

THE TEN SENSORY ARCHETYPES

Ten recurring objects and experiences across human material culture and in the lives of people with Profound & Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

What are they?

The personal archives of people with PMLD often contain descriptions, images, and videos documenting interactions or showing moments of engagement, communication, and connection in response to sensory stimuli.

These sensory stimuli can be classified broadly into ten recurring categories known as the Ten Sensory Archetypes. These are not the senses themselves, but recurring patterns of sensory experience that cut across and combine them.

The interactions of people with PMLD within these categories can be tracked over time, both within structured sessions and spontaneously in everyday life, building a richer picture of their personal sensory archives.

This means we can trace a life, for example, through lights, fabrics, or bubbles.

What is Sensory Heritage?

How can you belong to history and leave a trace if you are a sensory communicator who does not use speech, symbols, or a wide range of signs to share experiences?

Sensory Heritage is a multi-faceted approach to embedding history and heritage for people who are primarily sensory communicators. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Sensory stories and experiences centred on an individual's personal sensory archive in relation to the Ten Sensory Archetypes, as a way of co-creating 'oral history' with and for people with PMLD.

- A focus on primary sources to gather sensory testimonies that can be translated into shareable sensory interpretation and used to decolonise sensory practice.

- Create sensory access bags, packs, and kits using the Ten Sensory Archetypes, specifically for people with PMLD.

- Use the Ten Sensory Archetypes to adapt and develop sensory activities, ensuring people with PMLD can choose to engage.



To address absence

Responding to the lack of self-authored 'voices' of people with PMLD in the archive by working through everyone's first language: the sensory.

To locate presence across time

Situating people with PMLD within material culture across the aeons. The archetypes recur across cultures, from early hominids to the present day, revealing a shared human language of embodied experience, play, and affirming our common personhood and first language.

To enable everyday inclusion in heritage

- Supporting heritage places to build simple, everyday access and inclusion for people with PMLD.
- Engagement with the archetypes creates opportunities for people with PMLD to contribute to their personal digital archives as part of daily experience, not specialist provision.

This includes seasonal and event-based programming, which is widely used to attract families but are rarely designed with people with PMLD in mind.

- Use the **More Than A Nice Walk Workbook** to explore how the Ten Sensory Archetypes, alongside low-cost, sustainable tools, can support everyday access for people with PMLD in heritage places and spaces.
- Use the Ten Sensory Archetypes to create handling collections, sensory interpretation, and sensory activities for people with PMLD. These playful opportunities may also be of interest to Early Years audiences, families, and people with dementia.

Why do the Sensory Archetypes matter?

How can I use them?

 **Lights**
torches | candles | glow

 **Mirrors**
reflection | self | looking up

 **Fabrics**
texture | motion | scene setting

 **Water**
mist | spray | splash

 **Bubbles**
float | pop | anticipation

 **Tactiles**
loose materials | toys

 **Soundmakers**
music | instruments | vibration

 **Smells**
scented items | memory

 **Tastes**
edible items | flavoured lip balm

 **Movement**
sway | spin | airflow