

Mathematical moments: Spatial reasoning with toddlers

Tidy up routines

Jelena is a home-based child carer. Today she is caring for her own son Stephan (19 months) and Archie (21 months). Part of the afternoon routine is to spend time tidying up and having a story before getting ready to walk to school to collect Archie's older sister. Jelena sees tidy-up time as a valuable learning experience and so she allows plenty of time for this activity and she makes sure both of the boys are supported and involved in the process. She presents a small crate to them, 'Let's put the train tracks in here'. The boys enthusiastically throw the pieces of track in the crate until it seems full, with lots of pieces sticking out. Jelena still has a handful of pieces of track that she shows the boys. 'Oh no! Will these fit in?' She jiggles the crate and rearranges some of the pieces to make room and then hands the last pieces to the boys to put in the crate. 'Yes! They all fit in!' She carries the crate over to the toy shelf. 'Hmm, is this going to fit on the shelf? Yes, there's just enough room next to the puzzles!'

Before sharing a book, they go to the kitchen where some gingerbread people they made earlier are on the table cooling. Jelena takes several plastic boxes from a cupboard and puts them on the table. One is obviously too small and one way too big.



One is obviously too small and one way too big. 'We need a box for Stephan's gingerbread and a box for Archie's gingerbread'. She picks up the very small box in one hand and a biscuit in the other and says out loud to herself 'I wonder if they will they fit in this box?'. She shakes her head.

'No, this one is too small'. Next Jelena picks up the box that is too large and gestures comparing the size of the biscuit to the size of the box. She shakes her head again, 'Too big'. Jelena then picks up a more appropriately sized box, 'Just right. I think this one might be big enough for yours Archie' and she passes the box to him so that he can gently place his gingerbread in the box ready to take home later.