

Early Years Play Activities

Simple Sorting

(Based on 'Nonverbal Thinking, Communication, Imitation and Play Skills with some Things to Remember' Kerry Hogan)

1. The first thing that a child learns in this area is to coordinate visual skills with motor skills. In its simplest form this is the ability to look at an object, reach for it, and grab it. Once a child can hold an object s/he will learn to manipulate then in more complex ways such as putting objects into certain places that make sense visually. This skill can be developed, in part, by highlighting the area or container in which you want your child to place each object. For example when there is only one hole at the top of a container, it is easy for a child to see where to put the object. Some children will learn to take objects out of containers before they begin to place objects in containers.



2. Next a child will learn to differentiate some objects from others. This is the first step in learning to sort. One of the most successful ways to teach this skill is to create a sorting task that eliminates the possibility of making mistakes ie *errorless learning*. For example, you might make a container with a narrow opening for placing cards and a square opening for placing blocks. Neither object will be able to fit in the other objects opening, so it will be very clear that some objects are different from others and belong in different places.



3. Next s/he can learn to sort two objects into containers that are similar. For example, your child might learn to put spoons and balls into 2 containers, one for spoons and one for balls.. It is easier to learn this task if you use obviously different objects and transparent containers so that the child can see the objects that go into the container each time. Your child will also find it easier to sort if the objects in each category are identical (e.g. metal tea spoons and yellow tennis balls).



4. Another type of sorting that is learned fairly early on is the ability to sort by concrete features such as colour and shape. Start by using objects rather than pictures and by using similar objects with just the colour being different eg yellow and red buttons to sort.



5. Puzzles are also a sorting task. Puzzles are like the error free sorting task described in (2) because each piece can only fit into one place. The easiest puzzles are inset puzzles where the pieces fit into the right shaped hole. These puzzles can be made easier by having the same picture on the puzzle piece, in the corresponding hole. Young children usually begin with puzzles that have big pieces and handles to help hold and turn them.



The Purpose of Sorting

- 1) Sorting is an appealing activity to children who are predominantly visual learners. It is meaningful and easy to master.
- 2) Where a child is struggling to develop verbal language, seeing the differences between objects rather than listening to the labels, is a more successful way of learning.
- 3) Once a child has learnt to visually sort objects and pictures, they will then start to pay more attention to the verbal labels. Children will then attempt to learn more difficult concepts through sorting i.e. size, texture, number and letter sound.