

Get weaving

Working with textiles is both educational and playful. *Nicole Weinstein* offers some useful tips

Children are in daily contact with textiles: their clothes, the curtains and carpets in their homes, the tea towels that they use to wipe the dishes, the pet blanket that their dog sleeps on. So, it is important to give children an understanding and appreciation of all things woven or knitted.

'The fabulously tactile nature of textiles means that they promote discussion and creativity, while maintaining a familiarity that most children find comforting,' says Richard Ashworth of the Society of Dyers and Colourists (SDC), a Bradford-based educational charity that supports schools and nurseries in introducing children to colour and textiles.

WHAT ARE TEXTILES?

Textiles can be used to describe a wide variety of materials, both natural and synthetic, that have been woven or have fibres bound mechanically, by hand or naturally. Textile-based activities – working with materials such as wool, cotton, string, felt, ribbon and faux fur – are ideal for developing experiential learning and giving scope for artistic expression.

Mr Ashworth says, 'Simple activities like paper-strip weaving [see below] form the basis for initial textiles work, and more complicated ones such as chromatography – or unmixing colours, as we call it for early years – start to develop those important investigative approaches to science and technology.'

PRACTITIONER ROLE

To develop children's awareness of textiles, try the following:

- Provide a range of fabrics for investigation, both natural and synthetic, such as items that children are wearing and fabrics made of wool, felt, ribbon, etc.
- Invite children to look at materials in a range of products, such as chairs, carpets and curtaining, and discuss the different properties.
- Encourage children to compare fabrics. Which of their clothes do



they like the feel of? Which feel less comfortable?

- Take apart pieces of fabric (woven or knitted). This is always a fascinating activity. Deconstructing items enables children to think about how those things were made and, let's face it, who doesn't enjoy unravelling a knitted jumper?
- Explore the origins of textiles such as linen (from flax), cotton (from the plant) and wool (from animals such as sheep, goats and alpacas). Show videos of sheep-shearing or visit a city or real farm to see sheep being shorn.
- Teach children about the significance of their industrial heritage, particularly in areas such as West Yorkshire – which

Above: children from Glasgow Clyde College's Children Centre. Below left: Teachable Touchables; below right: Wesco Maxi Pack. Top right: Cosy Wicker Wheels

was once the heartland of Britain's textiles industry.

- Explore the colour, pattern and materials in textiles from other places such as India, Japan, Cambodia, America and Europe.
- Outdoors, take part in natural dyeing and weaving with found materials. Collect berries, leaves and flowers. Place them inside some plain cotton fabric and, on a hard surface such as a piece of board, pound them with a stone to crush the colour onto the cloth. Add hot water to the crushed berries mixed, pour the mixture through a tea strainer, then soak





the fabric in the resulting dye. Weaving activities can be done using grasses, adding leaves and flower petals into the weave to create designs.

LANGUAGE OF TEXTILES

According to the SDC, it is important that practitioners teach children the language associated with colour and textiles. Mr Ashworth says, 'One thing we find when working with children is a lack of clarity in their vocabulary when discussing colour and textiles. This may stem from a lack of knowledge on the part of some teachers and practitioners.'

He adds, 'The four- to eight-year-olds of today are the textile designers, colourists, knitters and artists, painters and weavers of 2030 and beyond. Therefore teaching them about wool, hue, value, chroma and the emotion of design, colour and textiles is a wonderful investment for the future.'

As a starting point, practitioners can begin to use words such as 'fibre' (the basic material such as wool or cotton from the plant), 'yarn' or 'thread' (made by spinning the fibres together) and 'fabric' or 'cloth' (made

from the yarn by weaving or knitting, or from the fibres by felting) to help children to begin to understand that cloth is a manufactured or made material and clothes are, in turn, made from cloth.

Words to describe colour include:

- 'hue' – the basic colour (red, blue)
- 'chroma' (or 'saturation') – describes how intense the colour is
- 'value' (or 'lightness') – refers to depth of colour and is lightened or darkened by adding white or black
- 'chromatography' – the process of separating out a mixture of original colours.

PAPER WEAVING

Introduce children to the weaving process with paper weaving:

- Cut different-coloured sheets of paper into strips 2cm wide.
- Glue or tape the strips at right angles onto one strip.
- Take a new strip and go OVER and UNDER the strips.
- With the next strip go UNDER and OVER the strips.
- Keep going until you reach the end of the strips.
- Glue or tape the last strip in place. (see www.malcolmtheweaver.com)

USEFUL RESOURCES

- The SDC recommends three resources for introducing young children to textiles: Malcolm the Weaver books (see panel); knitting dollies; and small hand looms. 'Neither the knitting dollies nor the



MORE INFORMATION

- Society of Dyers and Colourists, www.sdc.org.uk
- *Weaver of a Life in Colour* and *The Rainbow that Mixed Colours*, £12.99 each, by Malcolm Campbell. Published by SDC, available from www.malcolmtheweaver.com. Mr Campbell was inspired to write the stories after appearing on the CBeebies TV programme *My Story* with his twins Aidan and Zoe. To watch the programme, visit: http://youtu.be/_E9uOeJ7jCk
- Textiles, Part 7 of our art in the early years series, at www.nurseryworld.co.uk/art-in-the-early-years

hand looms are essential though,' explains Mr Ashworth. 'Discussing the feel and textures of fabrics and clothes, and becoming aware of the wider uses of fabrics, are key at this early stage.' Try the Prym Knitting Dolly, £4.50 from www.hobbycraft.co.uk; and the Hand Loom Class Kit (12 pack), £59.95 from www.tts-group.co.uk.

- Weaving can take place around a tree, on a twig, on a fence, on a trellis panel, in a hoop, around a CD... the list is endless. Cosy Direct provides lots of options: try the Wicker Wheels, £13.79; the Indoor Wicker Hideout, £249; or the Weaving Teepee, £175, which all provide an attractive display inside or out once the weaving has taken place. Offer children a range of ribbons: the Natural Ribbons (five pack), £12.49; the Skinny Weaving Ribbon, £9.99 (six pack); or Cheap Hessian Border Roll (two pack), £11.49 – at www.cosydirect.com.
- Children will build their understanding of how textiles are used and develop the vocabulary they need to express the characteristics of different textiles through resources such as Teachable Touchables, £16.99 or Matching Patches, £19.99 – both from www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk. Also available is the World Fabrics Value Box, £149 – www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk/world-fabrics-value-box.html
- Provide a range of fabric items for investigation and for making craft activities. Try the Maxi Pack of Crafting Activities, £9.50; Veined Leaves, £4.30; and Feathers, £1 – from www.wesco-eshop.co.uk ■

CASE STUDY: MALCOLM THE WEAVER

Malcolm Campbell, better known as Malcolm the Weaver, a weaver by trade, has been visiting nurseries and primary schools across Scotland giving readings and talks about his book, *Weaver of a Life in Colour*, published by SDC.

The book tells his story of growing up on the Isle of Lewis, becoming a weaver and learning 'the magic of the loom', spinning yarns, telling stories and 'weaving dreams'.

Children from Glasgow Clyde College's Children

Centre recently got the chance to listen to his story and take part in a hands-on weaving activity at the college's textile studio (pictured on previous page). Mr Campbell, who has been a weaver for 45 years, says, 'I want to encourage children away from computers by getting them interested in textiles and art from a young age. When I present the books to the children, it's just magical. By the end of it, they want to be artists and designers – and often

their favourite colour changes.'

On another visit to New Park Primary School in Harrogate, the children were inspired to create their own tartan using the school's blue, red and yellow colours with teachers at the school.

Sam Williams and Jan Cliff, two of the teachers at the school, said the children were interested in how wool was dyed in the past using fruit, so they initially went on a walk to identify plants that they could use. They then tried weaving

with paper and on looms, focusing in particular on choosing colours to either blend or contrast. Within science, the children have explored and investigated the properties of different materials, linking them to weaving by sorting and choosing material that can be used to weave and finding out why.

