



Reflections on LearningTM

The Foundation Years at Home

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Exploring light and shadow in the early years

Young children's curiosity about the world around them is apparent from the day they are born. Tiny babies use all their senses to explore their surroundings and even before they can talk they are clearly investigating, asking questions, solving problems and making choices as they play, eat, and interact with those around them. Toddlers love trying things out, moving things around and seeing how different objects behave. Children of pre-school age enjoy finding out what they can do with different objects and materials and think up their own ideas about why things happen in the way they do.

Sometimes it the simple things that are all around us, things that we as adults take for granted, that fascinate and interest young children the most. For many children pebbles, puddles, sticks, worms and mud are as interesting and exciting as expensive electronic toys and games. By encouraging your child to be curious and to actively explore the world around them you will be tapping into their natural curiosity and helping them to build up their own store of knowledge about the world and how it works.

Light and shadow are two free resources that are all around us, but we rarely pay much attention to them. They are wonderful examples of open-ended resources because they appear in so many different forms and can be played with and explored in many different ways.

Think of all the interesting possibilities you and your children can explore simply by taking a little more time to notice, think about and play with, light and shadow. On a sunny day look at where the sunlight comes in through the windows and draw attention to the way the light moves across the walls and floor during the course of the day.

In Autumn and Winter look out for opportunities to experience sunrise and sunset. Talk about all the wonderful colours in the sky and notice the speed at which things change.



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Go outside on a dark evening with torches to explore the garden, noticing how different everything looks at night. This is a great opportunity to build up a sense of excitement and to help your child to address any fears he or she may have about 'the dark'.

Find a dark space in your home – under the stairs, under a table, in the hallway with all the doors closed - and use this as a place to explore with torch light, shiny metal objects and mirrors.

When the sun is shining look closely at the shadows made by different objects or people. Can you think of a way to catch a shadow? Could you capture it in a cardboard box?

Try looking at the world through pieces of coloured acetate or cellophane. What happens when you start to mix the colours together?

Make up stories using shadow puppets - either using cut out cardboard shapes or just by using your hands to create interesting and exciting shadow shapes.

Don't worry about trying to explain the science behind what is happening in different situations. It is far more important at this stage to encourage children to notice what is happening around them, to try things out for themselves and to talk about and enjoy their experiences.



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