Treasures for twos

Although the Treasure Basket of Elinor Goldschmied's¹ creation was intended for babies, we now recognise their value and appeal for older children. If you have not offered a Treasure Basket to two year olds before, or have had limited success, why not give one of **Sue Gascoyne**'s suggestions a go?

The Wonder Years

When children reach the age of two, their bodies and minds are primed, ready for satisfying exploration and play. For the child in a Montessori setting their sensory needs will be actively nurtured through a diet of sensory-rich activities designed to break learning into small chunks and lay firm foundations for lifelong learning. But for some children, free play with sensory-rich, open-ended, resources can provide satisfying opportunities for exploration and play as well as casting a lens on developmental interests and milestones.

Offering a Treasure Basket for Free Play

The treasures in a carefully crafted Treasure Basket should be high quality and picked for their sensorial appeal, play potential and 'wow factor'. Although key to the success of any Treasure Basket, for two year olds - with their mobility and inclination to 'vote with their feet' this is essential for capturing and maintaining interest. Toddlers may pick up objects and move around, often mistaken for a lack of focus, but closer observation reveals a considered process of trial and error investigation, like the child spotting similar objects in different baskets, or searching for items that fit into a particular container. Although the communication benefits of Treasure Baskets may not be readily apparent, exploration gives meaning to words, supports fine motor and tracking skills and sparks conversations.

Offering a Themed Basket

Many settings provide themed baskets of objects such as shiny, noisy, seasonal or bathroom collections. Whilst these undoubtedly offer interest and play potential, they should not be confused with a Treasure Basket – a collection of objects picked for their variety and differentness. Key to the success of a themed basket is its relevance and interest. Many children have a preference for metal objects, perhaps because of their shininess, noise potential or thermic properties. For one child on the autistic spectrum practitioners made a collection of metal objects to fuel his special interest. For others it can be a tool for inspiring rich language.

If you are considering making a themed collection, first offer a Treasure Basket and observe play. If the theme is out of sync with a child's interests, it can result in lacklustre exploration and play. Like the 17 month old that emptied a themed basket of Christmas decorations by throwing them one at a time, yet played with focus with a Treasure Basket, manipulating and exploring objects.

Offering a Treasure Basket with other Open-ended Play Resources

Given sand or water and a range of natural and household objects, children will focus intently, problem solving, developing thinking and creativity and becoming agents of their own play and learning. Stage 2 of the Sensory Play Continuum² was inspired by observations of what children naturally choose to do combining objects with other media. As well as exploring concepts like volume and testing capabilities and ideas, it generates hugely creative play as the combination of open-ended objects and media like sand, water, dried rice or

couscous, offers a high degree of play affordance without any hint of a right or wrong way of playing.
As this snapshot shows, it can also produce some surprising

language results.

¹ Goldschmied, E., and Jackson, S. (1994) People Under Three (reprinted 2004)

² Gascoyne, S. (2012) Treasure Baskets and Beyond – Realizing the Potential of Sensory-Rich Play.

Sue Gascoyne is an educational consultant, trainer, author and the founder of Play to Z Ltd, specialist providers of award-winning Sensory Play resources. On Thursday 9 May 2013 she will be holding a practical course titled Bringing the Curriculum Alive with Sensory-rich Play showing how practitioners can use low or no-cost sensory-rich resources to support the three prime areas and four specific areas of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS. The course costs £135 per day per delegate (plus VAT), including lunch, refreshments, training handouts and a training certificate. For more details and to apply ring 01206 796722 or email sue@playtoz.co.uk.