

Clay

The strand of clay, as outlined in the primary curriculum, deals primarily with four broad areas:

- exploring and experimenting with clay and with clay tools;
- representing experiences, imaginings or observations using clay;
- experimenting with a range of simple pottery techniques; and
- looking at and responding to art made using the medium of clay.

At infant level the emphasis is placed mainly on the first area ie playing with clay and with allied materials such as plasticine or playdoughs. We should be moving away from the replica-based, once-off product activities towards a more open-ended exploration of clay (where the children are encouraged to explore, talk

about descri work where indivi allow space

own unique pieces – pieces that, to us as adults, may not sometimes be representational.)

A clay session with children



Coil Pottery

“It feels like a melted rock “

- discussing what actions we can perform with clay (pull, push, pinch, squeeze, flatten, roll, etc) and again recording this vocabulary;
- describing what they themselves feel they have created through play;
- pressing found objects and tools into clay to make patterns and textures;
- choosing a theme to work with and having a go at making a variety of things associated with this theme (e.g. animals, food, monsters, etc);
- working with a new ball of clay when the first one begins to get dry (store these in a basin and cover with a damp cloth in order to refresh for further use);
- choosing to make a favourite thing connected to the theme that we might keep, allow to dry and decorate.

The sequence of work outlined above might indeed be applied



Key Message

In order to implement the primary curriculum in full we must use natural clays because:

- only with these clays can we really explore, experiment and engage in process work;
- only with these clays can we make slip thus enabling children to join clay effectively; and
- these types of clay can be recycled thus allowing for more regular work with this medium.

The most widely available types of natural clay are terra-cotta clay and buff clay.

Avoid using nylon-reinforced clay (often commonly referred to as newclay).



Pottery by John Wheeldon

as a model to a clay session at any class level – simply change the theme you are using eg at middle class level use the theme of fruit, at senior class level choose a theme such as 3D shapes (integrate with mathematics) or characters from a class novel (integrate with reading work).

One of the most frustrating aspects of working with clay in the past has been that pieces made fell apart as they were drying – it has been impossible to teach children the correct technique for joining clay as we were in the main using nylon-reinforced clay.

The technique may be summarised in three stages:

- **Score** – roughen the parts to be joined;
- **Slip** – use slip like a glue (slip is simply clay diluted in water, to a gravy consistency);

- **Mould** – press the pieces to be joined firmly together and use your fingers to pull the clay together.

As children move up through the school they need continuous work with clay in order to improve their skills and develop techniques. They need to explore how this medium can be used to make art about their own experiences, about things they imagine and, indeed, about things they have observed. Planning class /school programmes around the idea of exploring themes means that children will use clay in exploring each theme – a far cry from merely using clay once a year. Work with clay might include:

- making models of characters from poems, stories or literature;
- making clay slabs and decorating them with lines,

textures and patterns;

- making clay models of local famous landmarks;
- making models of my family at work and at play.

The curriculum also outlines types of pottery that children can make. The emphasis here should also be on exploring the technique, learning the specific skills involved, practicing making each type of pot, making sample pots and ultimately making a good pot that can be decorated and kept. The types of pottery that can be explored are:

- thumb and pinch pots;
- tiles and plaques;
- coiled pots;
- slab pots.

Planned themes and a pictorial powerpoint on pottery techniques can be downloaded from our website at www.pcsp.ie

Children also need to look at

and respond to the works of artists who work with clay and to discuss the use of clay in making everyday materials. Ireland has a wealth of wonderful potters whose work can, not alone be viewed in galleries, but in our own homes. Older children might be encouraged to study the history of pottery and to look at ceramic art e.g. the willow pattern or the work of an artist such as Claris Cliffe or Pablo Picasso. Older children might also explore designing decorations, motifs or patterns and use ceramic paints to create these on plain white ceramic ware.

Compiled by members of the Visual Arts Team of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. Visit www.pcsp.ie and www.iama-nartist.ie for further information and ideas on clay.