

Doing the washing



Xanthe, at 13 months, you have reached that wonderful age where you are capable of mimicking the everyday activities you have been observing your whole life. You do this so accurately, showing what close attention you have been paying whilst perched on my hip all this time.

Today, it was putting towels in the tumble drier. First came the challenge of loading in the towel – lots of fabric to bundle up and shove in. Then, shut the door. Put your hand on the dial, just like mumma does. Watch the results through the drier window. Open the door, check the towel. Close the door, watch it tumble. Open, close, open, close. You concentrated intently on your work. Fully closing the door was too difficult, but you found that leaning in on the door had the same effect, with the machine rumbling into action.

We spent a good fifteen minutes at the drier – I got some lovely video of you moving through the rhythm of open, check, close. It was lovely to have the time to just stand back and let you achieve your intentions.

What learning was happening here?

Professor Alison Gopnik says that babies and young children ‘know, observe, explore, imagine and learn more than we would have ever thought possible. In some ways, they are smarter than adults.’ She describes them as young scientists and philosophers, conducting experiments and coming up with their own working theories of the world. Taking time to explore real world objects – such as the drier – is a part of how babies and young children learn about the world around them. Today, you might have been testing out ideas of cause and effect (the door closes, the drier starts), or learning about your own agency in the world (I can make the drier start by closing the door).

Gopnik also notes that ‘what children observe most closely, explore most obsessively and imagine most vividly are the people around them.’ So maybe this was the focus of your play – testing out the action you’ve seen mum and dad do countless times. What does it feel like to do their job? Can I do it too? It’s lovely to see you becoming more capable and active in the world. I’m excited to follow your lead as you decide what to do next.

xx mumma, 14 July 2012