

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange



An Encounter with Clay: Interweaving the practical and the possible

Transforming thinking about the role of materials for learning

Material encounters

Materials are not immutable, passive, or lifeless until the moment we do something to them; they participate in our early childhood projects. They live, speak, gesture, and call to us (Kind, 2014, p. 865)

Clay ecologies

Clay is able to slow things down in the classroom. It invites the children to follow its unexpected movements as it interacts with hands and feet, with canvas, with floor, with air. In this 'clay ecology', the production that is going on has a life of its own (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2016, p. 1).

A relational approach

"'Relatedness'- a particular manner of connectedness...a relation between things and events" (Martin, in Giamminuti, 2009, p. 76).

Co-Researchers

"The learning process is certainly individual, but because the reasons, explanations, interpretations and meanings of others are indispensable for our knowledge building, it is also a process of relations- a process of social construction" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.125).

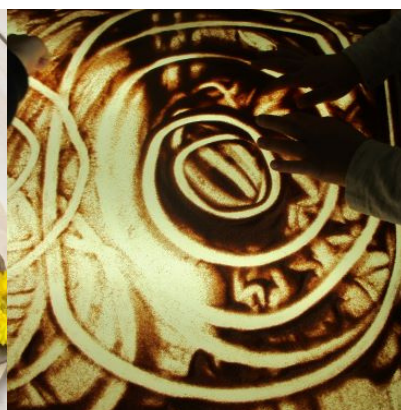
Coming to know

"...our hands - impressive working tools of primary importance - can encounter, explore, and come to know the material, at the same time taking from it sensations, forms, perceptions and imaginaries...

...Our hands listen, they observe and manipulate, they enter clay and fragment it with fine gestures, digging into the material with pressure and pleasure" (Reggio Children, 2020).

Intelligent hands

Children's hands are attentive, hurried, curious, cautious, uncertain, timid, courageous, delicate. They touch, stroke, ferret, select, juxtapose and compose the materials. Reggio Children, 2011, p. 76)



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Image of the infant

“ We realised that the experiences we had been offering the children maybe influencing the image of the child held by many of the parents as they realised that their children are researchers...” (Daniel, 2016, p.6)

The creative process

This is why we consider the learning process to be a creative processthe ability to construct new connections between thoughts and objects that bring about innovation and change, taking known elements and creating new connections .“

Small groups

Small group work “..offers rich communicative and relational potential and is a catalyst for the dynamics of negotiation and cognitive conflict. It coordinates actions, discoveries and feedback, enables conjectures and points of view to be changed and linguistic and symbolic adjustments to be made. Working in small groups broadens the landscapes of the mind and stimulates transformations of thought.” (Reggio Children, Identity Card of the Diana School (no date))

Contexts

“The objective of education is to increase possibilities for the child to invent and discover...the aim of teaching is to provide conditions for learning”(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 82).

Organisation - a shared responsibility

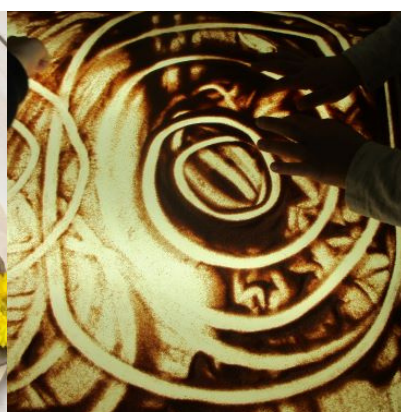
“Clay is soil, and soil requires fostering and nourishment. When we extract claywhen we offer it to children, we have to do it with care” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2017, p. 61).

Clay care

- Double seal in a plastic tub- important it is soft
- Check on it!
- Hands dry out the clay- set of damp face-washers
- Cover slabs with damp towel and plastic/canvas cover
- Wire mesh
- Scrapers for clean up
- Introduce tool/other materials down the track

Sculpting Clay

“Children’s work on press pots allows them to experiment with the balance between force and delicacy, between giving direction to the clay and listening to the clay” (Pelo, 2007 p.69).



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Questions to critically reflect on:

- What possibilities do you see for enabling the capacity and pleasure of learning with and through clay?
- How might clay inspire creative and imaginative learning throughout your context?
- What strategies of organisation and interconnection among materials, spaces, people, and ideas might you need to devise for the expressive and poetic 'languages' to flourish?
- How might documenting this curious, relational, researching child invite dialogue and changing perceptions about the capability of our youngest citizens?
- How do we as teachers support the child that pauses, that is stuck, that says I don't know what to do? Do we give children the time to think? Do we offer silent pauses and acknowledge it is okay to not know in this moment? How much do we intervene or attempt to change the direction?
- How might researching the possibilities of clay shift resistant attitudes in some adults?

In conclusion:

Consider the opportunities to invite children's and adults encounters with clay, to have the possibility to...

"...enter the between- space, the space of intra-active, event-full entanglements where children, materials, spaces, places, educators, time move together....

...(pay) close attention to the fluxes, movements and rhythms of the materials, the indefinite and unpredictable encounters, and the generative forces and relations among, with and between children and materials" (Pacini- Ketchabaw, 2017, p 81-82).

To follow Anne Ferguson on Instagram : [clayannforkids](#) & [clayann2](#).



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