

' A critical analysis of creative development placement based tasks.'

Consider the contribution creative development may make to the education of young children, illustrating your discussion with explicit examples of an activity/activities you planned in nursery and making clear reference to the Early Learning Goals.

Critically analyse at least one activity giving attention to content, organisation, your role, the appropriateness of the activity and the quality of children's experience in relation to your planned intentions. You should make clear and explicit reference to the response of at least one child if possible, identifying targets for their future needs.

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According to HMI (DES 1985:17, cited in Rodger 1999, p. 128) creative development is concerned with,

" the capacity to respond emotionally and intellectually to sensory experience: the awareness of degrees of quality; and the appreciation of beauty and fitness for purpose."

Creativity allows children and adults to express ideas and feelings in a personal and unique way. Although being creative can be seen as a uniquely human characteristic, if children are to develop their abilities in this area they must be provided with the opportunities that allow them to explore and experiment helping them to gain confidence to express their ideas in a way which is uniquely their own. This is facilitated in the nursery classroom where a rich and stimulating environment is provided helping children to generate and develop their creative ideas supported by sensitive and responsive adults.

The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000) states how creative development contributes to the education of young children.

" Creativity is fundamental to successful learning. Being creative enables children to make connections between one area of learning and another and so extend their understanding." (p. 116)

Creative development covers variety of different subjects, including art, music, dance, role-play and imaginative play. For the purpose of this essay I will be looking at the subject of art, and two art (creative) activities planned and taught whilst on placement in a nursery setting.

Peter (1996) stated that in order for teachers to plan appropriate art experiences, contributing to the education of young children, they need to be able to identify the general stage of development in art, that their pupils are at. Peter suggested that there are four stages of development in art, the Scribbling Stage that occurs between the ages of six months and four, the Pre-Schematic/ Symbolic Stage between the ages of four and seven, the Schematic/ Emerging Analytic Stage that occurs between the ages of seven and nine and the Stage of Visual Realism/ Analytic Stage that occurs between the ages of nine and twelve. As we are focussing on art in the early years the stage of most relevance is the Scribbling Stage from six months to four years.

The Scribbling Stage is the earliest form of artistic expression and is usually characterised by mark making which becomes more controlled as the child develops. At the beginning of this stage scribbling is random and is done with either hand and their concentration span is short. The value to the child is having the tactile experience and practicing the physical action from the shoulder. As the child develops the scribbling becomes more controlled and a 'grasp and push' action is used, rather than a whole arm movement. As children use smaller actions they begin to use a variety of marks, such as straight lines and curves when drawing and painting. When printmaking children will manipulate materials that will make impressions, make marks with body parts and print with objects and found sources. When making collages children will often observe and spread glue on to a surface and place prepared items in an irregular arrangement. Children in this stage are also developing sculpture and 3D

skills, manipulating rigid and malleable materials, moulding simple shapes and sticking found objects together. As children's learning and skills develop they move through the stages, but to ensure children are motivated a balance is needed between familiar activities in which they express themselves confidently and new activities to present them with fresh challenges.

Before planning my art (creative) activities I was aware of the stage of art development that the children were at. I was also aware of individual children's needs and ensured that I planned for these. Over the placement I planned and taught many creative activities, but for this essay I will concentrate on two activities that I feel contributed to the advancement of the children's learning.

The topic for the half term was Hands and Feet and the art activity focussed on painting. As a whole class we read the book 'Not Now, Bernard', we discussed what happened and what type of footprints monsters may make. I then explained to the children that they were going to paint their own monster using different coloured powder paints and to help them I painted a monster and explained to them what my monster was like. The objectives for the lesson were, to practice painting skills, to use own ideas to create a painting and to use relevant language to describe their painting.

The children were then called, three at a time, to the creative table to paint a picture of a monster. Some of the children were at the beginning of the Scribbling Stage and were only able to scribble with their brush. Other children who were further on in their art development and used the 'grasp and push' action were able to use lines to enclose a space and make shapes to represent parts on the monsters body which is a stepping stone moving towards the Early Learning Goal for exploring media and materials.

These children showed signs of using what Lewis (1966) called 'mandalas' or 'magic circle'. These 'mandalas' are what children begin to draw at age three or four when they are growing out of free scribbling and are the first drawings of people. Mandalas are usually a circle with lines for body parts and marks for facial features. These children are moving towards the Pre-Schematic/ Symbolic stage of development in art.

One child who was able to control her paintbrush well and drew 'mandalas' copied my painting of a monster from memory. She remembered the shape and surprisingly she remembered the colours I had used. Another child had remembered what the monster looked like from the story 'Not Now, Bernard' and instead of using the primary colours that had been put out he mixed the colour purple independently from memory. Other children were very imaginative and painted very individual paintings. They were able to describe what their monster looked like as well as what type of monster it was, for example, scary, naughty, this describing meant that the activity involved another area of learning, Communication, Language and Literacy.

The activity went well and most children were able to meet the lesson objectives. All children were able to practice their painting skills, most children used their own ideas to create a painting of a monster whilst others painted monsters from memory, both of which help to develop children's learning. Some children found describing their painting/monster difficult as they did not have the relevant language skills, but when asked questions about their paintings they were able to answer well. Individual targets were set but all the children need more opportunities to paint using their own imagination and ideas.

The way the activity was organised meant that the task could be introduced and explained to the children as a whole class. Then having three children at a time the activity could be controlled and supervised well, giving the children opportunity for one to one help and guidance if needed. Throughout the activity my role was to use effective teaching strategies to help the children progress in their learning. During the activity I used modelling skills, different forms of questioning, explaining strategies and I continually encouraged and praised the children.

The activity was extremely appropriate as it linked well to the topic for the half term, it had clear objectives which related well to the stepping stones and the early learning goals, the children were developing their art skills and confidence in the subject enhancing their education and most of all enjoying themselves whilst learning.

The second activity, again based on the topic of Hands and Feet looked at a different aspect of art, collages. For one week we looked at the story 'The Elves and the Shoe Maker' and looked at shoes for the week. The activities for the week had the theme of shoes. For this particular activity the children were able to choose and outline of a shoe pre-drawn, either a high heel or a trainer. They were then able to pick different squares of material and glue them on to their shoe (collage). The task was explained to the children as a whole class and then three children at a time were chosen to do the activity. The objectives for the lesson were to choose colours or materials, to describe how things felt, to use own ideas when placing materials and to practise gluing skills.

Some of the children stuck the squares of material outside the shoe outline at first but through discussion and questioning they understood that the material needed to go inside the outline. One child went to the Shoe Shop in nursery and got a shoe to copy a pattern on the side and the colour of the shoe, she had remembered from playing in their that the shoe was different from the others and had a pattern on it. Some of the children chose different colours and materials, whilst other children stuck to one colour or one type of material. One child that stood out chose red paper and ribbed card and she did a pattern repeating it over the shoe shape, she needs more opportunities to make patterns using a range of materials.

All of the children were able to put glue onto their material and stick it down, but some children put the glue on the wrong side of the paper. A target was set for these children to practise gluing on the opposite side to the side they want to show/see.

The activity went well and the children enjoyed designing their own shoe. All the children met three out of the four learning objectives, they were able to choose colours and materials, use their own ideas when placing materials and they practised their gluing skills. The objective that most of the children found it difficult to describe was how things felt. They had a limited range of vocabulary, even though we had previously covered the subject. Suggesting describing words and asking the children if I was correct worked well as it helped some of them to recall words from previous lessons, other children were still unable to answer. In order for children to move further up the stepping-stones towards the Early Learning Goal for exploring media and materials they must begin to describe the texture of things. For the children who find this difficult more opportunities are needed for them to develop their ideas and vocabulary.

Again the introduction and organisation of the activity worked well as the routine was used as in the previous activity. The children knew what to do and I was able to work well with three children at a time. My role during this activity was to explain the task again, to model what the children were to do by showing them a shoe I had designed. I continually asked the children about why they were choosing a certain colour or type of material and what it felt like, and if they were unsure I would tell them what I thought it felt like using describing words.

The lesson was extremely appropriate as it linked well to the topic Hands and Feet and to the mini topic of the week 'The Elves and the Shoe Maker'. Again the objective, like the previous activity, related well to the stepping-stones and the early learning goals. Through the collage the children were carrying out an effective and useful activity, which Morgan (1988) suggests 'is a link between visual and tactile experience.' (p. 74) Through this activity the children were not only exploring and experimenting with ideas and materials, but also developing practical and essential skills that are the basis for the rest of their education.

These activities have shown that the experience of art (creative development) contributes to the education of young children in many ways. It provides essential links and connections to help children develop life skills. Through art children can develop the ability and confidence to bring practical skills to a range of problems, sometimes in other subject areas. Whilst I was on my placement a child who really enjoyed the creative aspect of learning, who was still at the scribbling stage, worked extremely hard on a piece of work and was continually praised through out the day. As her confidence grew, due to being praised for her artwork, her confidence and interest in other areas of learning grew. Children are able to develop and assess their own and others ideas, and choose what materials tools would best fit a job/task. Children are able to build up knowledge about the world around them through their senses by trial and error in art, using their own ideas and methods what ever their abilities/needs. Overall children enjoy art because it is fun, there are no rules to follow, they are free to explore, experiment, express themselves and learn by discovering things for themselves.

Barnes (1987) suggested just how important art is,
" To be involved in creative activity is to confront how we feel about things. Expressing a mood, emotion, or temperament through art becomes as valid as responding to another person, a moving sight, or a meaningful experience. Both responding and expressing through art puts us in touch with qualities, which are part of what make us human. As such they give special significance and meaning to what we see with our eyes and the inner of the mind. They touch on part of us that nothing else can." (p. 1)

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