Recommended Reading


THE GOWER SCHOOL

Heuristic Play

www.thegowerschool.co.uk
What is Heuristic Play?
The word ‘heuristic’ comes from the Greek ‘Eureka’ meaning discovery, and so the purpose of Heuristic Play is to find out and discover proceeding by trial and error. ‘Heuristic Play’ describes the activity of a baby or toddler when they play with an array of everyday objects. As babies develop, they have a natural growing curiosity to explore items and see what can be done with them. Heuristic Play consists of providing children with a large number of varied objects and receptacles with which they are able to explore freely for as long as they desire. It is a natural stem on from Treasure Baskets and was developed by a team of child experts.

Examples of items that can be used in Heuristic Play sessions include:
- Natural objects such as fir cones, seashells, corks, pebbles and conkers.
- Fabric pieces such as ribbon, woollen pom poms, velvet, silk, lace and shower puffs.
- Metal objects including beads, chains, jar lids, keys, spoons, bowls, tea strainers, whisks, bells and tins of any size.
- Wooden objects such as curtain rings and dolly pegs, small bowls, egg cups, spoons, pastry brush, rolling pin and off cuts.
- Open ended resources such as cardboard tubes of all sizes.
- Small bags and boxes.

Who uses Heuristic Play?
Heuristic Play is suitable for babies and toddlers therefore the groups at The Gower School that have sessions are:
- Les Nounours (3 months to 14 months)
- Les Petits Lapins (14 months to 2½ years)
- Les Petits Poussins (18 months to 2½ years)

When do we have Heuristic Play?
Heuristic Play sessions are offered regularly at The Gower School. It is recommended that Heuristic Play sessions are held in a calm atmosphere where there will be limited interruptions so each room has their sessions when best suits their daily routine.
Les Nounours have Heuristic Play sessions every day from 4pm to 6pm.
Les Petits Lapins and Les Petits Poussins have Heuristic Play sessions two to three times a week during the morning from 9.30am to 11.30am.

Why do we have Heuristic Play?
Heuristic Play provides children with the chance to strengthen cognitive development, fine muscle control and also hand eye coordination. Toddlers have the urge to handle objects and like to gather them, fill them, stack them and manipulate them in any way they can. Heuristic Play sessions allow children to do this with a wide range of real objects in a safe and secure environment for as long as they wish. It also helps their attention span as children of this age tend to have difficulty in staying focused on something for more than a few minutes. In addition to this, children benefit from handling ‘real’ objects made from metal or wood rather than plastic as it helps the refinement of their senses as they explore the items. Heuristic Play sessions are a time for children to interact together socially; they will explore items together or in groups and imitate each other. The children make the choices for themselves, adults do not interfere, they ensure that the materials are attractively displayed and safe.

How do we carry out Heuristic Play?
At The Gower School, the teachers set up all the Heuristic Play objects in an attractive and appealing manner in a large area of the classroom in order for the children to begin their session. Large quantities of each item are provided to prevent conflicts although this may still occur occasionally. Once ready, children are able to freely explore and experiment with everything as they so wish. The role of the adult during the session is to sit back and observe and only intervene if necessary such as when a child is clearly frustrated. The reason the adult should sit back and observe is because the children should be given their own opportunity to make their own choices and discoveries. If a child approaches an adult then that is fine as it is the child’s choice to interact with them. Whilst the session is taking place, the items need to be repeatedly set up and tidied in order for the objects to appeal and welcome the children. It is also the role of the adult to maintain the resources, check they are safe and clean to use, discard unsuitable items and also collect new items. As a Montessori school, we strive to ensure that the environment is beautiful.