

How does questioning begin?

Teacher: Lorraine Sands, November 2005



We wonder about this. What is it that sets our babies on this curious path of discovery and how can we be supportive resources? For some time now we've been thinking of babies in the same way as our toddlers and young children – as researchers – learners who make discoveries about the world through investigation.

So with this view of the infant researcher in my head, over several months now I've been watching Ruby closely and I think she gives us a clue. As with all our very young babies we give them a safe, interesting place to stretch and move as they choose at the end of our infant room. There are a range of textures to explore and, at this very beginning, it provides a cosy place for family and child to get to know their new setting. ...Something happens here. As I watched Ruby's sense of belonging deepening – establishing that this was an interesting, ok place to be – she started to explore. Now, my view wasn't from a Key Teacher's perspective as I'm not in that privileged position, only as a teacher on the fringe, so to speak, as I interacted with older children, teachers and families nearby. But Ruby's activities have been hard not to notice. In retrospect, I think she's been planning her escape!!

Isn't it just as well we give her plenty of space and time to choose where and when she wants to move? And out those doors at the end was the goal! I began to see her sitting outside the infant doors watching the pace of life around her and working those physical muscles to get enough persistent traction to get up the ramp and into the toddler play space inside. The perseverance was noteworthy. Does an Olympic athlete train as hard?

The first time I saw her actually make it inside, the look of satisfaction was ecstatic. Her whole body seemed to quiver with excitement and her face lit up with that 'Ruby smile' that you both know and love so well. She'd seemed to by-pass our new natural infant garden, of such interest to many others, in favour of that long hall directly up the ramp and inside. How does this happen? Such focus and determination for a pre-set goal so early! I wonder what this might mean for Ruby, as she grows and builds on this 'disposition of persistence'

and turns her considerable focus towards other learning goals. I knew on that first day that she knew she'd achieved a worthy goal - her whole body language conveyed this without me having to double guess and if I needed any further proof it was the way she explored in that spot, just by the low library books and block shelves, for a very long time. Although activity occurred around her and she watched and listened, she actually stayed quite stationary for all the time she was there, just moving a little to reach blocks or books.

We often see her make this journey now and more recently Ruby has turned her attention to 'direct ascent', no longer content with the gradual slope of a ramp. I came into the toddler area on Wednesday to see the back view of a little head lined up on the long, wide stair with a group of interested toddlers. These stairs had been made especially as a response to our toddlers who were dragging anything they could to climb on so they could look out of the window at the arrivals in the car park. The head heights were relatively even on the stair till the end as Ruby came up to the last child's shoulder. I got a real surprise and my first thought was 'who is that?' What an 'extreme sport' was my initial reaction!

I didn't feel quite so comfortable about that little risk-taking venture so I moved closer just in case she toppled. What a foolish fear! She'd been practicing this for weeks and knew just where she was in space and time and the other children were also practiced in standing there without bumping each other too, so all was well.

What learning was happening here?



Had Ruby been planning this? Who's to say but she certainly described to me with her body language that a special goal had been achieved. Had we been listening to her questions? I think maybe we were because we have built a setting that supports curious endeavour and we have a rhythm to the day that gives infants time to sort out what they want to explore. Teacher/child ratios are a key aspect to ensuring safety, coupled with responsive teachers but I think most especially our view of 'the infant' as a confident, capable learner allows for children's diverse interests to be supported. Jo tells me that Ruby has started to climb the outside steps. She seems to be constantly setting goals. I wonder where this natural yearning for exploration will take her.

