

Sticking points

Collage experiences not only benefit children's fine motor development – they also provide a medium for children to represent their experiences and thinking, explains *Nicole Weinstein*

Matisse is one of the best-known artists to use the collage technique in his paper cutouts. This satisfying and exciting way to work involves assembling different materials on a chosen surface to create a new whole. Although the word collage originates from the French word *coller*, 'to glue', it is not necessary to fix the materials down with glue.

Early years and creative arts consultant Anni McTavish says, 'Collage in the true sense, linked to visual arts, involves gluing materials or objects onto a surface – this can be flat or 3D. Children may also create moveable or no-glue types of collage using collections of materials. And there's a whole other area under digital media – for example, programmes like iTunes Pic-Collage, where images can be assembled into digital collages.'

PRACTITIONERS' ROLE

There is no right or wrong way to make a collage. Creating a traditional collage involves selecting materials, tearing, cutting, sticking and lots of discussion. Practitioners can model

the skills needed to tear the paper, use the scissors, spread the glue and arrange and rearrange the objects on a chosen surface and stick them down. They can then encourage the children to talk about the different textures and materials, introducing vocabulary such as 'shiny', 'bumpy', 'rough', 'smooth' or 'silky'.

Early years consultant Linda Thornton says, 'Children love to spend time looking through available resources for collage – attractive boxes of small, light items alongside fabrics and papers inspire children to concentrate on finding the most suitable resources for their purpose. Practitioners should encourage children to spend time sorting, placing and arranging their resources before introducing glue. How to glue large pieces of paper or fabric can be a problem for young children, and practitioners should introduce and discuss gluing skills when a problem arises.'

According to Ms McTavish, there are many skills involved in creating collages. 'First, finding out and exploring different materials, which could be anything from torn pieces of paper or pictures from magazines to feathers, bottle tops, foil and, of course, a won-



'Children love to spend time looking through available resources for collage'

derful variety of natural objects such as acorns, leaves or grasses. Then there's the glue.'

This, she says, may be familiar PVA white glue or home-made paste – simply cook one cup of cornflour with four cups of water and stir until it bubbles and thickens, or mix plain white flour with warm water until it has a smooth batter-like consistency.

'Some children really enjoy explor-



At Pastures Way Nursery School in Luton, Bedfordshire, children are involved in collage activities every day. Deputy head teacher Emma Pobjoy says, 'Collage takes on many different forms – sticking and gluing pictures, transient art outside on a large scale, and heuristic play,

CASE STUDY: PASTURES WAY NURSERY SCHOOL

favoured by the babies. We provide children with a variety of resources, including natural materials and loose parts – things such as cogs, bottle tops and drinking straws.

'For us, we want the children to be the creators of their own collage, choosing what materials they access and how they use them. For this to happen we try to ensure everything is easily accessible so the children can self-select. This helps to encourage real independence and also allows children to create their own

representations without being led by the practitioners.

'In order to spark the children's curiosity and imagination, we often leave provocations in the collage or transient art areas. This could be a famous painting, a photo or an artefact, but it acts as a starting point for the children's work. The role of the practitioner is that of facilitator; they are there not to guide the children but instead to ask opened-ended questions that result in sustained shared thinking about the creations.

This helps the child become reflective about their work and develop what they are doing.

'It is important to remember collage is about the process, not the product. It is during the process that the real learning happens. We see the children using so many skills, fine motor, storytelling, imagination, turn-taking, mathematical – and of course it is a great way to address the Characteristics of Effective Learning.'

● <http://pastureswaynursery.com>

ing the properties of glue, and this is an important stage,' Ms McTavish adds. 'I'm sure it's a familiar sight to see children who have been investigating glue, carefully and with great attention, peeling it off their fingers. Home-made pastes can be a helpful option if you have children in the glue-exploring stage, as it offers a similar yet different material, but will also save on expensive PVA glue supplies. It's important that children are able to take the time to do this, rather than being rushed to create a piece of art.'

Paint, mud or clay can also act as 'glue' for different materials. Colourful tissue paper added to wet paint creates multi-layered and multi-coloured effects. Mud can be used either on a flat surface or upright on trees with petals, sticks or leaves pushed into the surface. And clay can be rolled flat with tiny sticks, shells or found objects stuck onto it.

CORE PROVISION

Collage activities can be provided as an integral part of the total art offer, indoors and out, to create permanent and transient collages. If space is limited, collage can be introduced as a focused activity, then made available as a choice for a short period. The environment can be developed so there are opportunities for children to:

- store and label objects for use in collage
- create collections of natural and made objects – for example, by theme or colour
- self-select objects and tools such as scissors, glue and spreaders, and surfaces such as paper, card or wood
- explore or tear paper of different strengths and textures, to cut plain



CASE STUDY: ACTON PLAYGROUP, SUFFOLK

Children at Acton Playgroup have designed a Springtime display that represents their ideas and interpretations of the season, through the medium of collage.

Lead practitioner Kim Farley says, 'Following the children's interest in the bug hotel and the changes taking place in the garden with the arrival of spring, we decided to base our display around this theme. We provided a wall as a blank canvas with three colours of paper attached – blue for sky, green for grass and brown for earth. The children talked about what they would like to see on it – trees with their leaves growing back; colourful flowers; snails; worms; birds; butterflies; and grass.'

'We provided a range of materials: scrunched-up

tissue paper, transparent paper, foil, felt, off-cuts of materials, papers of different textures – for example, corrugated paper, for tearing and sticking; and feathers, pens and paints. Over time we worked in small groups, indoors and out, to complete the display.

'Children had the opportunity to add to the display when they were inspired to do so. One day, a little boy had the idea to paint worms onto it, and using a twig as a paintbrush and mud mixed with water, he "painted" the wriggly worms. The display is full of different textures and materials and it has created lots of discussion, not to mention the fine motor skills that they have used.'



'The most important thing is to make the experience relevant to the children's current interests and to let them express their ideas in a way that is unique to them, regardless of whether or not those ideas are conventional.'

and patterned paper, fabric and yarn, and to stick ready-cut paper or fabric

- sort collage materials such as buttons, ribbon, scraps of fabric and old playing cards into plastic tubs (label the tubs and store for later)
- collect and sort natural materials such as fallen cones and twigs, stones and rocks on large pieces of paper or mirrored surfaces (they could also work on a large scale, placing hoops on the ground and arranging found objects and small-world toys inside to create patterns)
- use digital media programmes, such as iTunes PicCollage, to assemble images to create digital collages. Log on at <http://apple.co/1QYjcoH> or try <https://www.befunky.com/features/collagemaker>. Windows Photo Gallery also has an option to make simple collages from downloaded photos. You can organise the photos and then get the programme to 'auto collage'.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Paper** Translucent Paper – Various designs, £3.50 for ten sheets; and Picture Paper Nature, £5.60 for 40 sheets, both from www.wesco-shop.co.uk.
- **Scissors** Scissor Rack and 32



MORE INFORMATION

- Anni McTavish (2016) *Expressive Arts and Design in the Early Years: Supporting young children's creativity through art, design, music, dance and imaginative play*. Routledge



- scissors, £16.99, www.reflectionslearning.co.uk; Springy Scissors Block, £19.99 and Success with Scissors Kit, £38.95, both from www.tts-group.co.uk.
- **Surfaces** Large Messy Mats, 5pk, £8.99, www.reflectionslearning.co.uk; Giant Board, 4pk, £9.75, from www.cosydirect.com.
- **Materials** Bag of corks, £2.29; Moss Troll Stones, 12pk, £5.95; Gold River Rocks, 1kg, £2.85 – all from www.cosydirect.com. Transient Art Resource Collection, £145, from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk; Glass Pebbles, from £3.99 and Gemstones, 800g, £7.99 – both available from www.reflectionslearning.co.uk.
- **Craft materials** Assorted Craft Feathers, £6.99; Assorted Coloured Woodchippings, £2.99; Bucket of Beads, £9.99; Collage Craft Compendium, £29.95; Giant Collage Starter Pack, £29.95 – all from www.tts-group.co.uk.
- **Storage** Collage Storage Collection, £29, and Transient Art Storage Collection, £95, both from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk. Wicker Fraction Baskets, 5pk, £54.95; Polyrattan Rectangular Fruit Baskets, 6pk, £12.99; and Natural Artefacts Tray, £45 (pictured) – from Cosy Direct. ■