



Moving Towards Deep Thinking and Understanding: A focus upon painting

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Introduction

The child as a meaning maker

‘Children are natural scientists, artists, mathematicians, authors, and scholars.

From the time they are born they seek out information about the world around them in an effort to construct meaning and further their development.

Whether they are stacking blocks for the first time or taking in new textures, sights and sounds, children have an inherent drive to learn and make sense of their reality.

When given an enriching environment and supportive guidance, they intuitively take advantage of the prospects for learning that are put before them.’

(Bruehl, 2011, p.2)

What are the key ways that young children learn?

Representing ideas and experiences

‘Children deepen their understanding as they recreate experiences or communicate their thinking in many different ways – in role-play or small world play, pictures, movements, models and talk.’

(Learning, Playing and Interacting dcsf, 2009)

Developing a studio space

(Ring, 2014 - ongoing)

- My ongoing research is showing that many young children in EYFS settings often fail to find provision of material such as paint and clay satisfying in terms of appropriate challenge.
- Problems can include:
 - Lack of everyday availability of quality materials
 - Over prescription by or narrow expectations of practitioners in terms of how materials should be used and what should be produced
 - Lack of understanding by practitioners of the possibilities of 3D and 2D materials
- This can lead to children finding practitioner expectations lack challenge (children become bored) or are over challenging (children become anxious in their attempt to please)

Leuven scales for emotional well being and involvement


- Laevers recognizes that high levels of well-being and involvement lead in the end to high levels of child development and deep level learning
- Well-being focuses on the extent to which pupils feel at ease, act spontaneously, show vitality and self-confidence. It is a crucial component of emotional intelligence and good mental health
- Involvement focuses on the extent to which pupils are operating to their full capabilities. In particular it refers to whether the child is focused, engaged and interested in various activities.

The Concept of Flow

- Flow is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does.
- According to Csikszentmihályi, flow is completely focused motivation. The emotions are harnessed in the service of performing and learning.

- Flow cannot be experienced if there is a large discrepancy between challenges and skills.
- This means that one of the most important skills for a practitioner to develop is the ability to match skills, knowledge and competencies all together
- Building upon the child's interests – the focus of their attention, their pre-occupations - making sure the children are neither too overwhelmed nor underwhelmed by the material that is made available.

(Links with Vygotsky's Zone of proximal development)



Over the last two years I have been working with early years practitioners (one-year long action research projects) to develop our understanding of appropriate challenge in relation to our provision and children's use of a range of materials, e.g. drawing, paint, clay and transient materials (or loose parts).

Today I would like to share some of our work with you with a focus upon paint.

Missing slides show:

- *children deepening their understanding of media and materials and what they will do.*
- *children having freedom to combine resources in many different ways.*
- *the possibilities for powerful ongoing transformations in thinking that are part of the playful process of, for example: cutting; sticking; marking and layering paper and card or building; re-arranging and connecting blocks and plastic crates.*

Possibility thinking

Craft, Cremin, Burnard

‘Nurturing children’s creativity involves close scrutiny of processes of meaning-construction for each learner, recognizing the sheer creative engagement manifest by young learners, as they move beyond the given, or ‘what is’, to the possible, or to ‘what could be’. It involves, in other words, what might be called ‘possibility thinking’ (Craft, 2007)

N.B. The powerful interwoven nature of creative possibility thinking and creative skills.

The ability to represent indicates that the young child is gaining a more abstract understanding of their world.

It emerges from children:

- ⦿ exploring actively with all the senses
- ⦿ discovering relations through direct experience
- ⦿ manipulating, transforming and combining materials;
- ⦿ choosing materials, activities and purposes
- ⦿ acquiring skills with tools and equipment

The children you have been shown were offered an environment of co-participation where there was deep respect for children's ideas and where children contributed to 'the uncovering of knowledge'.

They were given time and space to have ideas and see them through.

Adults stepped back, 'enabling children's activity to lead their support for learning'.

In these environments children were given the authority to be innovative.

I have shown you evidence of children's:

- Motivation
- Playfulness
- Self-confidence
- Involvement
- Engagement
- Immersion
- Innovation
- Imagination
- Self-determination
- Risk taking
- Agency – to have ideas and to see these through to action