UCL DAY NURSERY’S CORE EXPERIENCE

BOOKLET

MANAGER- CATHERINE BURTENSHAW
Introduction and welcome

Core Experiences for the Early Years Foundation Stage is a planning framework for early childhood education and care in England. The basic idea is that young children should be able to access a wide range of high-quality experiences every day (or at least very regularly) in nursery. The framework is written to show how these experiences cover all areas of learning and how children might develop and learn as they revisit each experience over time. It also gives guidance to adults in the nursery on how they can support children's development and learning and teach them new skills and concepts. With the "Core Experiences" in place, the practitioners can then start to think about and plan for children individually.

This work has been developed by Kate Greenaway Nursery School and Children's Centre in London, England, building on an earlier idea from Southway Nursery School and Children's Centre in Bedfordshire.

This booklet is a practical and theoretical guide to how we plan to provide a broad, balanced and rich nursery education to the children at UCL Day Nursery. Although it has been developed by the staff team over a number of years, it is still a piece of work in progress to be rewritten and revised in the light of what we learn alongside children, parents, and fellow early year's educators and researchers.

In this booklet, we state our conviction that young children develop and learn best through play and first-hand experiences, with the companionship of other children and of interested and supportive adults. All aspects of development and learning in young children are interlinked, and children are born and blessed with brains and bodies which are ready to learn and move in increasingly complex and co-ordinated ways, given favourable conditions. Historically, the nursery school has provided just such favourable conditions: space, freedom with responsibility, autonomy with comradeship, and companionable adults who have a sophisticated understanding of how children develop and learn, who can share in new discoveries, sympathise with setbacks and upsets, and prepare the nursery inside and outside for the child’s interests and needs.

Play is neither easy to plan for, nor simple to support and develop moment by moment. It is tempting to plan for “free play” to keep most of the children occupied, so that an adult-led, formally-taught group activity can be carried out, ensuring the children are learning. The Core Experiences summarises how the provision of high-quality play and first-hand experiences can enable children to learn indoors and outside through social interaction, through play including heuristic and treasure basket play, communication in its widest sense and the development of language, and movement and multi-sensory experiences which develop health, strength, co-ordination and thinking. We take it as read that this takes place in an emotionally warm, secure and orderly environment underpinned by the key person approach.

In early childhood education, the richest play and discovery takes place when it supported by adults who are ready to judge when to join in, and when not to, and when to teach a new skill or introduce a new concept. We think that this is done best when children can revisit high-quality play opportunities every day, week, month and year, refining their skills and developing their thinking and understanding. Children need adults who understand how play and first-hand experiences can be made more challenging and broadened across different areas of learning. We think that the child who is able to sustain many hours playing with wooden blocks, using increasingly complex techniques to build ever more elaborate
structures, should be seen as an expert, not as someone who is stuck. When children are playing in the nursery, it can look simple and easy; it is neither, and this booklet tries to provide some guidance and points of direction to help nursery staff in this difficult and important work.

Thinking about how young children learn

This section of our policy draws on our work with Tina Bruce. To find out more, read her book *Early Childhood Education*

Children’s brains, from birth, have immensely powerful and flexible capacities to attend to sensory information (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling the body’s position in space, touching and tasting), including a developing awareness of the body, and the body’s 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 birth to five age range as a “sensitive period” for children’s development and learning.

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 overstimulation (e.g. too much visual stimulation for babies; letter flashcards for toddlers).

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 listen attentively, develop conversation, and think out loud together 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 in nursery need adults who can hold them in mind, can think about their emotional state, and can regulate their emotional state when it threatens to become overwhelming.

Children’s powerful learning mechanisms mean that a lot of their development happens through playing and experimenting with high quality 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 brain as well as muscle; 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 development of language from the second year onwards gives children an additional and immensely powerful mechanism for organising experience and learning from it. Through conversation with adults and other children, they 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-operatively (e.g. thinking over a
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 social, emotional, sensory, linguistic, and physical development. 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 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.
UCL DAY NURSERY’S KEY WORKER SYSTEM

At UCL Day Nursery we put high emphases on our key worker systems. Each key worker is allocated a small number of children; in the baby room (ladybirds) and toddler room (bumblebees) each key worker has 3 key children at any one time, and in the 2-5’s (pre-school) each key worker has 6 key children at any one time.

Having an allocated key worker to each child enables a close, secure adult–child relationship, which is critical for early development; in conjunction to this each key worker has a co-key worker, who works closely with the key worker and child. This is to enable the child to have a familiar adult in the absence of the key worker to ensure security within the nursery environment is always maintained.

We use the term *key person* in order to emphasise the emotional nature of this relationship.* Organising in this way also means that one practitioner has primary responsibility for gathering in-depth knowledge of the child, based on observation. They might also be responsible for records of achievement, although this task is sometimes shared. UCL Day Nursery have extended the role of the key worker further, to include establishing a relationship with, and getting to know something about, a child’s family and background. This knowledge enables more meaningful conversations with both child and...
parent, which will help to enhance learning. Children also benefit from seeing their parent and key worker in a friendly, open relationship.

All new families will be invited to attend a ‘Family conference’ prior to the settling date that you have been given, where essential information is gathered about eating, sleeping, language development, comfort routines and people who are special to the child. Families can share their feelings about their child coming to nursery and they are asked if there is anything they would like staff to know about the family. This is also a time for families and key worker to discuss the individual plan for settling each child.

All children have a two week settling-in period, fees are not charged for these two weeks to enable families to dedicate this time to their child and the nursery, families will be needed to stay with their child initially and gradually introduce the child to nursery life in the absence of their parents within the security of their key worker attachment. The whole induction process is seen as a time for staff and families to get to know each other. A settling in conference will then be held within the first 6 -8 weeks of a child starting, where information is shared on how the child is progressing in the nursery. Then families will be invited to attend progress meeting once a term for babies and toddlers, and twice yearly for children over the age of 2.

As a child moves through the different age groups, key workers set up new introductory key worker/progress meetings for parents, and then takes responsibility of settling the child into their new room, liaising closely with new key worker to ensure a smooth transition, the transition from one room to another is expected to take two weeks. Parents will be notified of the new key worker at least one month prior to the move in order to enhance good transitional communication between all parties.

Parents know the key worker is their first point of contact, but also that they are welcome to approach any member of staff. Parents are always encouraged to build relationships with a range of practitioners with the nursery.

MANAGER- CATHERINE BURTENSHAW
Over the past couple of years there has been considerable changes within UCL Day Nursery, the biggest change has been the opening of the new baby site at 55 Gordon Square in October 2011, and the opening of two age specific rooms, one for the younger babies the “Learning Ladybirds” for babies up to between 16 and 18 months, and the “Busy Bees room” for toddlers from 16 months up to 2 to 2.5 years. Prior to the opening of the new site all babies under the age of 2 years had been based in one room at 50 Gordon Square adjacent to the 2-5s room in the same open plan space since 2006.

Before to the opening of the new baby site, all the practitioner’s at the nursery worked closely with the children and their families, observing and assessing the children’s development and needs at the nursery. In order for us to plan and implement a high quality positive learning environment, for both babies and children using these observations and assessments as tools to help us meet the children/babies needs and learn about the effectiveness of our own provision. During these assessments and observations it became apparent that there was a gap that needed to be filled in meeting the needs of the younger babies, and the busy toddlers in baby room.

Using the information collected by carrying out observations on the babies/toddlers needs, the next step was for us to evaluate these observations and assess how best we were to meet these needs in the confinement of the space that we had to work with.

Although we accept babies from the age of 3 months with the current system of parental maternity cover we now frequently find babies are between age of nine and twelve months when they join us. Although these babies needs are significantly different from a 3 month old baby, they are still on a journey of independence, and are beginning to become mobile with some crawling, and others cruising around furniture. These young babies need constant close adult interaction, and a calm nurturing environment which enables them to observe and explore their immediate word around them at their own pace. They are developing their own personalities.
and their parents and key workers are able to recognise their strong likes and dislikes. They will have favourite toys and people. Strangers and unfamiliar faces are likely to be a source of upset and the baby will seek familiar people that they know for comfort. Over the next couple of months the main carers will notice that among the tune full babbles some word start to appear.

Between 16 to 18 months there is a significant shift in development. Most of our babies have now become toddlers and are walking. Their style off walking may be unsteady; with a gait to their style, even so being mobile provides them with so many new opportunities and experiences they are eager to explore. The toddlers are now able to see things from a new angle and reach things that were previously out of sight. As well as being able to walk the toddlers have also learned to climb and have gained increasing control over their hands, a toddler needs to be able to explore without restraints in a secure environment that is full of new challenges and experiences in order to meet their needs. These newly developed skills mean that they might show the first signs of becoming frustrated. Emotionally, toddlers need to be with their main carers and need the reassurance that they are present even when they are busy playing and exploring.

Having a sound knowledge of the broadly expected and observed development shifts between 12 to 18 months and beyond enabled us to reflect on what the babies were actually doing, what might be expected. This helped us to reflect and to plan our resources to meet the children’s changing needs working closely within our key worker system and with parents to ensure best practice.
In the July of 2011 The Institute of Education Nursery closed down and the opportunity arose for us to take over the building, enabling us to divide our under two’s into two age appropriate and development specific rooms, one for babies up to 16/18 months (the Learning Ladybirds) which met the needs of the smaller babies, we feel that we have created home-like environment, using natural colours and resources, comfy spaces and cosy corners, a black and white area to stimulate interest and vision, mirrors to encourage babies to crawl over to discover their own reflections, and a pull up baby mirror to encourage babies to stand by themselves, quiet social areas to foster small group relationships between babies and staff.

In contrast the new Busy Bees room for our toddlers is a hive of activity. Toddlers now have a space perfect for investigation exploration and sensory play to inspire their imaginations and creativity, the room is versatile and multi functional offering self accessed resources for independent learners and a space so that they can be as energetic as they need to be at any given time, a snug for quiet contemplation and cuddles when needed, giving them all the opportunities to grow in an environment that suits each child’s individual needs.
We have always known that it is important for us to organise the nursery environment that is rich in learning opportunities, that promotes play, and enables the children to integrate their learning across different domains.

Using this principle the “Core experience” has been being introduced throughout the nursery over the past two years, once the babies moved into their own building, this gave us considerably more space and flexibly to expand the 2-5 year old site to meet its full potential introducing the core experience fully throughout the nursery.

We have carefully planned and structured the new environment so that it is geared to the children’s development and progress, logically ordering the environment which enables the child to move from freely from one area to another, encouraging rich and imaginative play, giving each child the opportunity to select and then extend their experience and learning as they move forward within their development.

Using the Communication Friendly Spaces Approach we made many changes to the nursery concentrating on experiencing the setting from a child’s view point. We de-cluttered and created comfy spaces and cozy corners where children can relax and
changed the overall layout of the nursery so that children are encouraged to communicate with each other. The use of rope lights and calming music being played in the background has transformed the setting into a tranquil environment with many parents commenting on how warm and calm the nursery is when they enter. These changes have had a remarkable affect on the children who are relaxed, feel safe and secure with their surroundings.

The majority of our planning is outlined in the 14 Core Experiences. Each core experience is outlined fully later in this booklet. Most Core Experiences are offered every day, with a few offered less frequently (for example, forestry school, cookery or trips). Each Core Experience promotes learning across all six areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This enables children to learn through repeated experiences which can be differentiated to match and extend their development, all the way from the earliest stages of EYFS to the ultimate Early Learning Goals. So staff can start with a child’s interest in a particular area (like small world play) and extend the child’s learning across the full curriculum. This helps the child to develop skills through frequent practice, and to extend thinking and understanding.

Whilst we feel entitlement to a broad, balanced curriculum is important, we ensure it is balanced by an emphasis on the individual child building learning over time: in the end covering the curriculum matters less, than the child’s continued progression, overcoming difficulties, and developing all the key factors that enable them to learn: i.e. communication, cooperation with one peers, involvement and determination.

The development of children at the start of education can vary considerably, and also be unpredictable. This can result from differences in age (some children leave nursery before they are even four years old; others are nearly five by the summer term), natural differences in development, special needs and difficult early circumstances. While there is an important role for targeting extra help to specific
areas of difficulty (for example, communication, or social and emotional development), the curriculum and education we delivery needs to be rich and stimulating for all children, to foster excitement and joy. Creativity runs through the whole curriculum, with each Core Experience offering opportunities for children to make choices, think through solutions to problems and find unique ways of expressing their ideas through talking, drawing, painting, making models, making music, singing, role play, dancing and moving.
**Block Play**

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

Gradually, through this exploration and interaction, the child explores the properties of each of the different blocks, separating their differences and similarities, establishing common physical characteristics, and ‘knowing the blocks’. Through block play children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas, shape and spatial relationships. By playing with blocks children acquire a number of different building techniques, Louie in the picture above was 22 months when the picture was taken, yet you can see his symbolic representation and abstract sculptures are already becoming very detailed and intricate.

Block play encourages collaboration, co-operation an conversation: building together and helping each other lifting the heavier blocks. In the 2-5 year old site we call the blocks area our ‘stretch and build area’ and it is positioned carefully near small world play and the creative area, to encourage collaboration between the areas, offering endless possibilities to inspire the children imaginations and creativity.
Block play as a context for development and learning in the EYFS

Block play enables children’s **Personal, social and emotional development** by providing opportunities for making independent choices, holding their interest and involvement for longer periods of time and joining in with others.

Whilst using the blocks, children develop their **communication, language**, as they discuss ideas with each other, talk about what they want to do, listen to the ideas of others and use language to discuss size and position. At UCL we’ve a **stretch and build area** with pictures of buildings and structures that they children can refer to whilst taking part in block play, opportunity is given for the children to visit buildings in our local area on trips and parents have assisted by providing pictures of buildings near the children’s homes for them to refer to, and they can record their constructions by drawing and making marks.

Block play supports development of children’s **Mathematical learning** by providing opportunities to count for a purpose and the use of language of quantity and size (more, less, longer, shorter etc) Children gain firsthand experience of the properties of shapes, how to describe shapes, and begin to learn how to use the correct mathematical terms to describe shapes and how different shapes and blocks fit together.

Children can develop their **Understanding of the world**, by the way they explore shape, colour and texture and the smell of the blocks at first, and then by finding out how they build different types of structures and how to make them stable. Small children love to watch adults building towers and then enjoy them toppling over and starting again.

Block play helps **physical development** because children need to develop their gross motors skills, picking up the blocks and moving them from one area to another, and also fine motor skills when they show great concentration to position and manipulate smaller
blocks with great precision.

Block play greatly encourages children’s **Expressive Arts and Design** development by the endless possibilities it creates, allowing the children to build infinite numbers of structures and use their imagination to explore so many different ideas. At UCL block play is closely linked to small world play to encourage the children’s imaginative play (by linking them with the cars, small world characters and even the animals and dinosaurs) and both small and large scale role play, building tracks to ride their sit and ride cars on, or a bridge to the pirate ship.
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, and Makaton (baby signing) are introduced to support songs, rhymes and the children’s everyday words. Nursery rhymes engage children in small manageable chunks of text, giving them experience of alliteration, rhyme and rhythm in a context which develops their speaking and listening.

Even our smallest children are introduced to simple stories, these stories are often of a repetitive nature and quite often the stories are used to reflect the children’s here and now (“Brown Bear, Brown bear who do I see”, was used as an influence to make a book about the children in the room accompanied by a photograph of each child) again supported by props. Props match well to the emergence of symbolic understanding where there is a close relationship between the prop and the real object.

As the children grow and develop 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 Third year most children at UCL Day Nursery, rely less on props and can sustain involvement in more complex stories through text and illustrations alone, though props remain important to play with the ideas and the
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 also so that they can become active listeners and have the opportunity to speak. The pace of the group sessions is planned with a mixture of stories songs and rhymes. The children are helped to focus their attention to sounds-musical (Playing with instruments, listening to music, making sounds with the body), environmental, and the sounds of letters (phonics) and words. Children experiment with their voices making a range of sounds with different pitches and volumes.

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-p –penguin” and identifying the initial sounds in words and how they rhyme e.g reading ‘Chocolate Moose, Greedy Goose’, or ‘Each Peach Pair Plum’ and getting the children to guess to word from the initial sound or Rhyme and then further breaking the words down into individual phonics. Children are encouraged to play with sounds, and experimenting with new rhymes (e.g. replacing brown brown bear with the children’s names, or putting in new verses in Row- Row the boat’.

Staff make books with the children about memorable experiences so that the children are able to share and reflect back on the experience either in small groups, or one to one with staff. Children are also able to make their own books, ITC resourcing enables the use of photo’s (either taken by the children or the adults) to be incorporated and enhancing the experience.
Books and children’s literature as a context for development and learning in the EYFS.

Books support children’s **Personal Social and Emotional Development** from the earliest stages by providing opportunities to snuggle in with an adult, making choices and developing preferences like having a favourite book or story feeling a sense of belonging by joining in with others. Our well organised book areas enable children to make choice and select books of their own, as well as with an adult. We often have a favourite book for the room or the nursery that the children select over and over again (The children and staff in the 2-5’s sing the words of the story to the tune of “don’t Climb out the window tonight” to the tune of ‘She be coming round the mountain, when she comes’).

Whilst enjoying books children enhance their **communication and language.** From babies vocalising as literature, children develop they see pictures, to toddlers joining in with repeated refrains and older children being able to talk for extended periods of time pictures characters and the main events of the story, books help to develop children’s communication and expand their vocabulary when **speaking.** They support language for thinking, wondering why and how things happen in stories, imagining how the characters might feel- which enriches role play and small world play. Books and Rhymes help children to become active **listeners,** tuning into and delighting in the different sounds in rhymes or individual letter sounds, and being able to sustain and enjoy listening over periods of time. Books leaflets, posters and computer programs can all give the children additional information whilst they are engaged in other experiences like finding out about the different dinosaurs they are playing with, or the different insects in the garden.

**MANAGER- CATHERINE BURTENSHAW**
Books and rhymes help children to develop their **Mathematical learning** by providing opportunities to join in with counting and number rhymes like ten little ducks, and to count as part of their enjoyment of a story (e.g. How many holes did the hungry caterpillar make in the leaves) Children learn to recognise numbers in books and identify patterns and shapes in illustrations and photographs.

Children also develop their **Understanding of the World** through books: our nursery made books help children reflect on, talk about and celebrate their earliest experiences and think about the past, the seasons their own growth and change. Books also help widen their knowledge, for example showing in pictures they are unlikely to see firsthand.

Holding books and turning pages with care helps the children’s **physical development**.

Children’s **Expressive Arts and Design** is supported because, books, rhymes, and stories enrich pretend play, and children enjoy performances by remembering and saying or singing rhymes and stories enrich pretend play, and children can enjoy performance by remembering and saying rhymes and rein acting refrains from books.
Messy Play, including real food play, and malleable materials.

UCL Day Nursery put a lot of emphasis on messy play by building plenty of opportunities for messy play into the daily provision to reflect the children's growing interest in this sort of play, providing multi-sensory experiences in a wealth of mediums, from sand and water to shaving foam and food play, with a little imagination the possibilities of mediums for messy play can be endless, – children are provided with space and time to explore, feel, taste and smell the different textures allowing plenty of time for messy play. When organising messy play for very young children, practitioners should think carefully about the sorts of materials offered and how the provision reflects children's interests. Creativity begins with the confidence to explore and enjoy the materials.

From the earliest days of infancy children need to experience different types of materials. Malleable materials can be transformed into different shapes and sizes and there consistency can be changed (e.g. by adding water or flour) playing with them provides thinking about shape, space, and area - the foundations for maths and chemistry. Malleable materials encourage the children to use all their five senses. Malleable materials can also be use by our older children to express symbolic and creative thinking.

Water is always a favourite and water play offer an ideal time for babies to explore water, so leaves time to play as well as wash. Meal times and having different type’s food play available are another opportunity for messy play, so we ensure that we allow children to explore with their hands as well as their mouths.

MANAGER- CATHERINE BURTENSHAW
A floor level tray full of jelly is a favourite with our younger children as they will explore the texture of the jelly between their fingers, toes and all over their bodies. Accessibility is important and, as with most activities, messy play for the youngest children is offer at their level on or near the floor.

Children experiencing cornflower for the first time introduces a whole new thought process. They see what appears to be a solid surface and reach in to take a handful. At first the cornflower stays solid but then it turns into a powder and falls through their fingers, causing them to rethink their understanding of materials. The look of surprise on their face as they puzzle on this new insight is a moment of cognitive disequilibrium.

Water is much easier to explore when it is in trays on the floor and offers the opportunity to explore without wobbling. As children become more independent they will start to use the taps - an endless source of fun and learning. On our water tray or in the child high sink in the play room from our toddler room onwards our children have the opportunity to use the taps. On our water tray or in the child high sink in the play room, we also leave time for the children to play with the water as well as wash their hands when they use the bathroom.

Paint can be explored with the whole body and fingers are much easier for children to manipulate than brushes. At UCL Day Nursery we provide multisensory paint experiences for the children so that they explore through all five senses e.g. finger painting, foot painting, as well as using tools e.g. paintbrushes and cotton buds. Gradually they learn to name the colours and learn how mix the different colours. Over time and lots of practise the children will be able to mix paint to the consistency they require so that they may paint, learning the names of the primary colours. Using this knowledge the child will be able to mix paint to particular shade or
tone needed for their painting. The process of painting is what matters and not the end product, so that children are not encouraged to mirror images with their painting but express themselves freely.

**Special Benefits**

At UCL Day Nursery we advocate Messy play, and the many brings benefits it brings to all children's learning. However, it has particular benefits for certain groups. It offers [children new to our setting] a way to become involved and get to know other children. As this sort of play does not rely on words, children who are in the process of acquiring English as an additional language can join in and use the materials with their peers. There is no 'right' way to play with cornflower or dough and children with special needs and disabilities are able to use these open-ended materials in their own way as part of the group. Messy and malleable play provides satisfying experiences with children with low arousal (where the child needs sensory feedback to be strong in order of the nervous system to a sense balance- so children can bang, bash, stir, scrunch, and crush between their fingers)

In contrast children who have a highly aroused nervous system (children that are easily over whelmed by sensory experiences, and need to be introduced to them slowly, perhaps with a dot of shaving foam on their finger, or a few grains of dry sand to touch at first, then introducing a little water to wet the sand slightly to change the experience with the practioner offering encouragement. Using this approach we are helping the children to limit the flow of sensory information to then combine this information, and enjoy an awakening of their senses.
Messy Play, including real food play, and malleable materials as a context for development and Learning in the EYFS.

Playing with messy play, including real food play and Malleable materials supports children’s **Personal, Social and Emotional Development** by providing them with many opportunities to explore materials, they are developing their skills in using tools and manipulating the materials and develop confidence and independence, sometimes becoming evolved for long period of time with or more often without adult support. These materials can provide a further challenge when the children seek to develop particular skills to reach an end product, e.g. moulding dough into a required shape.

Messy play, including real food play and Malleable materials supports children’s **Communication and Language** as they talk about what they are doing or the experiences they are having, the opportunity for new words to be introduced such as “gloopy, sticky, slimy, gungy. Messy play is about exploring a process and in most cases does not result in an end product. Therefore, that we find ways to record this process for the children to reflect upon their experiences and to share with others. Messy play offers opportunities for children to speak and listen, for example, when sharing resources. Children use words and/or gestures to communicate and the informal context encourages confidence. Such play provides meaningful opportunities for children to talk through activities, reflect and modify actions, negotiate plans and activities and to take turns in conversation.

Understanding the process of representation through making marks with materials, supports the children’s **Literacy** and scribing meanings to them leads to understanding the symbolic nature of written language. Messy play develops the fine motor skills needed for writing, for example, hand-eye coordination. The narrative skills necessary for storytelling are developed as children start to tell stories using materials.
Messy play, including real food play and malleable materials supports children’s **Mathematical learning**; includes counting, calculating shape, space and measure. Messy play offers meaningful opportunities for counting. For example, in sharing out resources and responding to questions such as, 'Who has more/ fewer?'

Children learn about concepts of shape, size, line and area as they sort objects and develop their interest in shape and space by playing with shapes or making arrangements with objects. They can explore spatial concepts and use everyday words to describe position.

Sequencing events and objects, for example, when creating a pattern on a piece of clay, help children to understand patterns. Children use language such as heavier or lighter to compare quantities and methods to solve practical problems.

**Messy play extends children’s Understanding of the World** through exploration, investigation, designing and making skills. Messy play encourages children's interest in the world in which they live and offers them opportunities to investigate unfamiliar materials with different textures or properties when they are given the opportunity, Children can observe, select and manipulate objects and materials and identify simple features, similarities and differences, using all of the senses as appropriate. Messy play encourages children to set their own challenges, to problem solve and find out about cause and effect.

**Physical Development** includes movement and using equipment, tools and materials. Children can develop and practise fine motor control and co-ordination through using and handling tools, objects and malleable materials safely and in a
meaningful context. They are also developing body control, poise, balance, co-ordination and control in large and small movements through messy play on a large scale, such as transporting water and sand around the garden. Children’s **Expressive Arts and Design** is supported as they ‘feel’ for different textures and materials, and by the children moulding malleable materials to make object according to their own ideas, using representations in imaginative play,(i.e. making figures and animals out of play dough and then playing with them). The children then are able to develop their ideas and plans and can think about the results of they have developed and what they might want to do differently next time.
**Sand and water play**

Sand is an adaptable material which children enjoy using their five senses to explore. In all rooms the sand areas’ are resourced with natural materials for imaginative play, as well as buckets and spades for digging and building. We offer our children the opportunity to be able to sit and wallow in the sand and use their whole bodies to explore the sensations it offers. Often being in the sand encourages children to develop small world and imaginative play, at UCL we ensure that the children’s environment is organised to encourage cohesiveness between these experiences, i.e. our indoor sand tray is positioned with the creative area, adjacent to the small world and stretch and build/construction area so that the children can move freely between the area’s combining the experiences to their own needs and plans. The children are often found building complex structures and using the sand to pretend with.

The older children can transport sand, add water to it, mix to use for their imaginative play, ‘cook’ with it, dig for hidden treasure, or pretend to be Archaeologists’ excavating for dinosaur bones. In the sand foot prints and shoe prints can be easily examined, and various mark making materials such as sticks, rollers, their fingers, and even make their own tools by putting different objects together, that can be used to experiment and make patterns with.
Water is another natural material that the children really enjoy and it supports wellbeing and all the children from the youngest babies use all their five senses to explore it. Tipping, pouring, and splashing, water over different parts of their bodies.

Children use their mathematical thinking (exploring quantities as they pour the water from one size container to another) and scientific thinking (experiencing the force of “uplift” which makes things float. Knowing that plant and animals need water to survive and finding out how materials are washed with water, for example).
Sand and water as a context for development and learning in the EYFS

Sand and water enhance children’s personal, social and emotional development by being interesting and also calming materials to play with on your own, alongside others and collaboratively. Children can explore with enjoyment and stay involved for long periods of time, with or without adult support, developing their confidence and skills.

Sand and water play also helps children’s developing communication, and language, as they vocalise, make sounds, talk about what they are doing and collaborate with others. Children will sometimes negotiate and talk ideas through. Sand and water can provide a context for pretend play (making cakes in the sand, playing with small world equipment in the sand or water, for example) enabling children to develop narratives and extend their experiences and ideas through play. Children can make marks in sand using their fingers and using tools, supporting their emergent writing.
**Heuristic play**

**Heuristic play is rooted** in young children’s natural curiosity. As babies grow, they move beyond being content to simply feel and look at objects, to wanting to find out what can be *done* with them. Toddlers have an urge to handle things: to gather, fill, empty, stack, knock down, select and manipulate in other ways. Household or kitchen utensils offer this kind of activity as every parent/carer knows, and can occupy a child for surprising stretches of time. When toddlers make an enjoyable discovery – for instance when one item fits into another, or an interesting sound is produced – they often repeat the action several times to test the result, which strengthens cognitive development as well as fine muscle control and hand/eye coordination.

In their book, *People under Three*, Elinor Goldschmied and Sonia Jackson coined the term heuristic play, to explain how to provide a more structured opportunity for this kind of activity. Heuristic play ‘consists of offering a group of children, for a defined period of time in a controlled environment, a large number of different kinds of objects and receptacles with which they play freely without adult intervention’. It is particularly useful for children in their second year who often seem unwilling to engage in any activity for more than a few minutes. According to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘heuristic’ means helping to find out or discover; proceeding by trial and error. It stems from the same root as Eureka – ‘I found it!’ Clare Crowther of Bridgwater College describes heuristic play as ‘an activity we use with one-year-olds, two-year-olds, and young threes, giving them the opportunity to experiment spontaneously with a wide range of non-commercial objects. Whilst the heuristic play session is in process, adults need to remain seated and quiet. This supports children in making their own choices and discoveries.’

**Heuristic play with objects** is not a novel idea. Consider children’s age-old fascination with mother’s sewing basket: while mum is mending, her child enjoys its contents in various
combinations – reels of thread, bits of colourful tape, scraps of yarn and cloth, a pincushion full of pins, a measuring tape, small tins of snaps to shake (or match up and hitch together), and buttons in all shapes, sizes and colours to sort and arrange. Heuristic play represents the same concept, but takes place with groups of children and large quantities of each item.

To provide for heuristic play, at UCL Day Nursery we as practitioners collect natural materials like fir cones, conkers, seashells, and pebbles, as well as ribbons, short lengths of chain, and ‘found’ objects like curtain rings, jar lids, sturdy cardboard tubes, the circles from inside sellotape, and empty cotton reels.

For the heuristic play session, a large floor area is freed for a specified period; an hour is good, allowing time for children to help pack up. One staff member makes heaps of the objects for play and distributes tins (at least three per child). It is important to provide large numbers of each item, so that children do not feel compelled to protect ‘their’ things from each other. Goldschmied and Jackson point out that it is premature to expect children to share at this age (page 132).
Heuristic Play as a context for development and Learning in the EYFS.

Heuristic play supports **personal, social and emotional development** by providing play experiences in which they can make choices and play autonomously, delighting in their carefully chosen objects with all their senses and responding with excitement and interest to new items as well as remembering and returning to familiar ones.

Heuristic play also helps children developing **communication, language and literacy** they vocalise and make sounds often using a range of communication with each other, from the youngest ages including making eye contact, using facial expression and gesture, and using the whole body expressively. However these are not forms of play for the development of conversation between adults and children, nor a context for learning naming things as the flow of language would interrupt the child’s involvement and exploration.

Children can develop their **Mathematical learning** by exploring matching (one item in each hand for example, gives a first experience of one and two) and capacity as they fill and empty different containers. The structured materials of heuristic play especially give the opportunity to experience different sizes, to find out about putting things in and taking them back out, and at the end the opportunity to sort materials as they tidy up and put everything back in the correct bags.

Children can increase their **knowledge and understanding** exploring materials and their properties with all their senses and finding out about cause and effect relationships (e.g. the noise the shinny stones make when shaken in a plastic bottle or tin)
In Heuristic play children’s **physical development** is enhanced with opportunities to develop larger and small motor skills by manipulating and exploring a range of objects large and small, developing their hand eye co-ordination to put object into tins children also use their feet to explore items too.

**Expressive Arts and Design** is enhanced as children use their senses to connect to natural materials and enjoy making sounds spontaneously.
What is Forestry School

Forestry school started in Denmark in the 1980’s as an expansion of nursery provision. The philosophy behind it is to provide young children opportunities to experience and appreciate the natural world which encourages nature conservation in later life. It is an ethos of learning that focuses on processes and allows learners time and space to develop at their own rate in a long term repetitive contact with the world throughout the year.

We will be spending time outdoors—rain, shine, snow or frost where we will explore and use natural materials, also introducing the children to real tools; such activities will have adult supervision of ratios 1:2. The children quickly learn the boundaries, both physical and social and respond to the sense of freedom once a few rules are laid down for their safety.

We will endeavour to visit Collingham Gardens once a fortnight which has a large tree filled forest section where the children will learn den building, tying knots, tree and plant identification then moving onto using tools, in between these visits we will be having forestry school workshops in UCL garden with other small groups of children so that everyone will have an experience of forestry school.

Particularly for urban London children there are few opportunities to be outdoors, Forest schools offer a way to learn in a broad and balanced curriculum in a woodland setting encouraging children to understand the beauty of the natural environment and how to care for it, for themselves and future generations.
Benefits of forestry school

Using outdoors while integrating the Early Years Foundation stage.

Confidence and self esteem by planning each session so that tasks are broken down into small achievable steps and ensuring each child has positive reassurance, encouraging a “can do attitude” and a “well done”.

Communication and social skills increase 10 fold according to studies children are also introduced to new language and learning opportunities.
Outdoor and Garden Play

For all of us there is a unique quality about being outdoors; experiencing the natural changes in light and texture throughout the year, feeling the wind, rain, snow, sleet or enjoying the warmth of the sun.

So while we offer a broad and balanced curriculum outside that covers all seven areas of New EYFS, incorporating “forestry schools” and “communication friendly spaces”, we feel that it is important to differentiate between outdoors and indoors, in doing so it does not mean that all the indoor experiences are available outdoors (or vice versa), making the most of resources and experiences that are naturally supplied to us.

We provide a range of learning opportunities outdoors at UCL for children of all ages and the environment particularly enables children to make strong progress in their physical development. Large and small scale climbing equipment that the children learn to use independently helps children develop their balance, co-ordination, stamina and strength. A large range of outside play equipment is available for the children to explore daily, imaginative play is supported in the design features of all the gardens, such as the pirate ship in the baby unit and the tree house in the older children’s garden, the areas are carefully planned hidden corners and planting for the children to explore and hide in.
For the youngest babies we provide secure spaces for crawling, toddling and exploring, a sensory garden with large rugs and basket /boxes for a senses.

We encourage the garden to be used in all weathers, so that they have the experience of standing in the rain , splashing in puddles, being out in the snow ,making snow angles and snow sculptures.

In the early stages the younger children enjoy digging and turning the soil, finding creatures and mini beasts that live in it. They explore how wet and dry soil feels and can look for stones. With the help of an adult they can pick a range of fruits and vegetables.

As they get older they learn about the changing seasons in the garden, how weather effects plant growth and the need for sun, light and water, and the life cycle of butterflies. ITC helps the children with closer observation through recording with digital photographs and Video.

MANAGER- CATHERINE BURTENSHAW
**Gardening and outdoor play as a context for development and learning for the EYFS**

**Gardening** and outdoor plays helps children’s **Personal, social and emotional development** by providing opportunities for exploring the environment with interest, finding and enjoying new features, developing new skills confidence and self esteem and sometimes involvement for long periods of time with or without adult support.

The garden provides physical challenges with the children enjoy at first with adult support, and then independently, managing a small number of rules and boundaries, gaining confidence in their own abilities and recognising risks and dangers. The garden and outdoors is also a wonderful environment to provide large scale experiences and encourage the children to work together and negotiate how to share and be appropriately assertive.

Children develop their **Mathematical development** by exploring capacity (sand and water), length for example observing the growth of a plant, counting and sharing our items, when planting seeds or harvesting fruits and vegetables giving the children opportunity to sort different shapes and textures to observe and identify. There are many different materials to enjoy putting in and out of containers.
Whilst climbing, running and crawling, children experience being in and out, over and under and develop their understanding of position language.

The outdoor environment is the best medium for developing knowledge and understanding of the world as it offer a wealth of opportunities, exploring the larger space and the number of different materials that there is to offer naturally occurring in and around the garden and outdoors, enabling the children to focus specific features or processes and observing actions and their effects. Whist outdoors children can find out and talk about the different features of living things, notice and discuss patterns and become aware of change. (both immediate e.g. what happens when you add water to sand or soil, and also over time e.g. noticing the leaves drop in the autumn and the growth and harvesting of vegetables all year round)

Outdoors, children can use tools for purpose, supporting their physical development, and learn about keeping safe whilst experiencing risks. They can make large scale movements, enjoy increasing mobility and delight in the changes of their own perspective as they walk and climb. Children experience negotiating space, making, developing and sequencing movements, and using a range of ways to move around like slithering, shuffling, rolling, crawling, jumping, running, walking, hopping, skipping, and sliding. They can change speed and direction, going backwards and forward, negotiate equipment climb up and also crawl into and around structures. Children can move to express their feelings and ideas, and to represent ideas (e.g. being a super hero or flying around like a bird or a butterfly) They can gain their skills using bats and balls, using the basket ball net. When the children
are dressing in their outdoor clothes they are using their fine motor skills and the independence when managing their own clothes. Children can use gardening tools outside, at first with very close supervision and then increasingly manage their own safety and be able to put away and take tools safely and correctly.