

A close-up photograph of a child's hands, heavily coated in white flour, playing with dough on a wooden surface. The child is wearing light blue denim overalls. The background is softly blurred, showing more dough and flour. The overall scene is warm and playful.

The Curiosity  
Approach™

They just  
played today



Today I had the privilege of covering a year 2 class at the school that I work... usually I teach in the nursery with children ages 3-4.

Being in that classroom took me back to a few years where I was not just teaching year 2 but managing and leading the whole EYFS and KS1.

I had my children, became a mother and decided to take a step back from management for a while (but that's another story)...

I was left a lesson plan and a very large pile of worksheets from their teacher..." this is for subtraction" she said "and if they finish this they can move onto this text book".

I had a look through the planning for that week and noticed that it was mostly the same style.

I decided to teach them the same objective but in a different way. A way in which a lot of teachers, unless they have worked in the early years, usually greet me with shock and horror...

I let them play! Well... role play.

I taught subtraction through money... the practical experience of handling money. Something I would like to think most children have seen and done so in 'real life' situations.

I gave the children ownership on the learning- what kind of shop shall we open? After a class discussion they decided a bakery.

They spent their literacy lesson making salt dough cakes and biscuits and loaves of bread for their bakery - continuing to develop their fine and gross motor skills which at the ages of 7-8 they still need to do... as I sat back and observed the learning, I made a note of which children could share and measure the ingredients, which children could use their speech and language skills to talk about and discuss what kind of item to make and how.

I noticed which children had baked before as they talked about their home experiences and which children needed some support in identifying the shape cutters they were allowed to chose if they so wished.

After their creations, we discussed how much the items should be worth... they debated the cost of a whole loaf of bread to one small biscuit. They all came up with the menu and fair and accurate pricing. They collaborated and worked together.

Even the child which I was warned at the beginning by a few other teachers 'can be trouble' was engaged, interested and clearly enjoying the lesson so far.

They used pen, scissor and number skills to create price tags and price the items. And I was able to observe which children were able to understand and use decimals in their pricing and which children hadn't got there yet.

After a reluctant break (none of them wanted to leave their learning) we opened up shop! The children decided on who should start off as the shop keepers and who would be the customers. They were given a variety of coins to make their purchases and I could observe which children could add up 2 or 3 items and pay for them and which children were still needing support with that.

The shop keepers gave out change and I could observe which children could subtract accurately and which children were still working on their understanding of that.

They swapped roles, they play - ate, they communicated, they acted, they laughed, they argued over money and debated if they were either given the correct amount of money or not.

They checked to see who was right.

At the end of the morning I could not only tell their teacher who could subtract, but who could add, communicate, who's motor skills needed to be developed and who were secure, who could share, who was inclusive, who could turn take, who knew decimals already, who needed support with their number recognition, who could name shapes 3D and 2D, who could measure the ingredients, who could work as a team, who could write the menu and spell the items, who was good at debating, who was creative with their salt dough... the list goes on.

And although I may have facilitated this learning, it was the children who were independent in it.

Now tell me, what would I have got out of these children by giving them their worksheets?

A much cleaner classroom... but much less learning.

It always amazes me that by the time these young children are in year 2 there is no opportunity for them to learn through 'play' and what struck me in the heart is how much all these children thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and how much they gained from it.

The difference observing my little ones in the nursery to how these children have grown and are still competent, independent learners if they are just given the chance to do that.

How much more these 'older' children get out of a learning experience like this with their developed communication, social and numeracy skills.

But hey, they just played today.



# About the Writer

Our author is 'The Creative Teacher'

They prefer to stay anonymous when writing about experiences they have had.

The creative teacher trained as an early years specialist and has been working as a teacher and leader for over 20 years across London, Surrey, Berkshire and internationally.

She is a mother to two girls under 3 and is a passionate advocate for a curriculum change across the UK that enhances children's creativity, learning and personal and social development holistically all the way from Nursery to Year 6.

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