



The 'Find the Eggs' tuff tray aids infants' grasp development as they sift through shredded paper to pick up plastic eggs

# TUFF LOVE

## SENSORY PLAY SUPPORTS AND ENRICHES LEARNERS' DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD.

Children investigate the world around them through using their senses. To enhance the sensory play experience for them, Agape Little Uni. @ Upper Serangoon introduced a versatile learning tool: tuff trays.

These are large, shallow trays that can be filled with a variety of materials and objects to encourage hands-on exploration, experimentation and discovery. "Used effectively, tuff trays allow children to lead and explore without predetermined expectations of how activities must unfold. They also make excellent conversation starters," says English Mentor Teacher Ms Samantha Ho.

By observing children as they engage in the activities, teachers are able to better understand the diverse learning needs and personalities in their classroom. "This is especially pertinent for children who are

developing their language skills, as it helps us facilitate their learning appropriately and provide the right support," adds Chinese Senior Teacher Ms Li Liying.

### ONE TRAY, MULTIPLE BENEFITS

Teachers customised the tuff trays and used them to:

#### ➔ Integrate learning domains.

Different materials were selected to achieve different learning objectives for each age group. For instance, for infants, a 'Water Babies' tuff tray had water-absorbing beads to enhance sensory perception and eye-hand coordination. The 'Soapy Suds' activity for N1 children comprised different types of loofahs and sponges to exercise their fine motor skills, while they learned about cause and effect by mixing soap and water to produce foam and bubbles. The kindergarten group's 'Ocean Animals' tuff tray, which contained marine animal figurines, pebbles, shells and other materials, allowed them to explore natural habitats and ecosystems.

#### ➔ Inculcate good values.

Reminding children to treat materials gently so that their friends can use them afterwards

reinforced values of care and consideration. Getting children to assist in the clean-up process taught them about responsibility.

➔ **Promote language and thinking.** Through small group play, children practised their communication, teamwork, reasoning and problem-solving skills.

➔ **Encourage creativity and curiosity.** As tuff tray activities were open-ended, they supported child-directed play, innovative thinking and experimentation.

### TRAY PLAY AT HOME

Not only do tuff trays cater to a variety of themes and topics, but they are also easy to recreate at home. The centre conducted a parent workshop, followed by a take-home activity where parents were encouraged to create their own tuff trays and play together with their children. They were also provided with written guides and resource packs.

Mr Yeo Hwee Kian was among the workshop attendees. With his son Ashton, 4, they set up a beach-themed tuff tray containing sand, pasta shells and toy animals. "Ashton used his hands or small shovels to dig and bury items, create mini sandcastles, and explore the textures and shapes of the objects," says Mr Yeo. "The activity had a noticeable impact on his fine motor skills, imaginative play, and language and communication skills." ●



A tuff tray filled with soil gets children thinking about how best to grow plants from seeds

**GET A GRANT** Agape Little Uni. @ Upper Serangoon tapped on the ECDA Innovation Projects Grant for this project. Visit [go.gov.sg/cpd-innovation-grant](https://go.gov.sg/cpd-innovation-grant) or scan here to find out more.

