

## **Preparation of an Experience Tray - A Unique Variation on Experience Books**

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Creating an experience book for a very unique individual challenged me in many exciting ways.

The student I support is six years old. He is inquisitive, happy, and very strong willed. He has severe mobility issues but can now walk with support of furniture and “a hand”. He is completely blind in one eye, with a 20/360 acuity in the other eye combined with marked field visual field reduction, and has a profound hearing loss.

Developmentally, my student needs as much relevant experience, exposure and encouragement as possible along with the chance to explore and gather information from every opportunity. This is why I decided to make the experience tray.

I realized immediately that at this stage of my student’s development he does not willingly pick up or carry items in which he has no interest or comprehension. He will not even tolerate them on his tray. The whole premise was not to create frustration, but rather encouraging familiarization and tolerance of what are to date “scary” tactile experiences. I decided to make a very concrete, tactile route plan leading from the outside classroom door to the swings.

### **A Trip to the Swings**

Last summer my student loved to visit the swings, enjoying the vestibular and sensory input. However, he did not like walking on the gravel or touching the stones with his hands. He reacted the same way to the grass and refused to touch shrubs or low hanging branches when they came near his wheelchair.

The tray was designed to sit on the counter next to the outside door. Before going outside he is encouraged to touch, play with, look at and become familiar with pavement, growing grass, heather for the shrub, a tree branch to represent the tree trunk we pass by, wood, pea gravel, his object cue for the swings (a piece of metal chain). In time, with lots of repetition, I hope this tray will help the whole trip of going to the swings to become meaningful and familiar as begins to internalize the landmarks on his route to the swings. My second goal is to increase his tolerance and ultimately his enjoyment of the plants, earth, sand and rocks as well the swing.

## My Walk to the Swings - An Experience Tray



The first object cue on the left symbolizes "outdoors". The one on the right is piece of metal chain for the swings. Note the plain background for the tray, making it easier for the student to use his vision.



This is a living experience book. The heather and the grass are planted and watered regularly - a great job for the student!



The landmarks on the route are represented by the paving stones, a small heather bush, the branch for the tree trunk.



The trip continues through the grass, over the wooden edging into the pea gravel to the swings.

A favourite toy is used to encourage the student to reach and touch the grass or the gravel when he grabs it.

It's working! This is a great example of starting with the familiar and using it as a starting point to expand the student's experiences.

### **Stages of Involvement:**

1. Placing the tray at a comfortable visual level for my student will hopefully encourage him to investigate on his way outside. I hope to also involve one of his classmates to explore the sections of the tray together. Perhaps if his peer models touching the different items, my student will join in too.
2. I have placed his favourite toy, a small zebra, on different sections to encourage him to reach out and touch. His favourite zebra just might be hiding in the grass tempting him to reach, touch and be pleasantly surprised!
3. Once outside I draw his attention to the same objects, pavement, trunk, grass plants etc. that are in his experience tray and encourage him to touch. I encourage his peers to be involved here as well.
4. The next step will be to have him bring back items to match the things in his tray, grass to grass, gravel to gravel, etc.
5. Once my student has become comfortable with the 3D experience we will create a 2D experience book of the same landmarks. He loves to look through peepholes at things, so we will create a book with pages that he can look through. The grass etc. that he brings back from his journey to the swings can be enclosed in plastic and placed between two pieces of heavy paper that have a hole in the middle allowing the light to pass through. My student can safely touch and explore the items from all angles. We will also glue a small portion of the item onto the page so when he's ready he can touch it.