

Toy library
and treasure
baskets loan
service

Wellholme Park Children's Centre, Calderdale used some external funding from Halifax Bank of Scotland (HBOS) in 2005 to set up a toy library to support learning through play at home. This has developed to include not just commercial toys and games, but also books and treasure baskets.



A catalogue of all the equipment available has been compiled and this, along with an explanatory display, provides the children and their families with a simple way of choosing a toy.

Parents sign a contract and receive a card to record the items borrowed and the return date. The library is open and accessible to parents at any time and all members of staff take an interest in helping parents make their selections.

Sometimes a suggestion is made to a parent to take an item or book from the library that their child has shown a particular interest in during the week, thereby extending the learning directly into the child's home.

In some cases, practitioners from other services inform the Centre that a family would benefit from having more toys, equipment or books at home. Centre staff give more encouragement to these families to use the loan service.

Treasure baskets are used regularly in the setting with babies and young children. These baskets are filled with a selection of natural or

everyday objects such as fir cones, large pebbles, sponges, wooden and metal utensils, ribbon, whisks, balls and so on.

Open-ended play provided by treasure baskets can sustain children's attention and thinking for much longer than a commercial toy that may only have one purpose.

However, the team had noted that some parents were unimpressed at the sight of the baskets of what they perceived as 'junk' and sometimes negative comments were made.

There was clearly a need to share the educational aims of the baskets with families.

The team decided that it would help families to appreciate the experiences and learning that very young children can get from treasure baskets if they were encouraged to give them a try at home.

Some example baskets were put together and loaned to parents as part of the regular toy library service.



A simple leaflet was prepared to accompany the baskets, giving examples of objects that could go into a treasure basket and information on how a child's senses would be used as they explored, for example:

Touch	Smell	Sight	Sound
texture	intensity	colour	scrunching
shape	nice	shininess	ringing
weight	smells like...	size	banging

The response has been very positive. Loaning out the treasure baskets has changed some parents' views and enabled them to see that baskets of everyday objects are a great way of engaging young children in learning using all their senses.

Parents have come to appreciate more that babies and young children learn by testing everything they encounter in everyday life.

Some parents have even created their own treasure baskets at home.

One parent put together a treasure basket for her 11-month-old baby. She collected different brushes from around her house, an idea she had picked up from nursery. She was astonished at how long her baby spent playing with and exploring the basket. This really helps to illustrate to parents how important it is to take time to observe babies and young children at play, to notice what interests and engages them and fully appreciate how children learn.

The toy library process, with its regular exchange of observations, has helped staff open up a wider discussion with parents about the value of real, hands-on experience and play. Knowledge has been shared with parents about how talking to young babies and children as they explore and play is an essential part of the learning process. It's helped parents to see that learning doesn't just happen when there is an 'end product' of some kind to take home at the end of the day.

The development of the toy library and treasure basket service has helped practitioners to gain more confidence in communicating with parents, sharing learning objectives and exchanging ideas. It has also enhanced parent-practitioner relationships.

The plan for the future is to develop the toy library to include sessions where all the equipment is available for a combined play and loan session.

You can read more about treasure baskets at: Roberts, A and Featherstone, S (2002) *The Little Book of Treasure Baskets*. Featherstone Education Ltd. and Hughes A M (2006) *Developing Play for the Under Threes: The Treasure Basket and Heuristic Play*. David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

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