Activities for Sorting

Attribute identification

In order to sort, we need to be able to categorise objects in some way. One way to do this is to identify the attributes, or the features, of an object. If we were looking at trees, we could identify attributes such as height, width, size of leaves, colour of leaves, type of bark and so on.

Some preschools give each class a name or a mascot – for example, the Wombat group or the Waratah group. Is this the practice in your centre? If so, the children have probably already been introduced to this name and you may have had a discussion about where the name came from.

Now, ask the children to identify some attributes of this animal, plant or whatever it may be. Some children might need a picture to help prompt some ideas. If there is more than one preschool group, try to identify some of the attributes of the other group's mascots.

Sorting in the natural environment

Your children probably spend a great deal of time exploring and playing outside. One way to strengthen their understanding of sorting is to incorporate aspects of the outdoors into their learning.

Children could collect a range of objects from the environment (individually or in small groups), such as leaves, rocks, sticks, shells, etc. Once the group has enough objects to work with, children can begin to sort the objects into different groups according to attributes. After a few minutes, the children can return the objects to the group, and then select a new attribute to sort by.

Children could then be challenged to try and add to another child's sort. Did they select an object with the right attributes to be grouped with the original objects? Why or why not? Together, children can say why they thought the next object should be added, and whether or not this makes sense to the original sorter. This discussion is the most important part of the activity.

Sorting collage

Lay out some large pieces of paper next to the natural objects. As a group, decide on an attribute to sort by and allocate an attribute to each piece of paper. Children can then create a collective collage by gluing the objects to the paper. Children can contribute to multiple collages.

Questions to consider

- What do you notice about these objects?

- What other attributes do they have in common?

- Do they have any attributes that also make them different?

- What other ways could we classify these objects?