

SSNS WINTER NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2024

Developing Learning Domains through Sensory Play and Exploration

Rebecca Brunson – *Twos Teacher*

As the winter months continue and we are inside more than out, we are given the opportunity to reflect and create. We can direct that creative energy in many ways. I'm going to focus on utilizing our senses in the form of sensory play and exploration to capitalize on that energy and give our children a way to have fun and develop in the preschool domains of learning.

Our senses are the gateway to how we feel, interpret, and remember experiences. The smell of baking bread could remind you of a grandmother and instill warmth in your body at the remembrance. These memories are stored in our centers of the brain associated with each sense. Kinesthetic memory is also stored in our body, commonly known as muscle memory. Sensory play helps our bodies explore, learn, and store learned information.



Sensory play can utilize all the senses but the sense of touch is prevalent. Touch is one of the first senses humans develop. "Touch can influence how humans make decisions. Texture can be associated with abstract concepts, and touching something with texture can influence the decisions a person makes" -according to six studies by psychologists at Harvard and Yale University, published in the June 24, 2010, issue of the journal of Science. Touch is also important for building compassion and connection with our fellow human beings, which is integral to our well being.

Sensory activities to try at home:

Salt Tray Drawing. -Tray, salt, food coloring, essential oil

Playdough shapes (bought or homemade) -Homemade playdough(food coloring, essential oil)

Cinnamon and sugar drawing -White sugar, cinnamon or spice of choice

Pushing beads into playdough tracings -Traced shapes into playdough.Beads for pushing in

Shaving Cream -Shaving Brush, Shower Screen/Mirror

Blackboard paint with water -Blackboard, water, hands or brush

Squishy Bags (Acrylic paint in baggy) -Make shapes by pushing into paint on table top

Sandpaper Letters/Shapes/Numbers -Trace with finger, or make etchings: paper/crayon

Ice Painting (glitter optional) -Ice tray, water, food coloring, sticks, white paper

Chalk Rainbow drawing -Trace around a shape with different colors

Clay Molding -Clay. Can be reused or allowed to dry.

Fluffy Slime -Glue, borax, shaving cream, food coloring

Baking soda and Vinegar -Baking soda, vinegar, bowls, spoons, food coloring

Sensory table -Rice, lentils, seeds, nuts, beans, or noodles.

Baking /Cooking -Measuring, Stirring, Kneading, Eating!

Some of the activities were derived from the ChildCare Education Institute: Childhood 101.com

Sensory play uses the senses to explore and develop many domains of learning including literacy, mathematical thinking, physical motor development, social skills, and scientific thinking. Children can strengthen their fine motor development to encourage drawing and writing skills. In the creative play process they can see patterns, quantity changes, and measurement. They may ask questions, experiment, draw conclusions, and communicate their findings. In their discoveries and explorations social skills will develop as they inquire, collaborate, take turns, ask for help, give help, and engage with adults and children.



Sensory play can help develop many learning domains. The more senses are used to experience learning, the more places in the brain and body the learning is stored. It is also fun and attractive to children and adults alike, so dig in and have some fun!

Director's View: *Stick to the Recipe*

Scott Mitchell – Director, Fours Teacher

When I started at SSNS over thirteen years ago, I hadn't dared dream of becoming the director. I was just trying to survive being a new parent on a daily basis. Over time though, I eventually found my footing. Each year I was trusted with a bit more responsibility and was given the opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions alongside some amazing educators and parents who helped steer this community. My recipe for success was to focus on the job at hand, and assist in any other way that I could. That method proved perennially successful.

As the years progressed and I was named the successor to Janise as director, I found myself feeling both well prepared and nervous at the same time. I was fortunate enough as both a member of the board, and staff to have been exposed to almost all facets of SSNS. I seized many educational opportunities. I did my best to network within the early childhood education community. And I focused on the wise

words of my mentors: “Be the teacher you were meant to be,” “Communicate, Communicate, Communicate,” and “Meet both children and families where they are.”

All that said, I have to admit, that as I began my work this year as both teacher and director, I found my mind swirling at times. It has been challenging to find where to put my focus. I tell myself to stick to my old recipe: doing the job at hand, and assist wherever I can. I believe there is also a core recipe that has made SSNS a magical and wonderful place for more than 80 years.



- Attract a diverse group of local families committed to being a part of a cooperative community.
- Prep classrooms and outdoor spaces, with a wide variety of open ended materials and sensory rich experiential opportunities.
- Season with alumni parents, who demonstrate the talent and desire to become early childhood professionals.
- Blend children, teachers and parents, in playspaces, and allow for child-led learning (play), with plenty of social and emotional support.
- Combine both staff and family efforts, to provide the backbone support of school operations.
- Allow to rise, by giving ample opportunity for students and families to become their own beautiful selves.

Conflict is the Fairy Dust of Development

Celeste Raker Dillen – *Threes Teacher*

Three year olds are rife with conflict - no wonder it is exhausting to be their parents! Take heart, however, and welcome this conflict as a beautiful sign of development. Conflict is one of those concepts as humans we often try to avoid, invoking images of painful limits, unfulfilled wants and needs. The concept of conflict seems to embody unhappiness, a state that no parent wishes upon their child. With these negative connotations, we forget that conflict can be an important essence for growth. That edge of discomfort is where the magic happens and learning occurs. The world of the three-year-old is rife with conflict, and the resulting growth and development truly is magical. Conflict within a three-year-old begins with the growing internal landscape and the increasing awareness of the world beyond. Internally, the child is still experiencing big emotions as the limbic middle brain continues to develop. These emotions are becoming attached to increasingly complex concepts as their ability to plan, imagine, and create becomes more robust. Children at this age become very attached to their ideas and thoughts resulting in focus and sustained effort in achieving



their inner vision. Conflict arises when this vision is not met, sometimes in the form of mis-matched materials, undeveloped motor skills, or unanticipated intervention from a classmate. Meltdowns occur when vivid visual imaginations can not be fully communicated or represented in the created art. Countless tears have been shed over a tower that was knocked down before completion.

The increasing awareness of the surrounding world is also a deliciously rich source of conflict. Three-year-olds are boundary pushers, often intentionally doing the exact opposite of our requests. One of my earliest personal memories is being told not to touch a hot surface and me very deliberately placing both mittened hands on that forbidden surface in an attempt to understand what “too hot to touch” meant. This conflict of pushing boundaries is a step in independence - a skill three-year olds are working hard on achieving and can vehemently let us know. (especially when we are in a hurry or running late, lol!)



In the three's classroom, conflict arises over resource management. Whether it is with cars, marbles, playdough, gems or that one special costume, resource management and our desire to have the biggest pile or the coveted item and recognizing that a friend wants the same is a huge source of conflict. Unlike a younger child, redirection does not always work and we work hard on resolving the deep desire to have it all to ourselves without hurting or upsetting our friends.

In all of the scenarios above where the child is navigating this push-pull work of internal ideas and external interest, conflict is the magic fairy dust of growth, especially with language and language development. A diversity of vocabulary is supported by increasing complex imaginations that result in increasing needs and desires. Sentence structure becomes more complex to match the concepts being relayed. Language moves beyond descriptive to more conversational as problems are solved and collaborations are created among friends. Conflict creates a need for self-advocacy; verbalizing what is needed instead of a scream or a push. Collaborations are dependent on shared understanding through clear communication. Conflict also creates a fantastic opportunity to better understand one's own emotions as well as develop empathy for others. It allows for practicing self-regulation and delayed gratification. In the case of resource management, finding ways to share the resource by either taking turns or dividing the materials is a clear example of delaying gratification. Resource management also yields a lesson in empathy, especially in instances where classmates recognize the conflict between two friends. Many times the observers are quick to offer solutions or ideas on how to resolve the conflict.

Perhaps of all of the three-year-old conflicts, pushing boundaries is the most challenging for parents. It sometimes feels very personal and targeted. Children need a stretchy safety net of boundaries to safely test their limits in their world, helping them to better understand their roles and how to connect in an encouraging and capable way. Boundary pushing is a beautiful exploration of cause and effect relationships. As a child, my singed hands were not disobedience to the “don't do this,” but rather an honest



exploration of the concept and the world around me.... I was merely exploring it the hard way!

Conflict in the three-year-old is hard for the whole team. It brings out those big emotions, often for both the child and the parent. Yet, those big emotions are fuel for amazing and magical growth. And yes, it can be ever so exhausting. But also very beautiful....:)

Consistency and Change in the 4s Class

Scott Mitchell – *Director, Fours Teacher*

Parents at SSNS have probably heard the staff talk at length about the need for consistency in a child's routine. We share with prospective families, who are looking for a place to bring their children, that we offer a solid predictable flow to each class. A rhythm that kids can rely upon, trust, and gain comfort.

At the same time, parents have also probably heard the SSNS staff talk about the need to be flexible. We need to be willing to change our approach, in order to accommodate each child's particular needs, as well as the particular and evolving needs of a class.

As with many things in early parenting, this probably seems confusing, and it can be. Even the most seasoned early childhood professional, can struggle with figuring out when to keep something consistent and when to make a change. Let's look at this year's fours class for some examples.



At the beginning of the year, Wendy and I followed last year's pattern, of having a gather-time at the stumps, followed by washing hands outside, and then moving up to the patio for lunch. We stuck with this method for several weeks. We eventually came to realize that for this year's class, the amount of wait-time associated with transitions wasn't a good fit. We decided to move our hand-washing to inside the building, where more sinks meant less waiting.

Another change we've made was to move our gather-time from the stumps, to the playground itself. I've long believed that children will only come, if what you're doing seems interesting. The kids' behavior told me that about 75% of the class found gather-time interesting, and the remaining 25% did not, as they were very reluctant to leave the playground and join us. Wendy and I realized that we were creating conflicts by requiring kids to come to something that they may not enjoy. Since we've made the move to having gather-time at the playground, not only have we reduced conflicts, we've actually attracted another 10% of the kids to participate in gathertime.



Again, kids do need consistency, a reliable framework upon which they can rely. They will also, and appropriately, test the boundaries of this framework. What they need from their parents and teachers is a respectful response to their behaviors. They need us to keep what is working and necessary, AND have a willingness to be flexible with the rest.

The Tremendous Threes

Celeste Raker Dillen – *Threes Teacher*

Our day is filled with play and exploration. Within that play, we are learning and growing in so many ways. Let's take a brief look at what we are doing in the threes classroom in terms of learning domains:

Language and Literacy - We are working on sharing ideas and telling stories. We are working on saying "Stop" without screaming or using our hands. We are practicing asking for turns and negotiating how to take turns. We are listening to stories and retelling them using art and dramatic play. We sing songs and rhyme words. We look for the letters in our name, and play with sounds and rhymes. We mix up the words to familiar songs and laugh at the silliness.



Social and Emotional - We are working hard at recognizing our own emotions and the emotions of our friends. We are practicing using affirmations to recognize acts of courage, love and more. We are working hard taking deep breaths for ourselves and for our friends when they are having a hard time. We play monster and dinosaur chase, We pretend we are caring for our babies and cooking feasts for our friends. We carefully choose our costumes and help friends choose theirs.

Gross Motor - We are having fun wrestling our big stuffies and pillows. We are carrying heavy things, and climbing high places. We kick balls and toss bean bags. We race to catch bubbles. We are dancing and jumping to our favorite songs including "Popcorn."

Fine Motor - we play with doughs and sensory items. We hunt for gems and sequins. We use paint brushes and droppers to create masterpieces. We build massive Lego creations. We squish foam balls and softies. We play with puppets and stir sand cakes. We squeeze glue bottles and shake glitter.

STEM - We explored pumpkins inside and out - what is inside, how to smash them, what happens when we cook them, how do they taste and how they decompose. We scavenged for seeds and searched for sign of Fall and Winter. We count heads as we walk to the playground. We sort treasures and build with shapes and blocks. We count heads on the way to the playground, and count steps.



Art and Visual - we have processed and explored colors through tempura paints and water colors. We painted with brushes, wheat stalks, flowers, leaves, pine cones and more. We crafted leaf window clings and created a gratitude tree. We wrote letters with special pictures. We made huge murals and small personal art. We love glue. And glitter. Lots of glitter.

Executive Function - We are learning to wait and take turns. We are planning and building bigger creations and testing their limits. We are taking deep breaths to regulate big emotions. We are joining in circle time, and following instructions to play group games. We are listening to songs with simple dance moves. We are working on obstacle courses. The three classroom can sometimes look like a chaos of free and undirected play.

However, play is the work of the child, the means in which the child learns. Each activity a child chooses to engage in is a multidimensional learning space, engaging the mind and body for whole body growth.

All things Membership!

Joanna Lazzaro – Parent

We sure have been busy this year: answering voicemails, responding to inquiries, giving tours to potential new families, and changing the enrollment seasons of our school. If you are interested in being on the membership team for our school in any capacity, *please* reach out to me:

membership@silverspringnurseryschool.org. We're making t-shirts! ;)

All jokes aside, it has been very rewarding to be a part of the future of our school. The first time I was asked to be on the Board, I remember Ms. Celeste shared how neat it was for her (when she was a co-oping parent) to have a better understanding of how our community operates. The more I participate and give to our school, the more I receive from it.

Parent Education is an integral part of Silver Spring Nursery School

Eva Caldera – Parent

The co-op model means that, as parents, we get the unique privilege of being part of our children's day to day school lives. This has been an amazing source of knowledge for many of us! We learn so much simply by being in the classroom and talking to the teachers and other parents. We learn about ourselves and our kids by being in the classroom environment and seeing how we react to different situations and experiences. While learning happens on a daily basis throughout the year through conversations and observations



with other parents and SSNS staff, we are also reformatting our parent education lecture series this year. We've shifted three membership meetings to parent education lectures. We understand that families have busy schedules and we want to make attending these education nights as accessible as possible!

The parent ed lecture series this year will include three classes. The first one, which took place in early December, was titled "A Parent's Journey-Confronting Fears-Learning Basic Skills" and led by our fourth teacher, Scott Mitchell. We had a wonderful discussion that helped attendees gain perspective on themselves and their parenting choices. Our second class, coming up on January 10th, will be presented by Green Thinker DC, an organization that will help us reduce how much waste our school produces and how we can reduce our carbon footprint. Our final class will be a Mindful Parenting workshop led by our two teacher, Rebecca Brunson, on February 21st.



Outside of our parent education nights, parent education puts out a twice a year survey so we can make sure we are in touch with our membership and constantly learning and growing as a school. We will be hosting a potty training class for interested families. Look out for an email soon to indicate your interest. We are also hoping to host a "Getting Ready for Kindergarten" night where parents can speak to teachers from a variety of different kinds of school to make an informed decision for when they graduate from SSNS.

Finally, parent education is also hosting a book club this year. We are reading, *The Highly Sensitive Child: Helping Our Children Thrive When The World Overwhelms Them* by Elain N. Aron Ph. D. We will meet to discuss the first half of the book in mid January.

We are looking forward to our next two classes, our book club discussion, and taking the time to reflect on our mid year membership survey. It is a privilege to be able to be part of this community of learning and growth!

SSNS is always hiring....You!

Scott Mitchell – Director, Fours Teacher

SSNS has a stated preference for hiring staff from within the membership community. We are very fortunate that at the time of this writing, 100% of the paid staff at SSNS are alumni parents. What needs to be done in order for this trend to continue?

Every year, SSNS looks to its community to fill a variety of needs:

Our substitute list is always in need of alumni and current parents, to help fill-in when a co-oping parent is unable to work a shift. There are also annual opportunities to work as a buy-out substitute.

Our Monday and Friday Theme programs have a continual need for aides and teachers.

Becoming an aide, once already cleared as a co-oper, is a short road, and SSNS offers assistance with the classes necessary to obtain and hold certification. Becoming a teacher, though a little more time consuming, is also something that SSNS will help you navigate, with potential financial assistance.

While our current slate of regular classroom teachers and aides is one we hope to keep well into the future, history proves that life circumstances can change from year to year, and positions do become available.

Though we are only about a third of the way through the current school year, it is time to start looking ahead at our staffing for next year. Please, if you have any interest in any of the mentioned positions, or want to learn more about how you can expand your role within SSNS, contact Kate Weaver or Scott Mitchell.



To Redshirt or Not to Redshirt? That was my question.

Joanna Lazzaro – Parent

Redshirting is defined by Wikipedia *“as the practice of postponing entrance into kindergarten of age-eligible children in order to allow extra time for socioemotional, intellectual, or physical growth.”*
(*Redshirting (academic)* 2023)

Making the decision to give my older child a bonus year was simple, but certainly not easy. Yet it is one of my proudest parenting decisions and this is how I made it.

I read countless articles on the benefits and disadvantages of holding your kid a year back. I had discussion after discussion with some of my favorite, most trusted mom-friends as well as some relatives that have many well-intentioned-yet-not-asked-for-opinions on how we parent these days (eh hm, no thank you) and still felt so torn. Most of the parents we spoke with who had actual experience on this had made the decision to hold their sons back, and if it was a daughter it was earlier in their preschool years. Some of the worries and thoughts I had about this were: Would she develop physically even faster than her peers, would she be bored in school or too mature for her peers? What if I am doing this selfishly because I AM SCARED of kindergarten and the challenges of public school...?!

Finally, when the time came to re-enroll, I asked Scott, her teacher who I believe has a professional perspective on my child as an individual and also on the development of children in general, what he thought. We spoke on the phone and he said she's on the list of kids he could see benefit from an extra year to play. And that was that. I re-enrolled her. And I didn't have to worry about it anymore.



At times, the little parenting insecurities creep back in and feed me lies on why I made the wrong choice. This was especially hard when we first talked about it with her. K understood most of her “Wolfs” friends were going to Kindergarten at different schools and all of her neighborhood peers were starting Kindergarten. The language I used included how our family values play and believe it is best for her to have an extra year to play. Nowadays when we talk about it, Kacey is very happy to have this extra year to play. In fact, she claims “I want three more years to play!”

The most rewarding part of this hard decision is how she has grown from a super cautious and observant kiddo to an assertive and keenly aware kiddo. Kacey's bonus year has given her the opportunity to develop confidence in a beautiful way and it is giving me an extra group of parents to grow with. At the end of the day, either decision is not wrong—it is about what is best for each family. However, if any of our kids are going to be “red-shirted” I am so grateful it's enrolled in one that says *Sharing and caring since 1941*.