

An A to Z of enhancements

R is for Ramps

Building a ramp to race cars down led to a wider exploration of ramps for various rolling objects, explains **Amy Jackson**

Playing with ramps can enable children to develop in all three of the Characteristics of Effective Learning.

Giving children the tools that they need to create and adjust ramps can mean that they 'play and explore' while investigating the relationship between cause and effect, as well as forces. They can be 'active learners' who concentrate and persist when they encounter difficulties, such as if a certain resource keeps falling off the ramp and they find a solution through trial and error.

Children can demonstrate their abilities to 'create and think critically' as they come up with their own ideas. Sometimes children use our multilevel stands with planks to build ramps, but other times children use their own creative ideas using resources such as our large hollow building blocks.

AT THE RACES

One day in our nursery, a child suggested, 'Let's have a car race and find the fastest car!' Along with a group of friends, they built a ramp and organised and carried out rounds of races until it came to a semi-final and then a final, finding the fastest car in the nursery with concentration and focus.

As children in the nursery were showing particular interest in naming the toy cars, racing them, and comparing their features and speed, I saw this as an opportunity for a car race enhancement. To add a new experimental element to their play, I stuck different textures to the wooden ramps – one was bare wood, one had artificial grass, another had a plastic coating, and the last one had bubblewrap. Black paper was laid out below the ramps with a basket of chalks to encourage

children to mark-make where the cars finished. A basket with eight of their favourite cars in was placed on a table along with a selection of fiction and non-fiction books about cars from the local library. A whiteboard with photos of the eight cars was placed nearby with a grid to inspire different forms of recording winners.

There was a big interest in the information books about cars and some children made comparisons between the cars in the photos in the book and the toy versions they had. Comments such as 'that one is shiny silver like my car' and 'that one looks fast like our red racing car!' were overheard.

The children enjoyed exploring the new textures on the ramps and soon figured out that the bare wood and the plastic-coated ramps made the cars go the fastest. The children communicated with each other and collaborated in exploring the enhancement. Some children took on the role of recording the winners, either with chalk marks or on the whiteboard using the photographs. Others enjoyed the role of putting the cars on the ramps and racing them. A child had the idea to make a winner's podium using the wooden blocks, which was a welcome addition to the enhancement!

ROLLING OUT

Outside, children often roll our large tyres to see which one is the first to get to the gate in the outdoor area, which is at the end of a pathway that slightly slopes downwards.

We have some small tyres that were donated to us, and we sometimes set up a simple enhancement with two of our multilevel stands, two planks and a pile of the little tyres next to them. The children



The children raced cars down a ramp and recorded the results

happily experiment with the height of the planks and the corresponding speed of the tyres in a similar way to the car ramps, but on a larger scale with different physical development opportunities.

Building their own obstacle courses outside using our various sized planks, crates and tyres is a popular child-initiated activity. These obstacle courses frequently include ramps for children to walk up and down. We find that this not only presents physical development opportunities with the range of muscles used but also PSED, as we often see a child holding another child's hand, helping them to steadily manoeuvre up or down their ramps.

Instead of wooden planks, we sometimes use pieces of guttering on our stands. This can give children

the opportunity to roll a wider range of objects such as balls or pine cones that would fall straight off a flat plank ramp.

Adding a tuff tray at the bottom of a ramp containing water or a malleable material such as sand can add a new element to the children's exploration. The tracks that the objects leave in the sand as they roll off the ramps, or the sound and splash that occurs when the objects land in water, can spark children's interest and invite investigations. ■

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