

# clay

Knowle West Childrens Centre  
Bristol

by Rodney Harris & Robin Taylor





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A partnership between a childrens centre, clay and an artist.

### Clay Artist: Rod Harris.

I aimed to play and engage children, practitioners and parents in claywork and was keen to explore how it might evolve in terms of creativity, communication and community.

### Knowle West Childrens Centre:

We wanted to explore the relationship between an artist and children's creativity. Using Rod's artist's knowledge and skills, we hoped to develop our confidence, deepen our thinking, and enrich our provision.

# beginnings

## *relationships*

We met at Spike Island Artist studios to play together.

## *playful attitudes*

Herds of blind elephants, tallest towers, giant sausages and going on holiday, all made from clay.

## *materials*

Rod nurtured our confidence with using the clay, helping us overcome inhibitions about our creativity.

We focused on the process of manipulating clay in unusual ways, simply enjoying its open-ended nature, hoping to carry this back to the Childrens Centre.





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# discovering

“Imagine a world where our children are engaged in serious creative play”, Penny Hay.

To begin with we gave the children time and space to play with clay.

touching

feeling

tasting

smelling

squeezing

poking

rolling

scratching

bashing

and so on.

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# telling stories

“It is in their themes, characters and plots that children explain their thinking”, Vivien Gussin Paley.

## ***crafting sounds***

When playing with clay we talk, and sometimes the children use the clay to animate their words and thoughts. These words grow into stories that change and shift with new ideas. Sometimes children arrive at the clay and take the story to a different place.

“Mitchell made a big pile of clay, Jayden called it a flat, Ben thought it was a triangle, but it needed a ladder...”.





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# practice and practitioners

“Creativity becomes more visible when adults are more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results they achieve”, Loris Malaguzzi.

## *thinking...*

## *tools*

We just use our hands because tools restrict our response to the material, intimacy, imagination and physicality of clay.

## *silence*

Not asking children what they are making, sitting in silence and waiting for the children to talk, allows children to lead and suggest themes, stories and ideas.

## *journey*

Clay is an open-ended material with no fixed destination, the practitioner can follow children's leads helping to construct and interweave ideas. The adult role is to make the language and claywork more complex.

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# reflections

“Fantasy play provides the nourishing habitat for the growth of cognitive, narrative and social connectivity in young children”,  
Vivian Gussin Paley.

## ***playful attitude***

The best thing about clay is that it is open ended. Children must revisit clay, coming back many times to develop their confidence in using the material as a resource for their imagination and expression.

## ***talk and childrens narratives:***

Childrens ideas and talk is the starting point, allowing stories to emerge and grow, connecting ideas including your own. This captures the rich potential of clay.

## ***what next?***

We are going to use these ideas as compass points to guide us. We are learning how an artist can enrich our understanding of working with young children.



# next

There is still much to be discovered, learned and discussed. We plan to explore further work with parents, community, history and place. We are seeking ways for different voices to be heard.

"It is not art and does not look for infant art, but possesses a way of seeing that marvels and feels emotion on observing things". Loris Malaguzzi

## Bibliography:

Loris Malaguzzi, The Hundred Languages of Children.

Penny Hay, 5x5x5

Vivian Gussin Paley "A Child's Work, The Importance of Fantasy Play".









Exploiting the rich potential of clay in a children's centre.

