

Organising for Play: Resources

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Engagement, listening and attention (Oral Language)
- Engagement (Reading and Writing)
- Motivation and choice (Reading and Writing)
- Comprehension (Reading)

Introduction



Providing the resources for play is a large part of the teacher's contribution to the quality of the children's play. The purpose of this Support Material is to

provide some information about the practicalities of resourcing **open-ended, child-led play**. Many of the resources described here can be used for teaching and learning throughout the school day. This can be a very effective way of linking the children's play to subject-specific lessons. Having five play areas means you only have to provide enough of each resource for one group, but it's important that there is plenty for that group.

This Support Material needs to be read in conjunction with the related short podcasts. It is a companion piece to the Support Material, *Organising for Play: Time and Routines*. The two pieces of Support Material and their related podcasts, reflect the principles of, and practice guidelines in *Aistear*.

Open-ended Resources for Play



Every child needs the opportunity to talk about his/her play, to be heard and, in turn, to be the listener so that another child can be heard.

The play areas are generally a combination of sand, water, socio-dramatic, small-world, junk art, playdough, and construction. While these are not the only options, the key thing is that the resources are **open-ended**.

While some resources are free (e.g., junk art, shoe-boxes), some need a bit of investment by schools. The suggestions here strike a balance between buying and gathering. Parents can be an important support in gathering resources.

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Sand/Water



Sand and water trays need to be deep enough to have roughly 7-8 cm depth of either resource without it spilling out constantly. Dust-pans and brushes for sand and old towels on the floor for mopping up water spills, help the children maintain the area. Keep resources for sand small and in proportion to the size of the sand-tray, e.g., buckets and spades are fine for the beach but of little use in a sand-tray.

Junk art



Junk art connects particularly well with science, especially with the skill of designing and making. It provides a context for the science strand unit, *Properties and characteristics of materials*. Additionally, it provides considerable scope for self-generated and therefore real problem-solving, and promotes fine motor skills and concentration. The junk can contribute to children's recognition of 3-D shapes in the environment, and provide a way of talking about recycling and other environmental issues. Above all else, it is a space for the children's creativity.

Construction



As an example of how careful planning can enhance the learning potential of the resources, shoe-boxes (as described in the podcast) can be arranged Russian-doll fashion in threes, with the sets picture-coded. Sorting the boxes into the sets supports the children's ability to sequence objects. This kind of planning also enhances the language potential of play, particularly during the tidy-up. Shoe-boxes and other construction resources connect explicitly with the *Construction* strand of the Visual Arts Curriculum.

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Playdough



Playdough is easy to make and versatile. However, some children can find it difficult to get started. Teacher modelling can be very important when the playdough is first introduced. Don't tell the children what to do, just do it yourself and talk about your ideas. Playdough can support learning in visual arts through the strand units associated with clay.

PVC table-mats/cloth will keep the table clean. Position the table on the wet area or other uncarpeted area, add pasta shapes, straws, bottle caps, beads, pegs and other accessories and see what happens!

Small-world

Imaginative small-world play is often incorporated with construction resources which combine well with little dinosaurs, reptiles, insects, people, farm machinery, construction machinery, furniture and so on. It is through careful planning of the provision of these small-world items that the teacher can connect with the children's interests and any integrated topic which he/she is using for curriculum planning.



Socio-dramatic Play



Scenarios for socio-dramatic play should be, as far as possible, chosen in consultation with the children. What you can provide may be limited at first while you build a bank of resources, and these limitations can be part of the planning conversations with the children. See the Support Material, *Using Socio-Dramatic Play to Support Oral Language and Early Literacy*.

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Literacy and Numeracy Resource Table



While environmental print and other print resources can be included at each play area, a dedicated literacy and numeracy table is a very worthwhile inclusion. This table of resources is not a play area of itself, but the resources are available to all the children during the play session. It can include sand-timers, magnifying glasses, giant measuring tapes, weighing scales of various types, sets of measuring spoons, metre-sticks, flexible rulers, post-it pads and other small notebooks, novelty

pens and pencils, markers, coloured paper, envelopes, chinks and lots more. The principle here is that the children use literacy and numeracy for their own reasons, giving them ownership and making literacy and numeracy meaningful for them.

Organising Space



The best place for play to happen is in the children's classroom as part of their everyday school experience. The classroom can look very crowded as the children spread their play across the floor and over the table tops, and make connections between the play

areas. This represents a real culture change in our infant classrooms and will take time to get used to. The children's ability to tidy-up independently and effectively is very important. Equally important are the discussions between teacher and children about how to manage the space available. Research has shown that children are very capable of coming up with solutions where space is a problem (Broadhead, 2004).

Children rarely feel a space is too small for play. They will make use of whatever space is made available.

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Conclusion

As noted in the Support Material, *Organising for Play: Time and Resources*, ... *adults cannot plan children's play, but can plan for children's play* ... (Wood, 2013, p.68). The resources described, along with the linked podcasts, are intended to guide the teacher in choosing appropriate resources for **child-directed play**. These open-ended play resources help teachers support children *to be creative and adventurous, to develop working theories about their world, and to make decisions about themselves as learners* (NCCA, 2009, p.6).

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References

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