

What materials will increase curiosity and exploration around books to create a reading for enjoyment environment within my ASN classroom?

Sarah McVie, Class Teacher, Rowanfield School

What did you plan to do and why?

After observing my learners (p2-5 all with autism and most with or awaiting ID diagnosis) during reading activities, notably their use of the classroom story corner and engagement in adult led story time, I noticed three things:

- that many of them interacted with books in an unusual way – tearing, biting, chewing for example
- that engagement in adult led story time was low, with only half of the children engaging in a full story when read aloud
- that the story corner was more used for regulation – a cosy quiet space to rest – than to interact with books

From these observations I thought about all we had learned on this course as well as thinking back to my school's input from visiting author Allie Finlay the previous school year and planned the following:

- invest in sensory story resources for the next few planned topics
- invest in different book types (touch and feel, noisy books, textured books) as well as books from *The Indestructibles*
- observe children's interactions/engagement with the above during group sensory story time, adult led story time and free play use of the story corner, focusing on changes in interactions or length of engagement.

What has happened in your enquiry?

So far I have created three different sensory stories (*Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Zoom to the Moon* and *Jack and the Beanstalk*) all including different materials for the children to touch, taste, smell, see and hear.

I have taken order of textured books linked to current learning objectives as well as noisy books linked to interests and placed these out during workbasket time and in the story corner during free play.

I introduced books from *The Indestructibles* to the story corner and observed how the children interacted with them over time, knowing that to begin with they would try their usual behaviours at first (biting, chewing and tearing) and hoping that eventually they would interact in a different manner (turn pages, explore text and illustrations.)

My plan, for the most part, was fairly straightforward however took longer to implement for many reasons including staffing changes, addition of different activities to our timetable and the changes in weather resulting in children opting for more outdoor messy learning than time in the classroom.

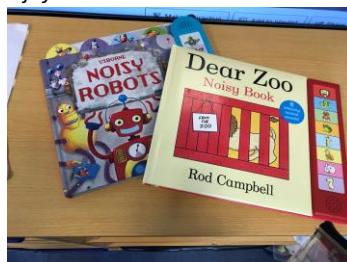
Learners were included in the enquiry through observations and engaging in planned activities. Sensory stories were stage appropriate using a variety of materials to increase engagement.

What impact has this enquiry had?

As part of my daily practice, working in ASN, I took many observations and photographs of how the learners interacted with the various new resources. I could see straight away from initial observations that they were intrigued by these. When I introduced some different sensory story resources for *Zoom to the Moon*, I was able to see that more children approached the session and after a few sessions was aware that engagement was higher with children remaining focused on the story for longer.

After reading *Bold, Clear, Sensory and Strong* (Findlay, A & Bangs, D, 2023) I adapted resources to use with the board book *Zoom to the Moon* from something for all senses to exploring different materials (throwing and catching them, feeling them, making dens with them, listening to the noises they made). I could see these changes had a positive impact on the learners who previously didn't interact with sensory story or only lasted a few minutes as they either stayed to explore all of the materials or observed peers interactions before joining themselves. One learner in particular really enjoyed exploring the emergency blankets waving them up and down or crinkling them to hear the noises they made. Having interacted minimally before, it was great to see him spend double the time on this activity.

Introducing books from *The Indestructibles* has had a hugely positive impact on my learners who are now interacting with these books in particular in a more appropriate way, learning how a book functions and exploring the illustrations and words within. At the beginning, watching them attempt to tear, bite or chew the pages made me wonder if the books would stand up to the test however watching the learners interact with them now that they know they can't tear, bite or chew the pages brings the staff great joy as they enjoy the stories within.



What are the implications and next steps?

What other resources are out there? – I plan to continue researching different types of books and introducing these to my learners to see how they interact. Having never heard of *The Indestructibles* before participating in this course to seeing the positive impact they've had on my learners, I am keen to explore any other reading materials that could have the same affect. I plan to continue exploring sensory stories using more research and information from the *My Kind of Book* and *Scottish Book Trust* websites. I plan to share my findings with other ASN teachers with similar learners and model sensory stories with colleagues in my setting, in the hope that this is something that can be done with learners of all stages within the school.

References

Scottish Book Trust (2025) *Make your own sensory story*. Available at: <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-resources/make-your-own-sensory-story> Accessed: January 2025

Finlay, A & Bangs, D. (2023) '*Bold, Clear, Sensory and Strong*.' Available at <https://mykindofbook.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MKoB-Bold-Clear-Sensory-Strong-report.pdf>

Contact Details

Sarah McVie
Class Teacher
Rowanfield School, Edinburgh

Sarah.mcvie@rowanfield.edin.sch.uk