

Treasured possessions

Individual treasure boxes provide an ideal way to develop children's personal, social and emotional learning, say *Stuart Hall* and *Carole Gibbons* from Tanglewood Nursery School

Each of the children in our classroom has their own 'treasure box', in which to store items that are precious to them. It is an idea that we developed two years ago and has now been adopted throughout the nursery, as it is so beneficial to children's personal, social and emotional development.

When introducing the idea, we emphasised that their individual box was a special place, just for them and just for the items special to them. We explained that they could add to their boxes throughout their time at nursery and take it home when they left to start school.

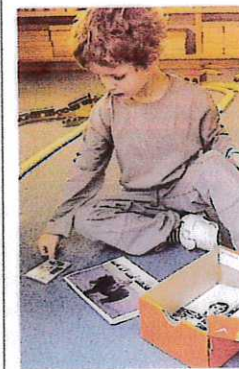
Parents were happy to help collect interesting boxes, and we cleared some shelf space to create a dedicated area where the children could keep their boxes and access them easily. We made the area cosy and appealing with cushions to encourage the children to be calm and focused. We supported each child when they chose and labelled their box, and encouraged them to decorate it to develop a sense of ownership.

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Gradually, the boxes began to fill up with items from nursery or home. Some were everyday objects; others were much more unusual. Among the items that were added were: ✓ family photographs ✓ holiday photographs ✓ collecting cards ✓ favourite toys ✓ Christmas decorations ✓ a candle from their birthday cake ✓ a snail's shell from the nursery garden ✓ sea-shells from nursery trips ✓ sharks teeth ✓ scans of 'the baby in Mum's tummy' ✓ a ticket from the zoo ✓ a postcard from Granny's holiday ✓ a ticket from the cinema.



Children play with the treasures from their boxes and share them with others



As the treasure boxes became a familiar feature of classroom life, we noted how the children embrace the idea. They love to revisit their boxes and the memories they contain.

The children can look in their boxes any time during the session. Sometimes they like to sit quietly and look through their special things on their own. Sometimes they like to show their treasures to adults or their friends in the class. This leads to lots of language and communication about their experiences and memories.

It is wonderful to see a child show-

ing a newcomer to the class the contents of their box, and sharing their memories about the various items. The new children are quick to understand the concept and enthusiastically choose which box they want to become their special place.

Many visitors to our setting have commented on the treasure boxes and how they enhance all the areas of learning. Other educators have adopted the idea and taken it back to their settings.

BENEFITS

We have seen how the boxes:

- provide the children with a sense of ownership of the classroom in general and their special space within it
- help demonstrate that each child is valued
- boost the children's confidence and self-esteem
- provide a useful way to celebrate a particularly impressive piece of work. The children feel immensely proud when we say, 'I think you should put it in your treasure box'.
- help the children learn respect. Our initial concerns that the children might open other children's boxes or leave their own box open on the floor proved unfounded. The children take pride in looking after their own box, and with a little support, have learned to respect other children's boxes.

When the children leave Tanglewood, we ask them to remember their time at the school each time they look at their 'treasures', and to keep adding special things. ■

Stuart Hall is a teacher and Carole Gibbons is a nursery nurse at Tanglewood Nursery School in Chelmsford, Essex