

“Supporting Learning”

by Robin Booth



One of the children's clay projects had broken. We talked about what we could do with the broken clay. It was suggested we put it in some water so it could be softened and reused. So the dried clay went into a few tins which were then filled with water.

The following day the water was poured out leaving a mushy and very sticky paste.

Jessica: “Can we mix some paint with it? Then we won't have to paint it after it dries as it will already have a colour.”

Teacher: “Okay. Let's see what happens when we mix in some colours.”

Ben: “Look, mine's going green.”

Mushy clay is very tactile.

Ben: “It's smooth and soft. I am going to put it on my arms...Look, I've got avocado all over my arms.”

Dominik: “I'd laugh it dries all over his arms, and then he'd stay like that.”

Etienne: “Yes. I'd laugh to.”

It is very clear that this process was exciting and exploratory. There is talk about how to put clay over one's whole body. Some children feel uncomfortable with the messiness being created and the children rally up in support of each as they explore how far they can take this experiment.

Z: “You had better wash your hands or your mom will be angry. You are naughty.”

B: “No I am not.”

Z: “Then why are you putting that on?”

Etienne and Dominik come to their friend's support.

E: “He's just having fun.”

D: “Yes. He's having fun.”

Ben continues to explore the sensations of clay all over his arms.

Ben: “It's freezing. I bet it's going to crack when it dries. I want to see what happens when it dries. I'm going into the sun.”

Here is experiential learning. It is motivated by the desire to explore, to sense, to feel. It is done by immersing oneself in the thoughts and questions which spark our imagination.

Does he realise that he is exploring how fridges work? That energy is used in the process of evaporation and hence the temperature drops? Or that clay shrinks with the drying process and this simple fact causes cracks in many houses built on clay? And these cracks vary depending on the rainy or dry season?

As he observes, explores and theorises, he builds a wealth of experience. From this he will create understandings of how the world works.

Ben: “I'm still freezing. When it dries it gets warmer.”

As he tries to pull off the dry clay, he realises that his skin hair is trapped and its painful to pull off.

Ben: “Ouch. I'm going to wash it off.”

Will this create an understanding of why some women wax their legs?

Our role as teachers is not to teach. We are there to support learning. If we focus on what we are trying to teach, we fail to understand what is actually being learnt. We engage in dialogue, acknowledging that learning is a two way process; that we are there to learn alongside children, exploring our worlds, making meaning, together.

