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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The "Why" Behind Classroom Behaviors, PreK-5*, by Jamie Chaves and Ashley Taylor.

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Supportive Diagram

A sensory nook is a safe space where students can go in order to calm down before engaging in the learning process. When a student is more regulated, she will be better able to take in information and access higher cognitive skills. It is important to include calming activities for a variety of the sensory systems, such as pillows, stress balls, noise-cancelling headphones, and picture books.

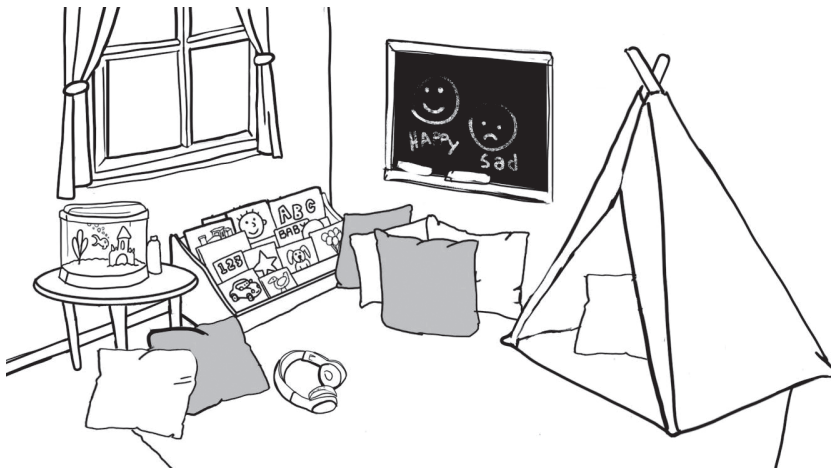


Image Source: Created by Hunt Dougherty

- When a student becomes withdrawn, has difficulty communicating, puts her head down on the desk, or begins to isolate herself
- The student specifically requests to use the space

Strategy 3: Use Multisensory Learning Experiences

By bringing different sensory elements into everyday classroom lessons and activities, you can not only enhance your students' integration of sensory input but also enhance your students' learning experiences. All students learn differently, and we need to embrace that fact. *Classroom instruction tends to favor auditory and visual inputs, yet tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive inputs are just as important*

for making new neurological connections. These multisensory learning experiences will also help with the “top-to-bottom” or vertical integration of the brain that we discussed in the Chapter 1. This vertical integration allows our emotions, sensory experiences, motor actions, and cognitive functions to all work together, strengthening each area and allowing for more complex thinking. You can get creative in how you weave sensory activities into your classroom curriculum, and you may be using many of these currently. Here are a few examples to get you started or to help you build on what you’re already doing:

Math:

- Play hopscotch when adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing numbers and have students record their answers on a sheet of paper.
- Roll dice to do multiplication tables, squares, greater than/less than, adding numbers, subtracting numbers.
- Use dominoes to do greater than/less than, adding numbers, subtracting numbers, multiplying numbers, and dividing numbers.
- In pairs, roll a ball back and forth or use a zoom ball to complete multiplication tables.
- Use fun tactile manipulatives as counters, such as mini porcupine balls, cotton balls, pasta shapes, or stickers.
- Use dot art markers for counting, adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing.
- Create “math facts” songs or poems—you can do this individually as a teacher, in small groups, or as a whole classroom.
- Do math facts while playing clapping games.
- Put math flashcards in a bin of rice, sand, beans, or dried pasta, and then have each student draw out a flashcard and give the answer (you can do this as a whole classroom or in small groups with different tactile bins and have students rotate).
- Trace math facts “in the air” with your finger.
- In small groups, have students complete math facts with their bodies (e.g., one student makes his body into the number 1, one student makes her body into a plus sign, one student makes her body into the number 2, one student makes his body into an equal sign, and one student makes his body into the number 3).

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- Explore the classroom to find different shapes and/or examples of symmetry.
- Play math bowling: put a number on the bottom of each bowling pin and have students roll a ball to knock down the pins. The small group can work together to solve the math problem (e.g., add all the numbers, subtract all the numbers).

Reading:

- Listen to an audiobook while following along in a written book.
- Have the student stand up when reading aloud in class.
- Have the student hold something tactile (stuffed animal, stress ball, fidget toy) when it is his turn to read.
- Sit or stand in different places in the room during silent reading.
- Play classical music in the background during silent reading.
- Stomp, clap, or tap along to word syllables.
- Pair each sight word with a movement.
- Play reading bowling: put a sight word or vocabulary word on the bottom of each bowling pin and have students roll a ball to knock down the pins. The small group can work together to read the words and/or define the words..

Spelling and Writing:

- Sit or stand in different places in the room.
- Draw a picture to go along with what you wrote.
- Use thought bubbles, idea charts, and graphic organizers.
- Break up into groups and act out journal responses, essay outlines, and narrative ideas.
- Use different pencil colors for different drafts of writings or different writing assignments.
- Use individual dry erase boards with dry erase crayons (or individual chalkboards with chalk).
- Trace letters or spell out words “in the air” using a finger.
- Do “yoga writing” by making different letters with your body.
- Do spelling activities with magnetic letters.
- Find and cut out spelling words from magazines—then glue them onto paper to make them into a sentence.

- In pairs, roll a ball back and forth or use a zoom ball to spell out different words.

NOTE: The Learning Without Tears¹⁷ curriculum has a variety of multisensory activities that can be integrated into writing and spelling activities.

Social Studies and History:

- Create maps and map keys using different craft materials, such as yarn, tissue paper, glitter (every teacher's favorite!), sequins, and pom poms.
- Bring in compasses and have groups of students follow a set of compass directions to reach an end goal/prize.
- Encourage students to reference a globe when talking about geography.
- Show pictures and play sounds from different geographic regions.
- Have each student cut out an individual state and work as a class to create a map of the United States.
- Use "dress up" as a way to have students emulate famous people in history.
- Act out important stories in history after reading about them.
- Put important dates or events on flashcards and have students place them in order or match them up.

These are just a few strategies to get you thinking about using sensory input in your classrooms. The activities above are ways to enhance learning experiences and facilitate a more integrated, regulated brain for all of your students. Including just one multisensory learning opportunity per class period will do wonders for your students! In the next chapter, we will explore sensory preferences and sensory processing differences in more depth, as well as provide you with more specific classroom sensory accommodations.

Interactive Scenario

Read each scenario and consider the behavior each student is demonstrating. Based on the strategies listed above, think about how to support the student's sensory need within the classroom in order to facilitate more regulated, engaged learning.

(Continued)

