



**eccdc**

early childhood community development centre

*Growing Together Blog*

## **Making Sense of Sensory Play in 2021**

As human beings, we are born with five basic senses: sight, taste, sound, smell and touch. As early learning professionals, we know that children in their earliest stages of life use these senses to guide their learning. Sensory exploration is a child's way of examining, discovering, categorizing, and making sense of the world, and it's beneficial to provide them with daily opportunities for sensory play. This type of learning will support and enhance their overall development as they engage in and wonder about the world around them.

As early learning professionals, we want to ensure that children are afforded the time to explore quality sensory play experiences, despite the current circumstances of our world at the moment. Following your public health recommendations for COVID-19 is of the utmost importance when setting up sensory experiences. It is also important to keep in mind that you may need to remove any items that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected including group sand/water tables, playdough, etc., however consider ways in which these experiences can be offered individually.



## **So how do we make sense of sensory play in this new normal that we're living in?**

### **Individual Sensory Bins!**

These can be made using plastic tubs that can be disinfected. Place a child's photo and name on their bin so

it's easy for them to know which bin belongs to them. If the contents in the bin are washable, they can be reused, and if not, they can be discarded or recycled when the child is finished using them.

## **Creative Arts!**

Setting up a space for children to engage with sensory materials in a creative way can support self-regulation. Consider the idea of homemade edible finger paint which can connect to all five senses. Check out this [recipe](#) and more!

## **Calming Corner!**

This is a great idea to encourage self-regulation and sensory comfort. To ensure your calming corner meets public health guidelines, consider removing cotton pillows and replacing them with vinyl or waterproof pillowcases. Also, consider other elements such as lighting and music.

## **Reflect!**

Bring in easy to clean mirrors, rope lights and flashlights for children to explore shadows and movement. Hang old cds or metallic streamers from the ceiling to catch the sunlight moving through the classroom casting colourful rainbows on different surfaces. This experience can also be paired with different kinds of music to see how the lights may dance across the room.



Photo by Anthony on [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

## **Music & Movement!**

There are many wonderful opportunities to include music and movement experiences in your sensory play. Consider engaging in yoga with the children, or for more energetic play, a game of freeze dance!

## **Outdoors!**

In a time when we are trying to stay socially distanced taking children outside can provide a whole new world of sensory play. Using your time in the outdoors will provide children a chance to expand their sensory skills. What may they be seeing? Changes in the weather? What are they smelling?

What is the smell of snow? What may they be hearing? Are there more or less animal noises? What are they feeling? How warm or cold are the loose parts? What can they taste? How does that snowflake taste on the tip of their tongue? Provoking children to use their senses and learn about the natural world around them will support their awareness of nature. Check out more activities and this [fun five senses scavenger hunt!](#) The tools available at [Ontario Children's Outdoor Charter](#) can also provide an opportunity to engage families in the importance of sensory play in the outdoors.



As we work from a strength-based focus, consider each of the children's learning styles and interests to ensure their sensory play experiences meet their individual needs. Providing materials such as fidget toys and noise-cancelling headphones are two great strategies to consider through transition times. Don't forget to connect with your Resource Consultant for more great ideas!

The ECCDC e-store and lending library offer a wide variety of resources to help you bring sensory play to life in your early

learning environment! Check out a sample of these resources below!

## E-Store Resources

### [Sensory Fill & Dump](#)



Materials to provoke young children to explore filling and dumping, sorting and sensory experiences.

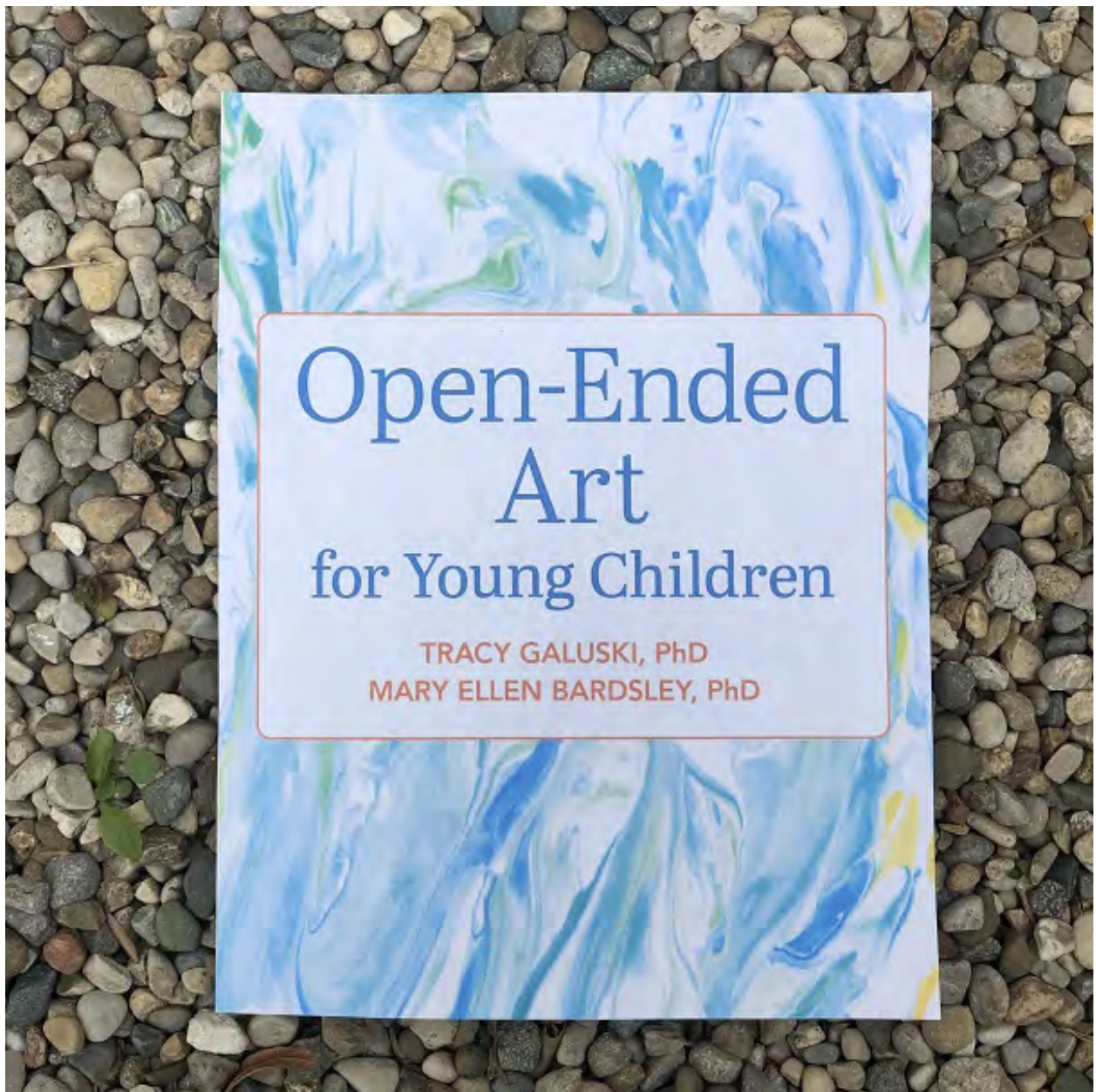
### [Supporting Children's Sensory Experiences](#)



Learning activity to support children’s sensory awareness as well as self-regulation, fine motor development, observation skills and problem-solving. This activity also encourages the concept of sorting and understanding of the natural world.

“Feel and Match Sensory Frame” includes two – frames with materials attached, 8 photo cards, 8 word cards, one canvas bag with one of each item included.

### [Open-Ended Art for Young Children](#)



Written by Tracy Galuski PhD & Mary Ellen Bardsley PhD

Open-ended art is defined as art activity where children are free to use their imagination as they explore a variety of materials without a planned outcome. When teachers embrace open-ended art, they emphasize the process of creating and observe the developmental growth being experienced by the children. Open-ended art provides children an important opportunity to think about, feel, and





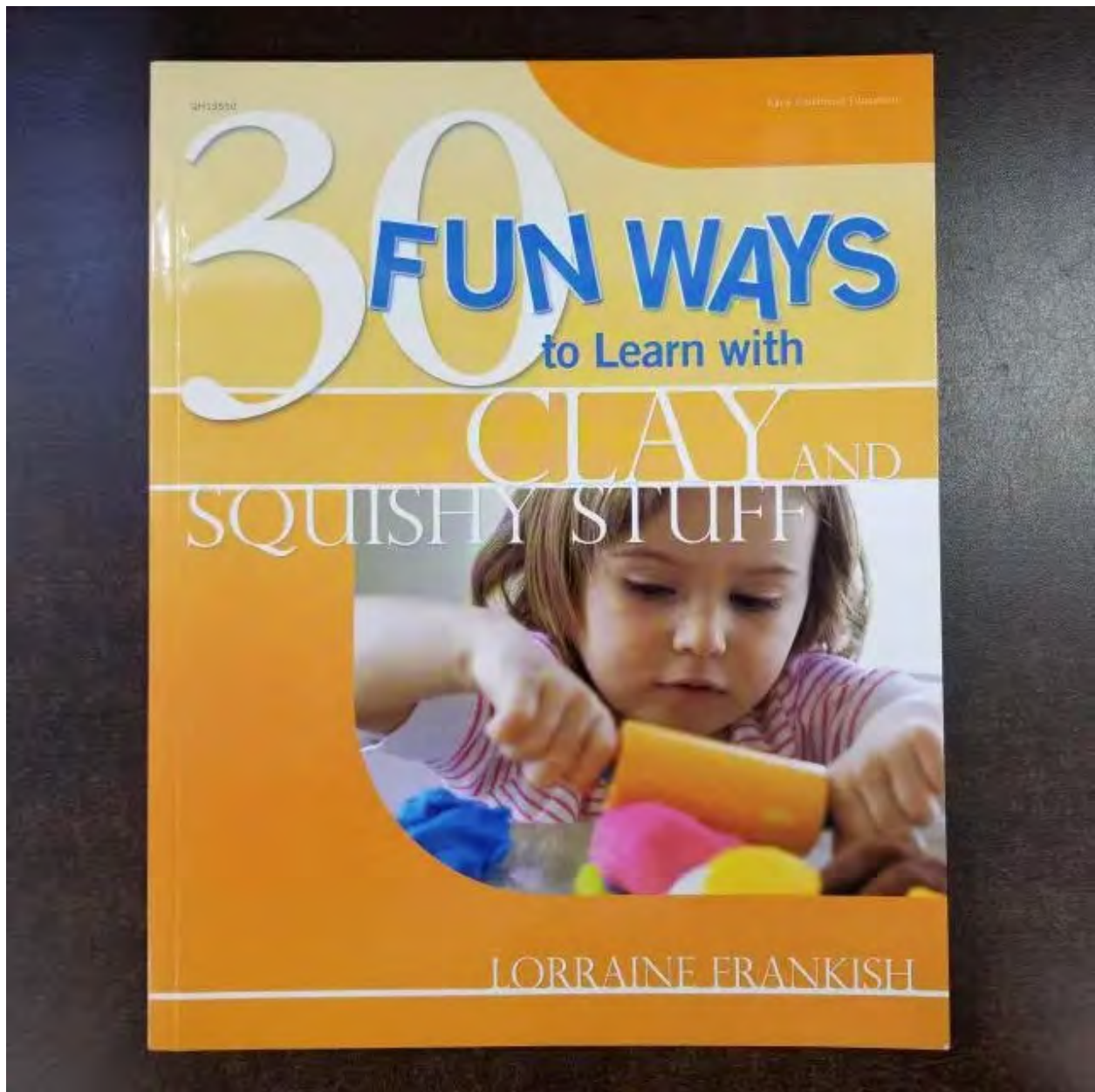
## Provocation for Learning Kit: Mud Kitchen Accessories



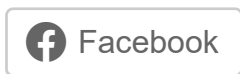
## Provocation for Learning Kit: Exploring Colour & Light



[Resource Book: 30 Fun Ways to Learn with Clay & Squishy Stuff](#)



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