front of them.

Going Further

- What other colours could we try?
- What happens when the colours mix and overlap?
- Can we keep layering prints?
- What different ways can the fruit and veg be used to make prints?
- Can we fold the paper to make different types of prints?

Pressing the veg onto the ink/paint pads will allow them to be more physical and they choose the colours they would like to work with. This also releases the smells of the fruit or vegetable.

When making the prints they might notice different shapes and patterns emerging on the paper, ask what they see? What does it remind them of?

Allow them plenty of time and material to make as many prints and they want to.

Materials Check List

- Table top
- Aprons
- Wipes
- Ink/paint pads in a range of colours
- A variety of vegetables such as: Brussels sprouts, red cabbage, carrots, potatoes
- A variety of fruit such as: lemons, oranges, strawberries, peaches, pears and cranberries
- Bowls
- Chopping board
- Containers for cut veg and fruits
- Corks
- Big stainless steel bowl
- Pre-prepared stamps
- Cloths to wipe up
- Dustpan and brush
- Access to a compost bin (if possible)
- Large sheets of lining paper
- Other white paper

Understanding Materials and Mark Making

This activity focuses on exploring natural materials, colours and making marks. Using seasonal fruit and vegetables opens up conversations about seasonal food and changes in the natural environment. Learning about the seasons helps children understand the passage of time and teaches them about change. While some seasonal changes are more obvious (like changes in food and weather), there are other important subtle differences related to each season, like changes in the types of plants and animals that we might see at different times of day.

The printmaking element of the activity creates lots of opportunities for experimentation and for children to explore the materials and process in their own time. Fruit and veg act as a great alternative to traditional arts and crafts tools because they provide a great variety of texture, colour, smell, size and shapes for us to work with as well as being sustainable; this also helps children to develop a multisensory experience of the world.

This activity also taps into children's fine motor skills by breaking, peeling, squeezing, cutting, folding and spreading objects and materials. The printing method also requires some strength and movement which also incorporates gross motor skills. By offering a variety of ways to use their hands in this session, children have ample opportunity to try, practise and develop skill in their motor movements.

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<p>Playing and exploring: - Playing with what they know - Being willing to "have a go"</p> <p>Active Learning: - Enjoying achieving what they set out to do</p> <p>Creating and Thinking Critically: - Using what they know to learn new things - making links - Choosing ways to do things and finding new ways</p>	<p>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</p> <p>Physical Development</p>	<p>Literacy</p> <p>Understanding the World</p>

How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- There were lots of opportunities to talk about and name vegetables and fruits and describe what we liked to eat, taste and smell.
- The children really enjoyed breaking apart the cut vegetables, peeling back cabbage leaves and the juices from oranges and lemons.
- Using brussels sprouts (cut in half) to print shapes and a cut out Christmas tree shape: this was good for hand strength and also for observing the patterns in the leaves.
- Some children spent a lot of time experimenting with different colours and mixing.
- One child took a lot of time arranging a print using cabbage leaves and talked a lot about how it looked like trees and forests.

Key Reflections from Elaine

This activity linked well with a previous potato printing activity, but this gave the children a wider range of shapes, smells, patterns and textures to explore, so that their prints became whatever they wanted them to be. Shape, pattern and colour mixing were all explored and the activity allowed them a lot of freedom of how to use the vegetable shapes in different ways e.g rolling carrots across the paper as well as dabbing cut sections.

It was good to allow lots of space to work with and print freely (we used two table-tops).

Ideas for Future Sessions

- Some learners at this age might also benefit from trying 'proper' printmaking, using paint/ink trays and rollers as well as creating their own simple print shapes.
- Link the vegetables with the seasons and food that we eat throughout the year. Are there occasions where we eat certain things, for example Christmas dinner, or food associated with other festivals or celebrations.



Texture and Touch

This activity uses touch, texture and mark making.

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

Warm up our hands for exploring through the sense of touch - wiggle fingers individually, moving them gently and slowly, fast and energetically.

You could play some music and invite the children to make their fingers dance to the music, or make starfish hands.

What do our hands help us to do? What do we use our hands for?

Getting Started

Open up the box containing the feely bags and take one at a time. Pass it around, guessing what could be inside. What does it feel like? Is it heavy? Is it big? Is it spongy? Is it warm?

Open up the feely bags and see what the object is. Did our hands help us to understand?

Can we use our hands to explore other things? What about using our hands to make things?

Going Further

Introduce the clay, giving each child a piece. How does it feel in our hands? Is it hot or cold? Is it light or heavy? Is it squiddy or hard or soft? What do we think it is made from? Where did it come from? How can we use our hands to change the clay?

Encourage children to observe, feel and talk about the results of their mark-making and model-making with their hands and talk about what they can feel.

Offer the children new equipment to use to cut/score/manipulate the clay one-by-one to maintain their curiosity, but let them help themselves to materials so they can lead their own experimentation and exploration. Spend some time letting the children explore the clay, using their hands to make new surfaces and then squash things up and start again.

Scaffold some possibilities of how the children could use the clay, such as warming it up in their hands, rolling it out, flattening it, scoring into it using other objects, pressing textures into it and seeing what patterns are left behind.

Materials Check List

- Table top
- Aprons
- Feely bags - paper bags with textured items inside that the children have to feel but not open until their hands have tried to work out what's inside. You can also use long socks.
- Air-drying clay - terracotta in small pre-cut pieces and in tubs to give to each child
- Clay tools for children - small rolling pins, wooden tools
- Items to press into the surface of the clay, such as little sticks, pine cones, herb sprigs, charcoal, shells
- Cloths to wipe up
- Flannels for hands (more eco-friendly that wipes)
- Greaseproof paper sheets to work on for the clay

Understanding Texture and Touch

This activity uses touch, texture and mark making to explore a variety of materials and make connections between them, their original forms and the processes that have made them. The activity encourages children to think about how touch helps them to explore the world around them as well as introducing them to new sensations, things they might not have handled before. This is important for child development because it encourages tactile confidence and curiosity towards the outside world.

Experimenting with clay helps children to explore the different properties that materials have such as surface texture, temperature, weight, malleability and layers. Clay is especially good at allowing children to explore the different possibilities for materials because it can be transformed from one shape to another to another in a matter of minutes. This helps children to expand their experience of a material, thinking more openly about its properties and possibilities rather than focusing on one aspect. By asking them to explain all the different shapes and objects that they've created, this activity also provides an opportunity for symbolic play, for children to make connections and attach meaning to the shapes they produce, important steps for their language and cognitive development. Throughout the activity, the children are encouraged to think imaginatively and creatively; there are no right or wrong answers, and children are encouraged to experiment and find out what works and what does not work - these are vital aspects of independent learning that can lay the foundations for future learning.

Characteristics of Effective Teaching & Learning	Prime Areas of Learning	Specific Areas of Learning
<p>Playing and exploring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding and exploring - Playing with what they know - Being willing to "have a go" <p>Active Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being involved & concentrating <p>Creating and Thinking Critically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing ways to do things and finding new ways 	<p>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</p> <p>Physical Development</p> <p>Communication & Language</p>	<p>Literacy</p> <p>Understanding the World</p> <p>Expressive Arts and Design</p>

How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- One of the children enjoyed warming up his hands and pretending they were spiders climbing up his arm.
- The children really enjoyed trying to work out what was in the bags without peeping, recognising shapes, textures and weights.
- The children observed how the clay was cold at the start but became warm after being squeezed, rolled and rubbed in their hands.
- The clay stimulated the children's imagination and creativity, with children creating all sorts of different objects and telling stories about what they were making as they went along.
- The children had to work out how to manipulate the clay to make what they wanted to, such as having to add more clay at the bottom to stabilise it.

Key Reflections from Elaine

Clay is an excellent material for allowing exploration with touch and because it is okay to make, then re-shape and rebuild, the possibilities from one small piece of clay are really wide-ranging. Having a range of different tools for the children to use opens up the possibilities of what they can do, sometimes making 'a thing', other times just trying out 'what happens if...?'.

All of the objects that were used were all 'things that came from the ground' which led to conversations about each material, which helped to make connections and links with animals, plants and environments as well as what things are made from. This helped the children see that the clay was different to what they originally thought it was (playdough) and could be used differently, and by the end of the session calling it clay.

Make sure to introduce the materials one at a time and try not to have too many materials out at once until the end. Rather, pay close attention to how each material can be used and have focused discussions around each one.

Ideas For future Sessions

- Adding in scented materials as tools could add another dimension to the sensory experience. You could try herbs and interesting shaped spices such as cinnamon sticks and star anise.
- At Crabtree Farm we also did another session with clay and fossils, exploring the fossils with our hands first, using frottage (graphite rubbing) to highlight the textures of the fossils and then using the clay to make our own fossils.
- During another activity at Crabtree Farm, we used the warm up 'dancing hands' to talk about Diwali that was coming up. The children looked at examples of rangoli art and used clay tools to recreate them, developing fine motor skills, all while discussing the culturally significant celebration. This allowed for fun, sharing knowledge and introduction of new words e.g. Rangoli, diva, barfi, Hindu and fireworks.



Construction Play

This activity incorporates construction/manipulative play, allowing children to work with objects constructively and creatively.

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Warm up and Starting the Conversation

Start off by reading the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, or inviting the children to retell the story to each other together. Discuss what happens in the story, and especially what happens when Goldilocks sits on the chairs. Why were some of the chairs stronger than others? What kinds of chairs do we like? What materials are chairs made from? What would make chairs strong?

Explain to the children that we're

going to make our own chairs for the three bears, but first we need to warm up our hands for building by wiggling them in turn. And we also need to tune in our senses to how things feel and we can do this by using them to feel different materials (our hair, our clothes, the floor).

Getting Started

Take three large pieces of paper and draw three different sized chairs on them - one small, one medium and one large. Next, ask the children to decide which chair belongs to which teddy (one small, one medium and one large). Invite the children to make their own chairs for the bears.

Going Further

You could also introduce different sized boxes that could be used as beds for the three bears.

Introduce the different materials we have in front of us and scaffold the possibilities by discussing with the children what we might use them for. The children can then get started and use their imagination and play with the materials and decide how they want to use them and see what might work best in their own time. Keep asking lots of questions as you go, asking them to describe what's happening, what they want to try next, what is and is not working and what they're experimenting with.

Prompt the children to make connections with the story and real life scenarios by asking how to make the chair the right size for someone specific, how to make them stronger, more comfortable and more supportive and discuss why this is important.

Materials Check List

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Table top space | <input type="checkbox"/> Cardboard boxes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aprons | <input type="checkbox"/> Egg boxes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Masking tape | <input type="checkbox"/> Card tubes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Washi tape | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminium foil |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lining paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Packing paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small tubs | <input type="checkbox"/> Brown parcel paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corrugated card | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic bottle lids |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lollipop sticks | <input type="checkbox"/> Glue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Straws | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Cloths to wipe up |

Understanding Construction Play

This session incorporates construction/manipulative play, which allows children to work with objects to purposefully construct or create something. Through construction play, children get to explore materials and objects around them, learning how to intentionally create with them as well as developing gross and fine motor skills. It is important that children are encouraged to learn and explore the process of construction play, with less focus on the end product. This activity encourages children's metacognition: they are invited to plan, problem-solve, test out different ideas, think critically, experiment and evaluate how things have gone. This all helps children build key skills for learning, such as resilience and reflection. This session also builds self-confidence and encourages children to develop a sense of control and mastery over their environment, which can often feel empowering.

Construction play often leads to pretend play, where children bring their own ideas to life through physical forms, or by acting out real-life scenarios. Learning and playing in this way appeals to lots of different types of learners and at different stages of development. This form of play enhances creativity and allows children to explore new scenarios and ideas in a safe way. It also provides an opportunity for associative play, for children to branch out from their own ideas into sharing activities with others, developing their social and emotional skills.

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<p>Playing and exploring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding and exploring - Being willing to "have a go" <p>Active Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being involved & concentrating - Enjoying achieving what they set out to do <p>Creating and Thinking Critically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using what they know to learn new things - making links 	<p>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</p> <p>Physical Development</p> <p>Communication & Language</p>	<p>Literacy</p> <p>Mathematics</p> <p>Understanding the World</p> <p>Expressive Arts and Design</p>

How Children Responded at Crabtree Farm

- One child used a small box to make a little bed for the baby bear.
- Lots of the children used materials to make different objects for the bears, resulting in lots of imaginative play - one used a piece of bark, straws and a tube to make a 'milkshake', another used materials to make a bottle for the baby bear and several children then make a 'cafe' together using big blocks.
- A child stuck lots of lollipop sticks together to make them stronger and was very talkative while doing it.
- One child really enjoyed the problem solving to stop baby bear's chair being so unbalanced and used great language 'making more support'
- One child enjoyed connecting and threading the sticks through holes in the wood.

Key Reflections from Elaine

This activity linked with lots of other learning happening in the nursery such as numeracy skills (shapes, size, 2D, 3D), reading ('Big Book Time'), fine motor skills development (using pinchy fingers to manipulate art straws, threading and connecting materials). Our activity was centred around Goldilocks, but could just as easily be adapted for the story of the Three Little Pigs or any other story involving things breaking!

There was also lots of laughter during these sessions, it is great to provide possibilities and potential for play and to 'plan on' some laughs during the activity.

It was just as useful for the children to think about why their builds didn't work as those that did. Trying teddies on different chairs and them toppling over was lots of fun and provided an opportunity for children to work together to strengthen them.

This activity can involve lots of materials being on offer at once, but it might work best for some children to steadily introduce new materials so they can explore the possibilities with each new object rather than be overwhelmed by having lots of different objects in front of them.

Ideas for Future Sessions

As there is a physical outcome from each child at the end of this activity, it does provide an opportunity to display the children's work. This can add to children's sense of pride about their work, boost their confidence and celebrate their achievements, as well as communicating with parents and the wider school. Are there ways that displaying the children's work could be part of ongoing learning, for example providing a tray of materials next to the display so that children can return to the activity to make new and different responses and add to the display too?

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