

In the first article which appeared in the December 1984 issue of *The English Teacher*, I talked about the rationale behind project work and the features of project work. In this article, I shall be giving suggestions for providing a positive learning environment in the classroom for project work as well as ideas for organizing the classroom for project work.

We must not forget that the environment in a Malaysian primary classroom does not just happen. It should be carefully planned and organized to provide stimulation and challenge to the pupils and also to cater to their needs and interests. The appearance of the classroom – the positioning of objects, for instance – determines the atmosphere for learning. Ideally the environment should promote social, emotional and academic growth. Is your classroom bare of all but fifty desks and chairs, or do you have the following in your classroom?

- an area for meeting with the entire class (maybe a matted area at the front of the classroom)
- an area where pupils can work individually and independently
- areas for small-group or pair work
- quiet and noisy areas
- a free flow of traffic
- signs and labels for different areas, displays, etc. and directions for getting to each area
- materials available for pupils for project work
- a variety of raw materials that are organized and labelled
- places for the pupils to display their project work
- actual displays of pupils' work

Creating classroom sections

Although it is not always practical in Malaysian classrooms where there are large numbers of desks, to create many different sections in the classroom, it is desirable to set aside certain areas for display of pupils' work and for the storage of raw materials. Probably the most suitable arrangement in Malaysian classrooms, is to have the centre of the room filled with groups of desks (*not* rows of

desks) while the periphery is left for other purposes.

If the classroom is large and the class relatively small, the teacher will also be able to partition off sections of the classroom to provide, as indicated in the checklist above, areas for whole-class, small-group and individual work. These areas need not be located around the periphery of the classroom but could be spread over a large part of it.

Such areas can be created without the use of special equipment or materials by rearranging existing furniture. A cupboard, a bookcase, a chart rack, the teacher's table, can partition off an area; desks and chairs can be grouped to form another area. Room dividers can also be created in the following ways:

- by hanging a cloth from the ceiling of the classroom. Pieces of dowelling are glued or sewn to each end of the material and suspended from the ceiling or lights by string or wire. The cloth divider also functions as a display area.
- by joining together a number of egg cartons. Each pupil can decorate an egg carton and the completed divider can be suspended from the ceiling or supported by blocks of wood at the base. The cartons can be joined with wire or string or staples.
- by stringing together bottle caps, jar lids, paper clips, etc., to form a divider similar to the room dividers found in many homes (which are made of shells).
- by using chipboard or stiff cardboard or corrugated cardboard sandwiched between two desks.

Signs and labels

Posting signs and labelling areas focus the pupils' attention on what and where things are in the classroom. They reinforce the pupils' knowledge of these words and save the teacher having to explain where things are. Signs can be made on scraps of heavy cardboard with poster paint, felt-tip pens or three-dimensional materials such as beads, buttons, twigs, leaves and ice cream sticks.

Collecting raw materials for project work

Probably the greatest psychological barrier to doing project work in the classroom, is the problem of finding raw materials. Teachers are quick to point out the lack of funds available for the purchase of raw materials. The fact is that raw materials are available everywhere — free — and it just requires a small amount of effort on the part of the teacher and every pupil to build up a large collection. Pupils and teachers can find tools and materials for learning everywhere — in the community, neighbourhood and home. Finding these resources develops the pupils' awareness of their environment and introduces them to new people, new experiences, and new materials. It is also a way to involve parents in their children's work.

Where and how to get materials

1. *Recycled items from parents:* Parents are the greatest resource available to teachers. A letter like the following will probably produce good results. Remember, parents are usually willing to send raw materials to school but they often don't have any idea of what the teacher needs. Spell it out for them:

The above letter contains only a few of the items that parents could be asked to contribute. Here is a more comprehensive list from which to choose:

Paper

coloured pictures	photographs
illustrated magazines	paper bags
wallpaper (?)	newspapers
wrapping paper	calendars
sandpaper	cellophane
cardboard tubes	corrugated paper

Containers

appliances boxes	film containers
cigarette boxes	tin cans (all sizes)
shoe boxes	plastic food
egg cartons	containers (margarine
jars (all sizes)	tubs, etc.)
bottles (glass and plastic)	plastic jugs

Plastic foam

trays (e.g. from food
sold in supermarkets)
packing bits

Dear Parents,

Can you help Class X/your child's class by contributing towards materials for project work and enrichment activities?

Things you can send to school with your child:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| — cardboard | — old bits of wood |
| — plastic bags | — tin cans |
| — paper bags | — plastic containers with lids e.g. ice cream |
| — rubber bands | containers |
| — buttons | — plastic bottles e.g. dish-washing liquid bottles |
| — rubber seeds | — egg cartons |
| — boxes — all shapes and sizes | — styrofoam (packing materials) |
| — string/raffa | — old cooking utensils |
| — scraps of cloth | e.g. measuring cups and spoons |
| — broken appliances | — |

These materials will be used by the pupils and will not be returned.

Signed class teacher

Fabric

canvas	leather remnants
felt	muslim
flannel	fur scraps
upholstery	other fabric scraps

Decorations

beads	braiding
buckles	buttons
cord	ribbon
laces	spools
thread	knitting yarn
zippers	safety pins

Natural materials

seeds	shells
nuts	sand
gourds	rocks

Metal

aluminium foil	steel wool
tinfoil	wire
copper foil	nails
screws	paper clips
hooks	

Wood

boards	blocks
dowels	beads
sticks	picture frames
ice cream sticks	

Miscellaneous

ceramic tiles	formica samples
lino tiles	pipe cleaners
rope	twine
inner tubes	tyres
carpet pieces	chipboard

2. Materials from shops: Shops and manufacturers are sources for raw materials and for display items. Shops periodically discard display racks, shelves and promotional displays, which can be used in the classroom to store or show off materials. Shop owners are often willing to provide surplus materials. Try the following:

paint shops	grocery stores
restaurants	department stores
supermarkets	chemist shops
fabric stores	ceramic tile shops
printers	book-binders
newspapers	fast-food shops

3. Materials 'found' by pupils: One way of involving pupils in the collection of raw materials is to organize 'scavenger hunts'. These scavenger

hunts can be organized when a particular skill is being studied, e.g. the learning of shapes and sizes. Pupils can be asked to look for items of a particular size and shape. Most often though, pupils will be asked to look for materials that they can use for a particular project.

The pupils can be set a task like this:

GO ON A SCAVENGER HUNT

Find and bring to class:

- 1 shoe box
- 2 tin cans
- 10 ice cream sticks
- an old telephone directory

... or a less obvious task:

Find and bring to class:

- a happy picture
- something that can make a sound
- something 2 metres long
- something blue
- something which begins with the letter 'B'
- a pair of something

Before setting pupils off on scavenger hunts, it is necessary to establish a couple of rules: 1. If the object belongs to someone else, you must get permission to take it; and 2. Be sure to find out if the object must be returned. If so, be sure to return it. Different 'task cards' can be given to different groups of pupils.

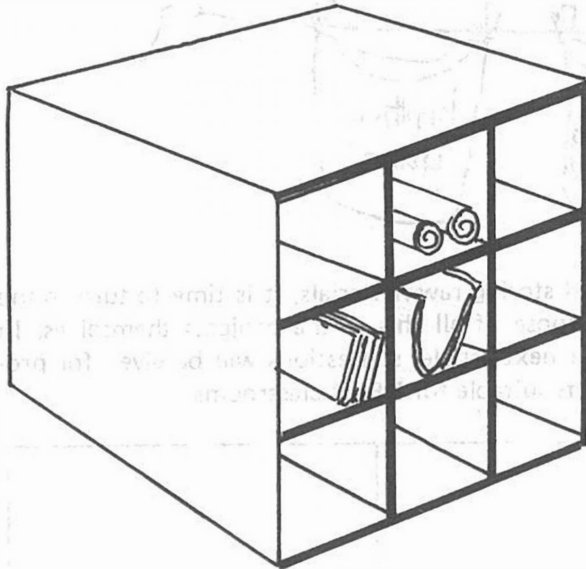
Storing materials for project work

In order to allow the pupils to do project work independently or in groups while maintaining an orderly classroom, the teacher needs to provide various ways to store raw materials. When materials are stored openly, pupils are able to get what they need without relying on the teacher. Careful labelling and placing of storage containers/holders develops the pupils' awareness of where things can be found and how things should be kept. It also reinforces pupil responsibility.

Here are a few suggestions for storing raw materials:

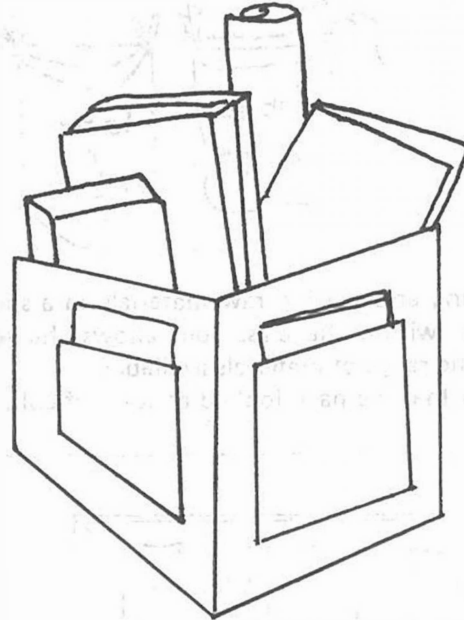
Bottle box

A handy storage cupboard can be made from a carton which is already divided into sections. The carton can be painted or covered with paper and each section identified by labels.



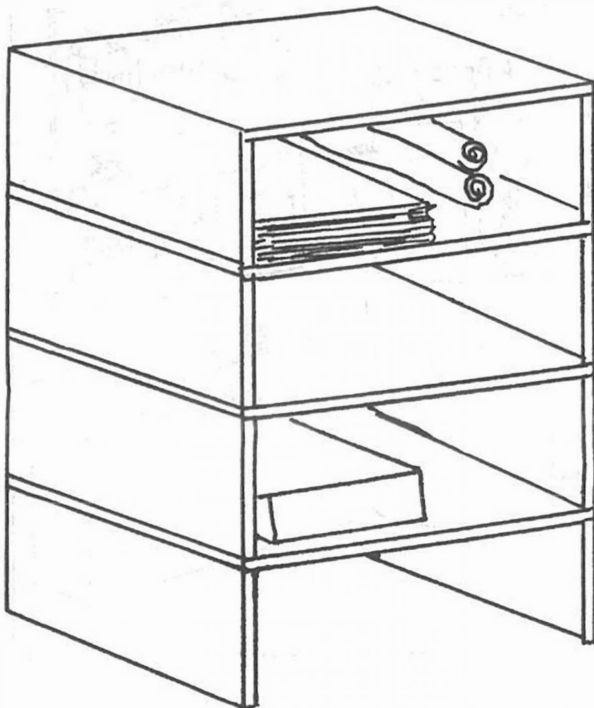
Storage box

A box with the top removed becomes a storage box for larger items. Other smaller raw materials can be placed in envelopes on the sides of the box.



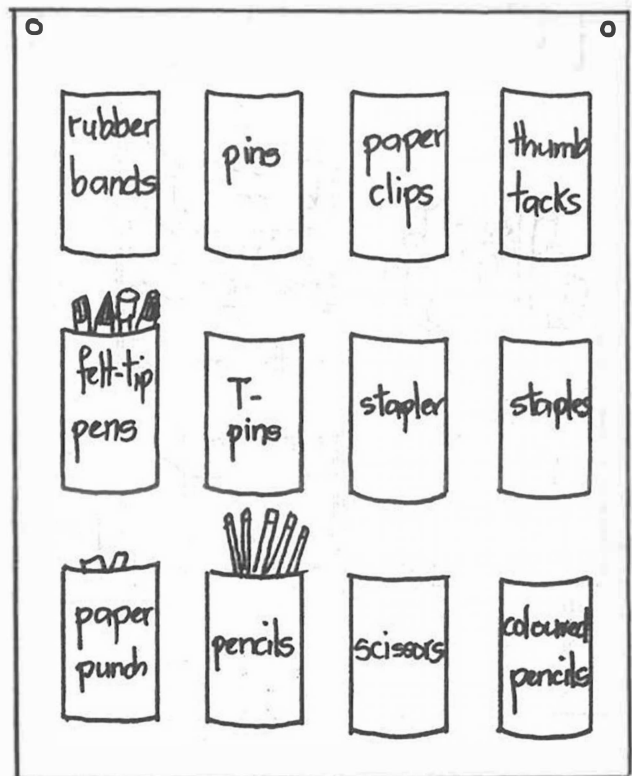
Fruit box

Wooden fruit boxes can be used as storage bins. Knock out one side of each box and stack several on top of each other. Join them together with nails driven in at an angle or with a strip of wood attached along the side. The boxes can be sanded and painted.



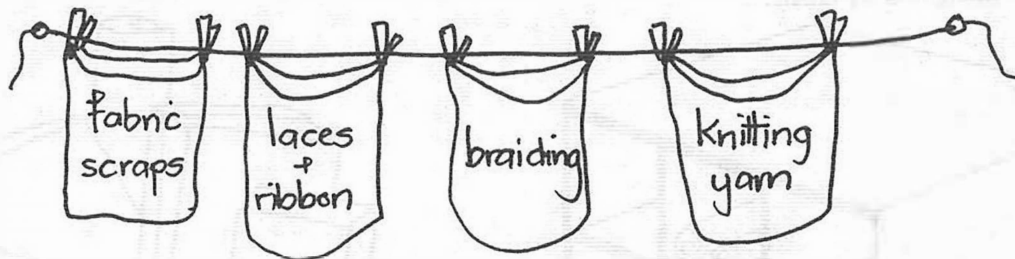
Shoe holder

These are useful for holding smaller items. Labeling the pockets helps the pupils locate and return materials.



Clothesline

Tack or tape up coloured yarn or string or make a clothesline. Paper or plastic bags can be used to hold raw materials for project work.



Collecting and placing raw materials in a specific location within the classroom allows the pupils to see the range of materials available.

Now that we have looked at ways of collecting

and storing raw materials, it is time to turn to the purpose of all this – the projects themselves. In the next article, suggestions will be given for projects suitable for KBSR classrooms.

