

“Building Relationships”

by Robin Booth



How do children start friendships?

How does our connectedness to those people around us influence what we do and who we are?

And what small gesture of sharing can lead to the building of a relationship?

Zayren was new to the school. After watching the older children (4 to 5 years older than himself) exploring the medium of clay, we asked him what he felt like doing.

Teacher: *“Zayren, What would you like to do?”*

Zayren: *“Hmm....I want to play with the clay.”*

Teacher: *“Okay. Here is the clay. How much would you like.”*

Zayren: *“Can you give it to me. I don’t know how to take it out (of the bag.) I haven’t played with it before.”*

Teacher: *“Here we go. I will hold the bag.”*

Zayren: *“I want it mushy, like they have it. How do you make it like that. Can you make it like that for me?”*

Teacher: *“Perhaps one of the other children can explain how they made their clay mushy.”*



At this point Zayren was still not part of the group. He looked about himself not sure how to approach these older children in their play.

After a little while the teacher responded.

Teacher: *“Perhaps Jessica can explain it to you.”*

At this point the process moved on with its own momentum.

Jessica: *“You need a bowl... no something bigger, that can hold water. Then you break it into smaller pieces...like this.”*



While Jessica explained the process, Zayren was drawn into the pleasure of connecting to other people. Here someone was sharing ideas, making meaning, a pure demonstration of caring. He was no longer an outsider. There was a creation of a sense of belonging.

For the rest of the day he stayed by Jessica’s side. It was clear that this little incident had had a great impact on him.

Teacher: *“In reflecting back on this relationship building, I often wonder what would have happened if I had mentioned another child’s name to show him how to make the clay and not Jessica’s. What has been my role in influencing this connection? My teaching is not an objective process. I bring my values, my meaning-making and my subjective view of the world into my interactions with the children. It is through this interaction that we create an authentic culture of living and learning. Together.”*

We help make one another who we are by how we treat one another. We seek out relationships that nurture our sense of self worth. We wish to create a sense of being connected to other people.

How do we as teachers and parents recognise the importance of these moments? How do we as educators support this process of ‘life’ learning? How do we provide spaces and ample opportunities for children and adults to explore these relationships? It will be these things that children will remember when they have forgotten their multiplication tables and scientific formulas.

