



The use of light, dark, and shadow in children's play

It is important to let children explore light and shadow as it can support their developing curiosity. Children can be encouraged to ask questions about how things work by playfully exploring light. It also offers us, as enabling adults, the opportunity to introduce new, often science or mathematic-based, vocabulary, such as transparent, translucent, opaque, passage of light, dull, dark, shadow, or even refraction when light bends around something.

In this case study, Sarah Sharpe, a registered childminder, and PACEY member from the Vale of Glamorgan, shares her experiences after PACEY Cymru launched their CEY smart (Childcare and Early Years smart) training module '[Igniting children's curiosity through use of light](#)'. This case study focuses on how the training has impacted Sarah's provision and as a result the children in her care.

Tell us about yourself

I registered in 2012 and have learnt so much over the years. My pedagogy is very much child led play, nature and nurture. I have completed the Hygge in the Early Years Accreditation as it felt like the perfect route for myself and my setting. Creating a calm, homely and safe space for children to learn and grow is something I'm very proud of.

What made you focus on light and shadow play experience?

We were given a walk-through of the course as well as discussing the benefits of introducing light, dark and shadow play experiences. I decided to have a good look at the opportunities in my setting for light play.

How has accessing the information shared by PACEY impacted on your setting and practice?

Having reflected on my provision I realised that I had many more resources than I initially thought, and it made me look at what I could have out on a regular basis. I made a mobile for the garden from old CDs and bottle tops. I already had two pieces of driftwood suspended from the ceiling with fairy lights that I hang baubles, feathers, cinnamon sticks or pinecones on throughout the year. The babies who spend a lot of time on the floor can look up and enjoy it as it stimulates their senses.

I now use the dark den under the tuff tray a lot more and the torches, light up balls and glow sticks are always a favourite for inside. When the sun comes out, I often model the play to show the younger children that the colour shape blocks make pretty colour reflections on the floor and furniture, I love watching the children's expressions when they suddenly see the rainbow colours reflecting from the CDs onto walls and sometimes themselves. Although I realised, I had the resources and offered the play experiences, following the discussions and information shared I am now much more aware of the benefits and invitations to play that I offer in relation to exploring light and shadow. As a result, I now observe the play and plan for development and progression.

How has this benefitted the children in your care?

Last week one little girl tried to 'catch' her shadow, and I could see she had no idea why she couldn't touch it. I copied her and tried catching my shadow and although the little girl doesn't communicate through words, we connected, and our laughter was contagious as the other two children couldn't help but join in, and I'm sure we were heard by many of our neighbours. This gave me the opportunity to share in her joy and time for us to explore the wonder of shadows.

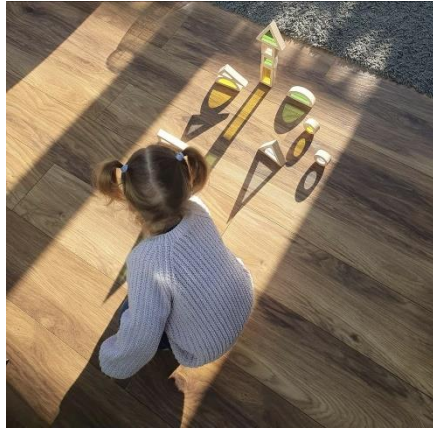
Introducing more light play has benefitted the children as I have noticed their focus skills develop. Each and every child is fascinated by light in some way, and they often return to their play time and time again. They take time to process what they are seeing and, by doing so, they are learning to problem solve and think logically as well as develop their understanding of shape, size and dimension.

We love to spend time outdoors; the local woods have some of the best reflections and shadows. Being out in the woods also allows the children to explore and negotiate obstacles. We enjoy stretching tall, crouching low and often we jump like bunnies and watch each other's shadows. Children love to explore the different movements they can make with their bodies, which supports and challenges their increasing physical capabilities. Puddles and leaves also make wonderful reflections and shadows and we can often be found sat around a puddle for extended periods of time, which allows the children to further explore and deepen their understanding of light, in an unhurried way. Through the rainbow reflections one of the children has started taking an interest in colours and is beginning to remember them and use them during song time. The child is excited when we sing 'Dyma Lliwiau'r Enfys' and 'I can sing a rainbow'. This reinforces the child's understanding of the different colours and that there are two words for each colour, a Welsh and English word. By doing this it has also allowed the child to enhance her Welsh language skills in a fun and interactive manner.

Light play is a sensory experience which enables children to express their feelings and emotions which in turn supports their well-being. The soft mood lighting can have a relaxing and calming effect helping children to regulate their feelings and emotions. This is all considered when I'm setting up invitations to play and planning for each child's interests. The children enjoy this area when they need to download, slow down or even to sleep and rest. The subtle lighting helps that sense of calm and there's often a visual change in the children's demeanour when they use this area.

Do you have any top tips or suggestions for peers thinking about introducing light and shadow play?

I would really recommend looking at how you can add light/dark/shadow play into the day-to-day playful learning opportunities you offer the children in your care as it can be quite magical. It doesn't have to be expensive; it can be very simple and as easy as painting on a mirror, doing hand puppets on a wall, putting fairy lights on the ceiling or watching tree shadows moving on the ground. Take a look around you, I imagine there are lots of resources that can be utilised into light play of some kind. Think about the cause and effect and what invitations to play you offer. Observe, analyse, review and revisit the experiences, and allow children time to explore, to investigate, and share in the magic with you.



Signposts

- CEY smart: [Igniting children's curiosity through use of light](#)
- [Managing sensory input](#)
- [Inspiring Environments | PACEY](#)