

Relationships and Connections



Madeley Nursery



"It's a Sad Tree, it's Crying"



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THE PROJECT RESEARCH began in autumn when seasonal change in our garden provided opportunities for exploration of falling, decaying leaves, bare trees, shrubs and bushes. Children were aware of the educator's intentionality to look and look again at what is always so present in daily life of the garden space. I had the challenge to make the familiar unfamiliar. The spring offered different provocations for growth and change.

Cameras, mark making materials, microscopic viewers and beans to germinate, were offered as resources to develop project enquiry and provoke curiosity. Within this prepared environment children began to reveal their interests.

A child cradled a decaying leaf in her hand and under the magnifier looked closely at holes and blemishes. The child had made a connection with its physical and emotional well-being.

"He's got an infection, he's got a little bite – he's had an ant injection".

I was interested in further research with the children in support of an enquiry about how they make connections with other living things and the



nature of these connections. I was interested to find out what lay beneath initial responses from one group that the tree has branches that look like arms or the knots in its trunk drew a parallel to eyes. What was it that fostered emotional connections between the children and plants? Why it was so important the children visited it again and again and again

Both groups of children developed different curiosities but in the similar direction of empathy and connection to nurturing and caring for the living plants and trees. The group who attended in the morning identified with a particular tree in the nursery garden which they had perceived as 'poorly' and 'sad'. Subsequently the tree developed an identity and an inner life which mirrored their own human needs both physically and emotionally.

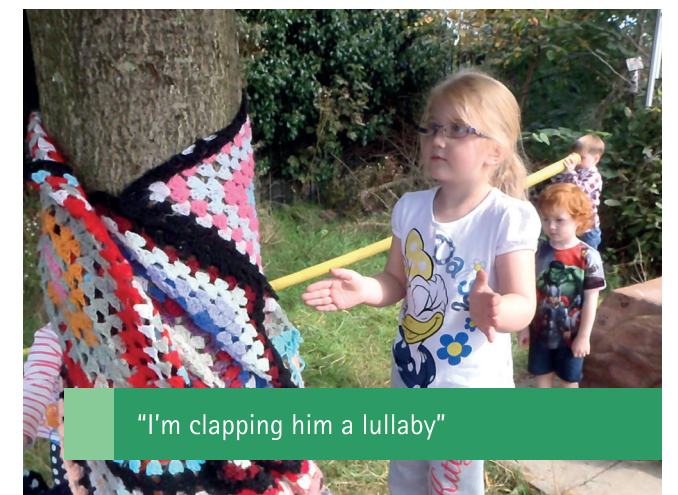
"He's poorly because he's got loads of cracks."

"I'm hugging him, he's cold, he hasn't got a blanket. I'm clapping him a lullaby, just clapping him to sleep."

It was possible ideas related to their own desires to be cared for and nurtured created a notion that these needs of the children and trees were



"He's had an ant injection"



"I'm clapping him a lullaby"



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interdependent and couldn't exist alone. Children's desire to nurture and make the tree better motivated the group to communicate and work together, testing ideas, reflecting and revisiting.

The children have a sophisticated range of vocabulary that was enriched through enquiry and which enabled them to articulate their thinking and hypotheses about inner functions of themselves and the tree and how they communicate and interrelate.

"I was drawing red with the blood; it was turning blue when I was blue. That's the tree it's poorly inside me."

A similar curiosity developed amongst another group which focused on the inner life of germinating plants we were growing. I heard theories about being fed and watered, sleeping, blood systems, breathing, the heart, brain and lungs.

One child commented as he watered a very thirsty, wilted bean plant:

"My one is sad because he hasn't drunk the water up – his body's not happy".

It is possible that connections were being identified based on personal experiences of how



"His body's not happy"

children's own physicality is related to emotional well-being and that these interrelations do not exist only in people.

Another child made a drawing of her ideas about how the inside of the tree may look and feel.

"This is me drawing in my imagination. I see green blood and it turned yellow and I looked inside. That's its brain and it couldn't breathe. We pretended to be Doctors then he died."

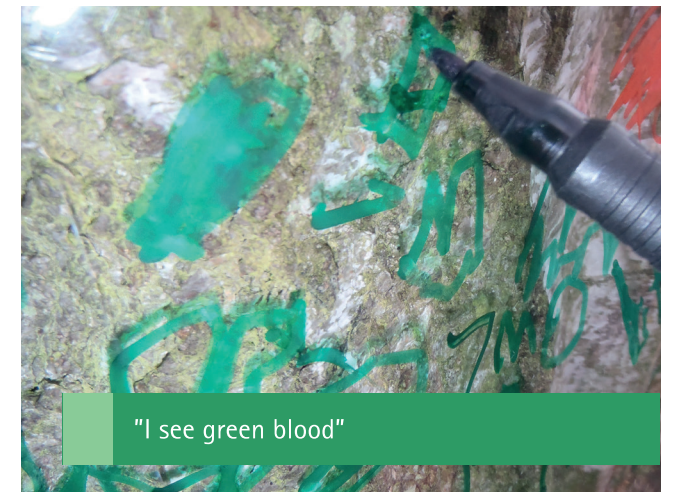
Children writing and drawing their own theories was an important element of the projects visibility through documentation, they became authors of their own learning. The accessibility of their work and its visual presence within the teaching area supported thinking and dialogue amongst the groups and children made constant reference to it.

Towards the end of the project a child took her notepad up to the tree and as she wrote she commented:

"The tree's asking me a question. WOW look at the trees ideas. It said to me how do we grow up? So he can grow up like us. I will make some project work at big school and when I visit you I will give it you."



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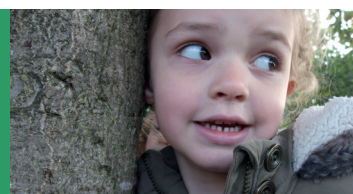


"I see green blood"



"WOW look at the trees ideas"

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Again I am made aware of the sensibilities, the energy and the competencies of children and their ability to reflect and use acquired knowledge to revisit and reawaken their own enquiries in a richer cycle of learning and a quest to understand themselves in relation to others. This project has reminded me of how powerful children are as documenters able to record and hold ideas through writing, drawing and photography. This documentation is a platform to give a value and visibility to their ideas.

It is also important to acknowledge that as educators we have an important role to facilitate and support children in sharing their ideas and engage colleagues and parents in the spirit of exchange where all contributions are valued. This requires sensitivity in how we interact and use documentation as a provocation to hear and debate and think about the 'what next', both alongside children and in a pedagogical dialogue.

I have become more aware of the complexity of the children's relationship between their ideas and their emotional state of mind or well-being. Sometimes the tree laughed, felt sad or alone or poorly. As an educator there was never a point in which this became a linear narrative progressing towards a certain conclusion.



"The tree is telling me ideas"

The tree did not get better because the arrival of spring had brought new growth. Maybe it is that the permanency and stability of its presence in the garden enabled the children to feel safe in the transient and complex states of just being?

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