



Creative corners

A bit of imagination is all you need to transform your setting into something else entirely, says **Wendy Bowkett...**

When I first started work as a nursery teacher way back in the early 70s, play corners were usually a 'Wendy house', well furnished with a kitchen and perhaps a bedroom. Occasionally this little area would become a shop, when parents had been asked to bring in empty grocery boxes and such like. I felt very daring when, working in a special school, I started to change all that. Many of the children were physically disabled and unable to hold a cup, let alone make tea or wash up. Our play corners had to be 'hands on' for the adults and my imagination went into overdrive.

One winter's afternoon, we had a snow storm... and got into serious trouble for our efforts. After several weeks of saving all the white polystyrene shapes used to protect items sent in the post, we had a washing machine box full to the brim with 'snow'. We placed a white sheet of 'snow' on one of the large soft mats in the middle of the room, dressed in scarves and mittens, and began our snowy day experience. Each severely disabled child had turns to lay on the snow while the rest of the group threw handfuls of poly-shapes up in the air to land around and over the chuckling children on the mat.

Snowballs and snowmen were out of the question but the children thoroughly enjoyed the snowstorm without getting wet or cold. Little did we realise, however, how much static electricity would play a part in our game... The shapes stuck to

everything, everyone and everywhere. It took myself and two team-mates over an hour to pick up all the bits at the end of the day, and we were forbidden to do it again! I had to wait until I was 'in charge' before I could repeat the exercise, and I did - several times!

Play corners can be very inventive. Autumn brings fallen leaves, conkers, pine cones and colour. Most children love 'swishing' through crackly leaves and collecting debris from trees for an interest table. Take it one step further and have a 'park' in your setting. Prepare a cardboard or similar base and cover it with dried leaves, etc. Have story time there; knowing there will be lots of distractions and noises whenever children move adds to the atmosphere of the 'Dark, Dark Wood' story.

These areas can reflect the topic being covered within the nursery, but often seeing or hearing a child playing can spark off ideas. A colleague watched a child tip

up a trike and scratch her head, looking puzzled. Cheryl went over to check the situation only to be told that the trike needed a garage as there was some trouble with the steering. Our very own garage with reception desk and plenty of work was in action by the next session. Mechanics mended Matchbox vehicles, Little Tikes cars and Playmobil motorbikes, all with plastic spanners and screwdrivers. Real metal tools were available to use, but only under close adult supervision. The 'receptionist' sat chatting on the phone, booking in jobs and sorting out payments - a hive of activity.

A child arriving at preschool with a bandaged soft toy dog sparked off a veterinary surgery and hospital. Sam's own dog had jumped over a wall onto rubble, been badly injured and had stayed overnight at the vet's after an operation. On returning home bandaged, hobbling and needing TLC, Sam decided his toy dog would help him tell all the gory details!

Whenever a 'new' corner was prepared, a colleague would spend a great deal of time within the area to help show children how the 'job' was done. Children without pets, for example, would not necessarily have experienced the appointment system, heard about fleas or even injections. Perhaps their family had no car, so garages were not on the agenda. They might never have experienced a holiday in Britain, let alone abroad, so a travel agents, airport or even a bus or train journey might have been an alien world to them.

Finally, one quick-and-easy-to-prepare play corner is a bus: two rows of chairs with an aisle between and a driver in front, and you're on your way! Off to Blackpool, singing 'The Wheels on the Bus' with newly added verses can last the whole journey. Add conductors, crowing chickens and crying babies, and the idea can last for days!



about the author

Wendy Bowkett has worked in early years settings for over 30 years, and ran her own private day nursery for 15 years. As well as contributing to *Teach Nursery*, she has written a number of books for those working with 0-5-year-olds.