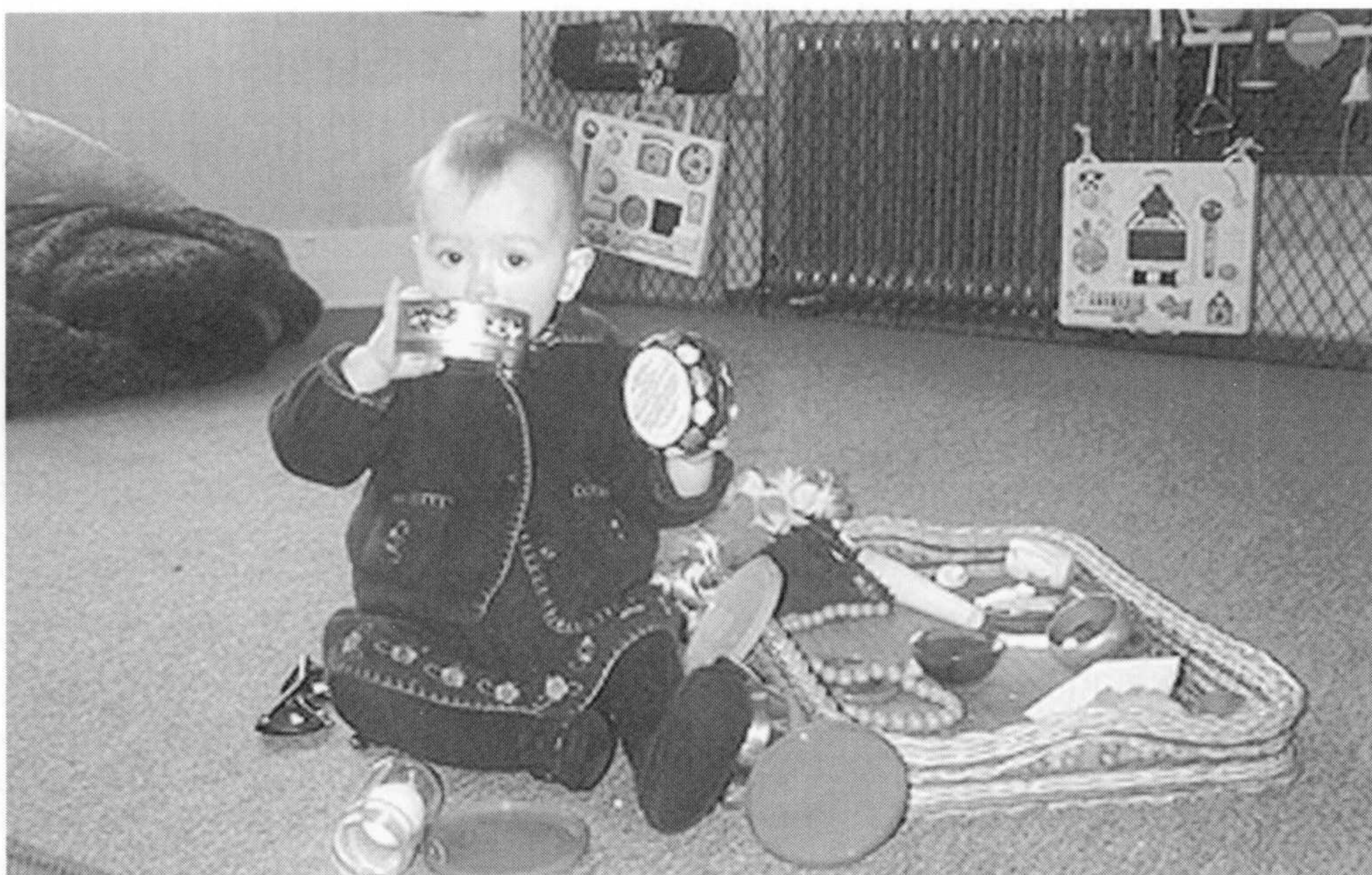


Five key principles of heuristic play

by Shelley Auld

Heuristic play sessions are one way that young children can explore the properties of everyday objects or cultural artifacts in a safe, supported, open-ended manner. Through heuristic play a child has the opportunity to determine their own actions and make choices.



Madeline McCann, 13 months, exploring objects in a treasure basket at Otago University nursery.

The word 'heuristic' comes from the Greek word 'heurisko', which means 'serves to discover or reach understanding of' (Goldschmied & Jackson, 1994). Heuristic play is the play that allows children to experience and put together objects in a way that engenders the excited feeling – 'I have found out about this object!'

There are five principles to play being viewed as 'heuristic'.

Principle one: The type of equipment used in heuristic play.

For play to be termed 'heuristic', according to Goldschmied & Jackson (1994), the equipment offered to children should be everyday objects and/or cultural artifacts. Perhaps heuristic equipment could be regarded as an organised equivalent of pot-cupboard play. Children playing with real things that adults busy themselves with.

When putting together heuristic play equipment you should gather a variety of objects with different properties and uses. Try to find objects such as:

- wood, glass, metal, wool, cotton, plastic, cardboard and stone;
- large and small objects, heavy and light, clear and opaque;
- objects from the kitchen, laundry, bathroom and bedroom; and
- objects that will fit inside each other and make different sounds.

Heuristic play equipment should only be used in the programme during heuristic play sessions as these items have the potential to be unsafe if not closely supervised. This focused time

