

The value of treasure baskets

Treasure baskets are designed to offer play opportunities for babies and infants, providing them with natural, household and recycled items to explore and discover. A treasure basket encourages exploration through the infant's senses and assists them to make sense of their everyday environment. The purpose of the treasure basket collection is to offer interest through:

- Touch – texture, shape and weight
- Smell – variety of scents
- Taste – different taste sensations
- Sounds – ringing and banging
- Sight – colour, form, length and shininess

The objects selected for the treasure baskets may also be mouthed by the baby. Mouthing is part of a healthy child's natural development.

Treasure baskets encourage the infant to:

- Value and enjoy the variety and beauty of the natural world.
- Develop aesthetic awareness.
- Be soothed through tactile playing.
- Be alert to sound, visual images and touch.
- Experience different textures, shapes and sizes.
- Explore through sensory experiences.
- Discover and concentrate.
- Make decisions.
- Practice and refine fine motor control and hand-eye coordination.
- Move, communicate and verbalise through simple materials.
- Make choices and develop preferences.
- Interact with other infants.

Treasure baskets can be set up in any environment. Below are some suggestions for introducing treasure baskets.

- Clean an area in a comfortable room and provide plenty of space for the infants to explore. Keep the play area clean and tidy.
- Place 40-50 items in a treasure basket, ideally one basket per child. Items are specifically chosen to offer rich sensory experiences.
- Select items that are washable, wipe-able or able to be soaked. This needs to be done on a regular basis.
- Place the baskets within reach of the infant, allowing them to reach the objects easily.
- Some infants may need time to 'warm up' and familiarise themselves with the basket and then begin exploring.

- A limited period should be selected and reserved as this is a time of immense concentration and learning for infants.
- The adults are essentially facilitators and may remain quiet, attentive and observant. Adults are there to provide emotional safety for the child. This is a great opportunity for the adults to observe the children's concentration and decision making.
- Change the items around for each play session, to create new interest.
- Clean equipment when necessary and should any of the items be broken or damaged, remove immediately and replace.

The value of heuristic play

Heuristic play, or discovery play, refers to the way children personally select and handle objects in order to construct their own meaning. In practice, this means offering young children a large range of objects and containers in a controlled safe environment where they can play freely and make their own discoveries.

Heuristic play is child-initiated - children make their own choices and decide for themselves how and what they want to play with. This type of child-initiated play builds confidence as children feel they are being trusted to investigate on their own. Child-initiated learning can be seen as the foundation steps to creative and imaginative thinking.

There is a natural progression from exploring the treasure baskets to discovering heuristic play. Play goes from '**what is this object like?**' to '**what can I do with this?**'. Heuristic play is very open-ended as there is no right or wrong and there is always more than one way of exploring.

Heuristic play encourages an infant to:

- Develop focus and concentration.
- Develop theories for making sense of the physical world.
- Experience cause and effect.
- Make scientific and mathematical discoveries e.g. light/heavy.
- Develop problem solving and decision-making skills.
- Develop a sense of control of their environment.
- Take on new challenges.
- Discover spatial concepts – in/out, through.
- Develop perception, space, form, size, patterns and colours.
- Have fun exploring and playing with objects.
- Identify differences and similarities between objects.
- Stack, tip, load, dump, bang, jiggle, tap, rattle objects.
- Select, group, sort, match, push and pull objects.

Heuristic play can be set up in any environment. Here are some suggestions for introducing heuristic play.

- Clean an area in a comfortable room and provide plenty of space for the child to move around the objects freely. Keep the play area clean and tidy.
- Set out a collection of items. Items are chosen to encourage discovery and are presented in multiples for exploration of concepts for e.g. posting, stacking, sorting, matching.
- Some infants may need time to 'warm up' and familiarise themselves with the items and then begin exploring.
- A limited period should be selected and reserved as this is a time of immense concentration and learning for children.
- The adults are essentially facilitators and may remain quiet, attentive and observant. This is a great opportunity for the adults to observe the children's concentration and decision making.
- From time to time throughout the Heuristic play session, you can quietly reorganize the objects so they always look inviting.
- Change the items around for each play session, to create new interest.
- Clean equipment when necessary and should any of the items be broken or damaged, remove immediately and replace.

Questions to reflect on

- Does your baby love playing with keys, pots, pans, and other items outside and inside the house?
- How do you think you think you can set up treasure baskets and heuristic play at home?