


Madeley Nursery School



2017-2018

Children's
Inquiries

Morning enquiry supported by Rachel

Explorations of what is alive



This was a long-running and in-depth enquiry by a group of children into their ideas about what it means to be alive, both for creatures and for ourselves. I noticed recurring themes within the children's questions and ideas such as 'What is alive?' 'Can you bring something back to life?' and an interest in 'What's inside'. Children continually developed their ideas together,

through discussion and through media such as paint, clay, digital technology and movement. They brought their theories to many different provocations, from a giant ammonite, a dinosaur egg, a tiny caterpillar and finally to themselves. In connection with each other the group formed a strong learning community, able to listen, discuss and test out ideas, supporting one another with good social skills as they journeyed through their learning.

Children discussed what had happened to the ammonite... 'It's so old, it's turned to rock' – Gabriel. 'It's never gonna turn back to alive and come to nursery.' – Gabriel. 'If we put it back in the fridge it will turn back into



a creature.' – Jake. 'If we put it in the river it will turn into a squid or an octopus.' – Hattie. 'If we throw it in...' – Eddie. 'NO! If we put it in gently.' – Florence. 'When he's fixed he'll turn into a real one, like the mummy.' – Ellaby.

A fossilised dinosaur egg provided a new opportunity... 'It's still sleeping' – Charlie. 'I think it's an egg that's dead. It's a dead egg.' – Lucy. 'It's the skull of an egg that didn't hatch.' – Mila.



'If we take the skin off we can see what's inside.' – Hattie. 'But we can't take our skin off!' – Florence.

This prompted laughter and discussion in the group and a new enquiry about our bodies. Using the visualizer we were able to look closely at our bodies... 'I think there's a battery in my body.' – Gabriel. 'There's a brain in my leg and a battery.' – Gabriel. 'My heart's stopped, it's really stopped.' – Hattie. Ellaby and Jake created a playful dance around this idea 'My batteries off.' – Jake said and Ellaby tried to re-animate him 'Here, have my battery.' 'When my batteries on I'm like a factory – I'm alive! When it's off I die.' – Jake.

“Observe and listen to children because when they ask “why?” they are not simply asking for the answer from you. They are requesting the courage to find a collection of possible answers.” – Loris Malaguzzi



Morning enquiry supported by Helen T.

Ladders for woodlice



The summer holiday assignment offered an opportunity for our children and families to consider the many creatures, great and small, we find in and around our homes and the outdoors. However it was our initial visit to the wild area in nursery which generated a real energy within the group. The children's enquiry began almost immediately when one of the

children discovered a tiny bug which appeared trapped between layers of masking tape wrapped around the trunk of the tree.

"It hasn't got a little ladder – it needs a little ladder so it can climb up, we need a long stick with Sellotape at the bottom of it." "Why does it need Sellotape?" "So the bugs can climb." "Owls climb ladders with their claws." "A ladder is for squirrels to climb, they like to be in trees. I climbed a ladder into the roof." "I climbed a ladder to the attic, if you reach the top you are strong enough and then you can reach the sky."

The children's exchange of ideas and theories deepened their own enquiries into how the creatures would use the ladders and also opportunities to share their own experiences of ladders. We explored the concept of a ladder, compared different styles of ladders and the reasons for using ladders. The nursery ladders were used by the

children so they themselves could climb up experience the sensation of being high and safe and how the 2 styles of ladders could be used (an A frame and a flat ladder) The ladders were used in various areas of the nursery and 'tested' . The group spent time designing and then constructing their own ladder ideas. Using the nursery ladders helped the group develop a deeper understanding of the 'grammar of a ladder'. Is it 'stable' and do we feel 'safe'?

"It's a circle hexagon ladder." "It's a tippy climber frame." "This ladder can go upside down and join along with the other one....see?"





"When I climbed up there on a ladder I hurt myself and my mum and dad had to help me down." "This is a rocket ladder' it goes up and saves the energy in your legs."

The ladder has been the tangible object which has enabled the children's thinking to move effortlessly from reality to fantasy.

The wild area has played a significant role in this year's enquiry as the children continue to discover creatures in interesting holes and fascinating places. One such creature we found in abundance in the many dark and damp places in our wild area was the woodlouse. Woodlice are a curiosity amongst the group and they provide a way for children to ask thoughtful and unexpected questions about the world. Woodlice have strength and power, they need to be safe, they need ladders and roofs and they want to play.

Both the ladder and the woodlice brought a real energy and excitement within the group as they shared their knowledge about them both.

"Did you know woodlice are super strong and can lift wood?"

"They are so powerful with muscles."

"I can see a baby woodlice, it's so beautiful but it has a yucky tongue! They're hanging off the wood they are cute when they're walking"

"How do we draw the legs under the woodlice?"

Digital microscopes and media allowed the children to observe more closely the features of the woodlouse. These images alongside the information books we looked at, supported the children to focus and develop their observational and representational skills.

Through their enquiry into ladders and woodlice the group have developed their social learning through processes of shared collaboration of knowledge. Many concepts have been explored as they develop a much deeper understanding of the grammar of ladders, not only in the purpose of, the construction of and the suitability of ladders but also imaginative ideas have extended their thinking as they consider new ideas and theories of how the woodlice travel around the wild area.

Morning enquiry supported by Susie and Kay

Sharing ideas as a group



Morning friends in Kay's group were curious about creatures who lived under the Ocean. This work was inspired when Alfie brought in treasures from a visit to the Sea Life Centre.

We responded to the children's curiosity

about how creatures looked, their shape, size and colour. We also looked at how they moved and the relationships between creatures within the context of families and friendships.

Children arrived at school with treasures from the beach and reference books about sea life.

As the enquiry developed we began to create puppets from their graphic work. Story making and the use of puppets has held a strong thread throughout the academic year. Kay invested significant time and energy at the beginning of



the Autumn Term and was always surrounded by many friends with a story to tell through puppets, the show was always 'about to begin'.

Puppets of jellyfish, mermaids and treasure chests were adorned with sparkles and so rose our nursery story from the depths of children's encounters and imaginations.



Our Sea Story written by Kay's friends and Susie.

There's a treasure chest and the real pirates are good and a sword came to kill the bad guy. He chopped the good pirate and the heart of the good guy and took the treasure.

Moana tried to chase after and grabbed up and down up and down. Up and down and right and swirled him around and then he was gone and then Moana got the treasure.

The jellyfish did sting and swim back to his little house.

The stick insect came and stuck on the pirate and he got a special sword to get him off. He said "come on let's have a pirate party" and he found a venomous jellyfish and he got stinged and the bad pirates have guns.

The jellyfish stung the crocodile and swammed away.

"Tick tock , tick tock the crocodile has food in the nest, in Peter Pan the crocodile swallowed an alarm clock".

The end



Morning enquiry supported by Trina

'The Sound of Our Country' – Animal Sounds and International Exchange



The summer assignment 'All Creatures Great and Small' provoked a shared interest about animals of personal significance between the group, their families and key educators.

An invitation to participate in an eTwinning research project with children and teachers at 'Saulite Preschool', Latvia called 'The

Sound of Our Country' generated an exciting and playful partnership for the group. Children collaborated and exchanged their learning ideas, theories and enquiries about different animal sounds through a multimodal process, thus developing their understanding about the similarities and differences in Latvia and the UK, "the cat sounds the same, but the dog it sounds different.

The opportunity to video conference with Saulite preschool offered legitimacy and confidence for the group to not only share sounds of their



chosen animals but aroused their curiosity about the culture of a preschool in Latvia, "we don't sleep in our nursery, we sleep at home", "it's not the same there".

Exchanging a Christmas gift between the countries inspired a rich empathy to the project and with each other, "that was very kind".



The educator noted how children's exchanges about their pets transformed beyond respective sounds and creative imagination into a dialogue concerned with relationships, tenderness and care, "I like playing with Aston, we're real friends now".

Many incidental references to the project occurred such as daily greeting group friends at register time with 'Sveiki' ('hello') and fascinations with international visitors to the nursery, "are you from Latvia?" Furthermore, our nursery volunteer Linda who is Latvian, has been an invaluable resource supporting us with translation and sharing personal artefacts from Latvia and culture of her extended family, "can't your granny come to nursery?"

The project culminated in a celebration with families to reflect and share our international work, the children's ownership and collaboration of their common interest and wider European experience.



Afternoon enquiry supported by Susie

Searching for real creatures



Searching for real creatures in our nursery wild garden has been really important for afternoon friends. They have been thinking about their homes and where creatures live.

Snails seemed to hold a fascination for the group and in particular the spiral pattern seemed an interesting provocation which emerged in graphic work, movement and sensory exploration.

Children moved their bodies to express feelings about sleeping snails, frightened snails and slithering snails, we looked at footage of moving snails on the big screen to create a context and light-scape to move in.



We explored scale through drawings and clay “Shhhh it’s the baby one- look”
“mines getting, getting, bigger, bigger, bigger, really BIG”

The notion of spiral patterns emerged in children's daily encounters. Patterns were found in garden sculpture, created in sand and paintings and drawings were adorned with treasure.



“This is called an Ammonite from a hundred million years ago, it's so old. I'm putting a rock on my work it looks so beautiful, it's so so precious, I really, really like snails”.

“Observe and listen to children because when they ask “why?” they are not simply asking for the answer from you. They are requesting the courage to find a collection of possible answers.” – Loris Malaguzzi



Afternoon enquiry supported by Helen T.

Incredible transforming creatures



Creativity becomes more visible when adults try to be more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results they achieve in various fields of doing and understanding. Loris Malaguzzi (20th century), Italian early education specialist. Quoted in *The Hundred Languages of Children*, ch. 3, by Carolyn Edwards (1993).

Our summer holiday assignment offered the children and their families a small gesture to engage with each other and consider the many creatures, great and small in our world. However it is often the unexpected that creates a real energy within the group as they begin to discover the incredible complexities of nature that can unfold before our eyes. Moments such as these have been experienced over the year as we have seen first-hand chicks hatching from their eggs, tadpoles emerging from the frogspawn changing into frogs, Tiny Tim our 'Giant African' snail grow and our tiny eggs in a pot that hatched into tiny caterpillars and became chrysalis's until finally emerging as beautiful butterflies.

We had opportunities to predict what may happen and it is through these meaningful group discussions where the children develop ideas and theories built upon their shared knowledge and understanding.

Education, hence, must focus not on the child considered in isolation from others, but instead on the child seen as interconnected with particular others in nested communities: home, classroom, school, neighbourhood, city, region, nation, and eventually extending out to include the whole world.

We consider relationships to be the fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system.

Loris Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10.





The caterpillar eggs provided an opportunity for the group to share predictions as to what they might be and what if any, changes they may see over time. Such provocations create a curiosity amongst the group and they provide a way for children to share theories, ideas and to ask thoughtful and unexpected questions.

“Baby transformer inside, he doesn’t need the egg anymore”

“I think there are cars inside and that’s the engine”

“Chickens are inside and there are 3 of them”

“I think there is a chicken and a tomato inside”

“Can they move?”

Ideas have been explored through the languages of digital media, clay, drawing, dance and shadow work.

The tadpoles arrived in May and brought a renewed energy to the idea of natural transformations within our natural world.

“It’s magic when they change into frogs”

“They say ribbit”

“They eat the leaves”

“They come from the sea”

“They get tangled up in the weeds cos they need help”

“They bite the leaves”

“Do they eat skeletons?”

The living creatures are a curiosity amongst the group and they provide a way for children to ask thoughtful and unexpected questions about the world. The children’s research over the year, has given me as the educator, opportunities to observe how their ideas and questions are explored and extended through the languages of drawing, movement and digital media. The children share exquisite experiences of how relationships form and develop through empathy, kindness, music, expressive movement and humour often using narratives to extend and explore ideas.

Afternoon enquiry supported by Mo and Kay

100 languages for 100 snail babies



Our project was initially inspired by Jack's pet snail Robbie and later joined by Tiny Tim who lives in our studio.

Our group have used many different mediums to explore and express our ideas about snails.

Clay, charcoal, pencil, pens, paint, blocks, fabric, salt dough and movement...

Frequent returning to the medium of clay has produced a group of learners who are confident in their use of the materials. Clay work has grown

increasingly more complex and detailed. The group's ideas about snails have also become more complex and moved towards careful consideration of the needs of a snail. Robbie had 100 babies while we were studying him in our project, we shared in his joy...

"he is happy now, he has his family, they are egg babies" Idrees

"he is Mumma and Pappa" Finn



"does he have a heart?" Kitty

"Robbie was lonely so he had babies" Jack

"the heart, it's made of lava like a volcano inside him" Lottie-Boo

"we go 2 brains, one goes upward and one stops, your head makes it stop" Taylor

"but snails got little brains, not big brains" Jasmine

Drawings have been refined, encouragement to





look closely and really 'see' the snails has offered up sophisticated artwork.

They like to show their work to the snails and offer opinions on what they might think, showing maturity in their emotional intelligence and understanding of how others may feel and think (empathy).

Children are supporting each other.

"I can't draw a snail" Idrees

"I can, I will show you" Ahmenah

Small gestures of kindness and generosity are happening all the time.

Offers of kindness to help each other when it's needed, offers of clothes, homes, buses, rainbow colours and love to the snails.

"a bus for the snail, he will go faster" Shae

Penelope, Shae, Jack and Finn are keen to make homes for the snails.

"It needs to be in the forest, he will be happy there" Penelope

"All of this is a great forest. Inside the forest is the child. The forest is beautiful, fascinating, green and full of hopes, there are no paths. Although it isn't easy, we have to make our own paths, as teachers and children and families, in the forest. Sometimes we find ourselves together within the forest, sometimes we may get lost from each other from far across the forest, but its living together in this forest that's important" LORIS MALAGUZZI



Afternoon enquiry supported by Sue

‘My power goes past my heart’



Through the collaborative sharing of ideas and experiences, children's theories surrounding growth have transformed into many opportunities that have been explored throughout this academic year. An evolution of ideas from butterflies inside cocoons to the inner life of onions progressed and children became focussed on the possibilities of what is inside their own bodies.

The established concepts of blood, muscles and bones soon made way for more elusive ideas of what our imagination is and the forces involved that makes our bodies move.

Whilst the concept of imagination and its role in their lives was significant;

“your imagination is in your brain and you’ve got lots of memories in your brain”

“my imagination works when the food moves”.

What became increasingly important to the children's enquiries and interests was a particularly evocative exploration of power within their own and one another's bodies.



“power is – it goes through your hands and you have fly power, you have handstand power and at the moment I’ve got freeze power”

Through movement, the children have developed theories surrounding the movement of power through their bodies;

“Body moves” became an important medium



from which the group explored the concept of power; the colour of power and its directionality;

“it’s through my head and down my arms and to my feet”

“blue power is really big and it goes to your power – my power goes to the purple one”.

This notion that power can be shared and transferred between one another was explored through a range of forms including digital technology, graphical representations and movement;

“power goes round and round to each other person’s power, it shoots out really big massive bits”,

“do you mean to my power?”

“and your power shoots to little bits of my power”

“my power goes past my heart, into my head and makes my imagination work”



Afternoon enquiry supported by Julie

Connections with nature



This group came together to work on their keen interest in mini beasts.

The initial focus was to bring the children together so they could work alongside others. The children began to notice reciprocal ideas and feel the pleasure of working together.

We worked mainly in the wild area.

“it’s mumma, he likes it in his house”

Children connected things they know about they enjoy familiarity.

Family was a recurring theme.

Two Baby one, Mummy one, Daddy one”

“It’s a baby, it needs its mumma and Dad”



Children enjoyed sharing ideas about what the creatures might need.

“They need wood to eat, woodlice need it”

Working in the wild area offered space for children to be alongside, to watch each other and hear.





The shared love of the creatures gave the group a bond. They often worked in silence, communicating with their movements or a gesture.

The care for the mini beasts created a wealth of metaphors of transformation from the real to the imaginary.

“I’m a worm like him”

Children started to move their bodies through the long grass.

“I’m finding my home.”



Thank you for supporting the school's ongoing school improvements; through developing and embedding the school values, principles and aims.

Our aim is to create and celebrate a community of learning where there are endless possibilities to discover together through curiosity, creativity and play.

The school is a place of citizenship - being part of a strong community

Our school is an integral part of the community. It is a place where every child, family and educator has both a right and responsibility to contribute to and support their community. *We define community as being both immediately located around the school and stretching out to include the wider global community. We believe that citizenship encompasses people and cultures as well as environments and ecologies. That as citizens, children should be creators of culture not passive consumers.*

The school is a place of research

Working together to question and improve, our school is a place where children, families and educators work together to improve the quality of learning and teaching experiences, therefore promoting high aspirations, levels of well-being, good dispositions and achievement for all. *We believe that a researching school relies on developing a 'listening pedagogy, where all protagonists collaborate and co-operate in reflective dialogue, respecting and encouraging different opinions and ideas, being open to change and innovation.*

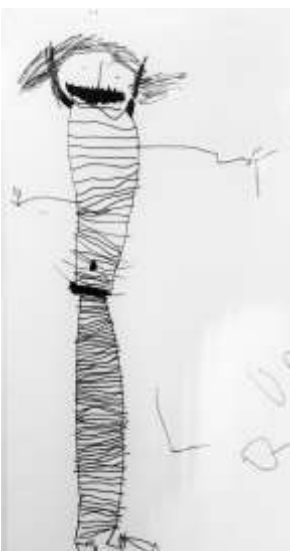
The school is a place of partnership with children and families

We consider that a genuine, respectful and active partnership between children, their families and the school are central to successful learning. *This principle is interrelated and underpins the other school principles and reflects our relational and community ethos. Partnership involves parents, families and staff working together to benefit children in relationships where each recognises, respects and values what the other does and says. Partnership involves responsibility on both sides.*

The school is a place where every child is viewed as competent and full of potential

All children have an innate ability to learn from birth. We believe that every child has an incredible capacity to learn and develop through engagement with others and with the world. *This principle has inclusion and diversity at its heart and is made visible through the pedagogical approaches of the school. Where learning is seen as crossing the borders that separately define disciplines, curriculum and concepts.*

Promoting these values



- ◇ Pro-social behaviours
- ◇ Self-regulation
- ◇ Collaboration
- ◇ Equality
- ◇ Compassion
- ◇ Creativity and innovation
- ◇ Confidence
- ◇ Exploring the world
- ◇ Effective communication
- ◇ Resilience and perseverance