

Full of possibility

Open-ended resources allow children to explore their imaginations. *Marianne Sargent* gives the lowdown on some flexible resources

Part of our remit as early years practitioners is to supply children with interesting resources within an appealing environment that will foster creativity and imaginative play.

Manufacturers and educational suppliers are responding to the demands of the EYFS by producing an ever-increasing range of flexible, open-ended resources that can accompany children wherever their imaginations take them.

Below is a selection of some resources that fit the bill.

IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Every early years setting will have the usual small-world sets such as the pirate ship and farmyard and role-play boxes packed with scene-setting equipment to create houses and shops.

Given the opportunity, children will spend a great deal of time engaged in imaginative play scenarios. However, their storylines are often far from conventional and their scenes are constructed from more than what is in the provided kit.

Children will often introduce what appear to be random items and objects from the surrounding learning environment. Observe them and watch to see what they are using in their imaginative play, then add to the possibilities by providing a range of interesting alternatives to enhance their play.

Suggested resources

- Yellow Door supplies a range of wooden Natural Stacking Resources that are designed to encourage children to design and create their own small-world settings. These include a Natural

Below: Yellow Door's Emotional Stones

Next page: TTS's Potion Bottles; Yellow Door's Sensory Play Animals; and Educational Supplies' Perception Spheres

Stacking House and Natural Stacking Tunnel, as well as sets of wooden shapes that represent Water, Rainbow, Fire and Earth. Each is priced £20.

- Cosy offers natural resources that have multiple uses, including Glow In The Dark Rocks (£6.49 for a pack of 30), wooden Story Telling Discs featuring random images (£28.99 for a pack of 30), Blank People that allow children to draw or stick faces on (£15.99 for a pack of four larger people), and plain wooden Chunky Houses (£10.49 for a set of four).
- Mindstretchers supplies a Bodysuit made from hard-wearing polyester fabric (£26.67). The suit has no features, enabling the child to become any character they wish. It comes in two colours, red and blue, and is translucent to the wearer, who can pull it over their head to cover their face yet still see everything around them.
- TTS offers a choice of clear or coloured plastic Potion Bottles (£19.99) that children can fill with anything they choose while taking on roles such as chemist, wizard or cook.
- Fine Solutions provides robust natural Teak Bowls that have a variety of uses both indoors and outside (£35.95 each).
- Hope Education supplies a 3 in 1 Wooden Rocking Boat that serves as an open-ended role-play resource with multiple uses including a bridge, boat, counter or divider (£164.99).
- The Consortium Early Years has a range of Natural Wooden Vehicles (£22.99), a Natural Wooden Tractor (£14.29) and a Large Natural Wooden Dump Truck (£29.99), all devoid of cosmetic detail and suitably adaptable to a range of storylines.
- Find a wide range of open-ended small-world scenery from Early Excellence including sets of Wooden Walls (£17), Wooden Arches (£28), Town Houses (£37), Wooden Steps and Bridges (£18), a Tall Tower (£19) and Small Tower (£19). Also, a set of 12 featureless Wooden People (£10).

EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

When shopping for open-ended resources, try to see past aesthetics and weigh up the potential play possibilities. Can the resources be used in





a multitude of ways? Can you think of any children in your setting that they might appeal to?

Consider buying sensory resources that enable children to explore shape, form, colour, texture and space, but can also be used to invent games and learning activities. Look for objects that are made from natural materials in plain colours so that they lend themselves more easily to a range of different purposes.

Suggested resources

- Yellow Door offers a tactile set of eight stone Sensory Play Animals including a bear, owl, bird, whale, fish, elephant, mouse and rabbit (£15) and a Dinosaur Bones Discovery Set containing 12 chunky plain white bones in different sizes (£15). Both can be bought as part of a First Discoveries Kit that also contains a collection of stones (£40). Use these resources for sorting and language activities, as well as storytelling, small-world and role play.
- Also find a set of Emotion Stones from Yellow Door (£20), each featuring a different facial expression. These stones are great for activities that relate to recognising emotions, can be carried outside to prompt independent discussion and will also appeal to SEN children.
- TTS supplies a Roll It Collection of eight wooden cylinders and 12 balls (£64.95), Duck Treasure Nest with 20 eggs of different sizes (£39.95), and set of 14 colourful Liquid Timers in different shapes

and sizes (£47.95). All of these resources can be used in maths and language activities, in role play and to play games.

- Eduzone provides a 38-piece pack of Rainbow Design Blocks that come in 12 different colours, four shapes and many sizes (£47.50). These have uses for art and design as well as maths.
- Reflections on Learning supplies a set of Clever Circles – wooden rings that can be used for matching and sorting games as well as to create settings for small-world play (£59.99).
- Asco Educational Supplies offers a set of eight brightly coloured transparent Perception Spheres (£39.99) that children can look through to see the world in a different light. These can also be used with treasure baskets and light boxes.
- Also, Cost Cutters supplies a set of five different sized Sparkle Cylinders (£69.95). These are made of poplar wood and have different-coloured shiny acrylic inserts. Children can nest, roll, fill and play games with them.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Give young children some games equipment and they will rarely use it for what it was intended. Children are very talented at making up their own games with often complicated rules that have many exceptions.

Source interesting and unusual games equipment and physical activity resources that children can use to make their games even more interest-

MORE INFORMATION

- Asco Educational Supplies, www.ascoeducational.co.uk
- Cost Cutters, www.costcuttersuk.com
- Cosy, www.cosydirect.com
- Early Excellence, <http://earlyexcellence.com>
- Eduzone, www.eduzone.co.uk
- Fine Solutions, www.finesolutions.co.uk
- Hope Education, www.hope-education.co.uk
- Mindstretchers, www.mindstretchers.co.uk
- Reflections on Learning, www.reflectionslearning.co.uk
- SenseToys, www.sensetoys.com
- The Consortium Early Years, www.earlyyears.co.uk
- TTS, www.tts-group.co.uk
- Yellow Door, www.yellow-door.net

ing and imaginative. Avoid placing restrictions on what they can carry between the indoors and outside by ensuring you buy durable resources.

Suggested resources

- Mindstretchers provides a great range of strangely shaped balls made of natural rubber in a variety of colours. These include a Bubble Ball, Torpedo, Crazy Ball and Bobble Ball (£5 each).
- SenseToys offers a Colour Storm Ball (£6.65) and a Smiley Cluster Ball (£2.49).
- Fine Solutions supplies a Bilibo, which resembles a tortoise shell and can be used to experiment with balance, movement and imaginative play (£22.95 each or five for £99.95).
- Eduzone provides a 42-piece Rainbow Play Pack that contains all kinds of equipment including cloth frisbees, ribbon wands, bean bags, furry balls, dice, ankle skips and ribbon rings, ideal for making up a variety of games (£68.95).
- Early Excellence supplies a Set of Dice for outdoor games with numbers up to six, 12 and 20 (£35). These would be a great addition to the play pack above, opening up even more game-changing possibilities.
- In addition, find a set of 14 Funky Farm Feet from Cosy (£44.95). These natural wooden discs have farm animal footprints burnt onto them and children can use them to create trails, play matching games and enhance imaginative play. ■