Social Activity 10: Sharing the Treasure Basket

Primary Goal
Exploring in a social situation.

Secondary Goals
Developing concentration; discovering through trial and error.

Material
Work mat.
Two infants.
Basket. Ideally, the basket is flat-bottomed, straight-sided, at least 14 inches (approximately 36 cm) in diameter, 3–5 inches (approximately 8–13 cm) high, and made of natural material such as wicker or grass, with no handle. You can also use a sturdy cardboard box of similar dimensions.

Assortment of objects safe for the infant to examine. As much as possible, choose objects that have interesting texture, smell, size, or shape, and minimize the number of plastic objects. Examples of objects: sponges; shaving brush; ball of wool; dried gourd; clothespins; multicolored wooden beads tied securely on a thick string; length of chain; metal colander; door knob; silk shawl; strips of fabric fastener; tea strainer; bicycle bell; small leather purse with a zipper opening; powder puff; tennis ball; scent bags (small cloth bags sewed or tied securely and filled with aromatic herbs or spices, such as lavender or cloves); small spiral notebook. (For more ideas, please see the Materials and Equipment section in the Classroom Guide.)

Make sure to include enough objects for both infants. This gives each infant an opportunity for parallel play, exploring independently in the presence of another child. To maintain the infants' interest, change the contents in the treasure basket regularly, adding some objects and removing others. It is also important to check the contents of the basket after every use, to clean objects that have become soiled or replace objects that may cause injury.
Presentation

• This activity appeals particularly to the interests and abilities of infants 6–12 months old.
• In advance, prepare the treasure basket and get the work mat.
• Choose a time when you have two infants sitting close by each other. The infants may be sitting propped by pillows or sitting on their own.
• Place a work mat between the two infants.

If this is the first time the infants have worked with the treasure basket

• Place the basket on the work mat between the infants, close enough that they can easily reach in. Make sure the infants are far enough apart that they are not constantly reaching for the same object.
• Sit facing the infants. Take an object out of the basket. Examine the object slowly and carefully. Hold it out so the infants can see it clearly. Remember to appeal also to the infants’ other senses. For example, ring a bicycle bell, shake a silk scarf, smell an orange, rattle a chain.
• Return the object to the basket.
• Pause and smile at the infants.
• Sit without speaking, giving the infants time to start exploring the contents of the basket on their own.
• Once the infants start focusing on the basket, quietly move aside, but remain nearby where the infants can see you. Stay quiet but attentive. Young infants especially may need your presence as an “emotional anchor” to develop confidence in this new situation. The Montessori approach gives the infant complete freedom to choose and examine whatever objects he/she wants. The adult does not correct how the infant holds an object, does not intervene or interrupt unless absolutely necessary, and does not let other children interfere. The goal is to let the infants explore for as long as their focus lasts.
If the infants have worked with the treasure basket before

- Place the basket on the work mat beside the infants, close enough that they can easily reach in.
- The infants will probably start exploring the contents of the basket immediately.
- Once the infants start exploring, remove yourself quietly from the scene. Remain nearby, staying quiet and attentive, but do not intervene or interrupt and do not let other children interfere. Let the infants explore for as long as their focus lasts.
- When the last infant has finished the activity, take the infants with you while you return the work mat and basket to their proper places. This completes the activity.
- Make sure that the basket and materials presented stay available — on a very low shelf, for example — for each infant to access again when she/he wishes.