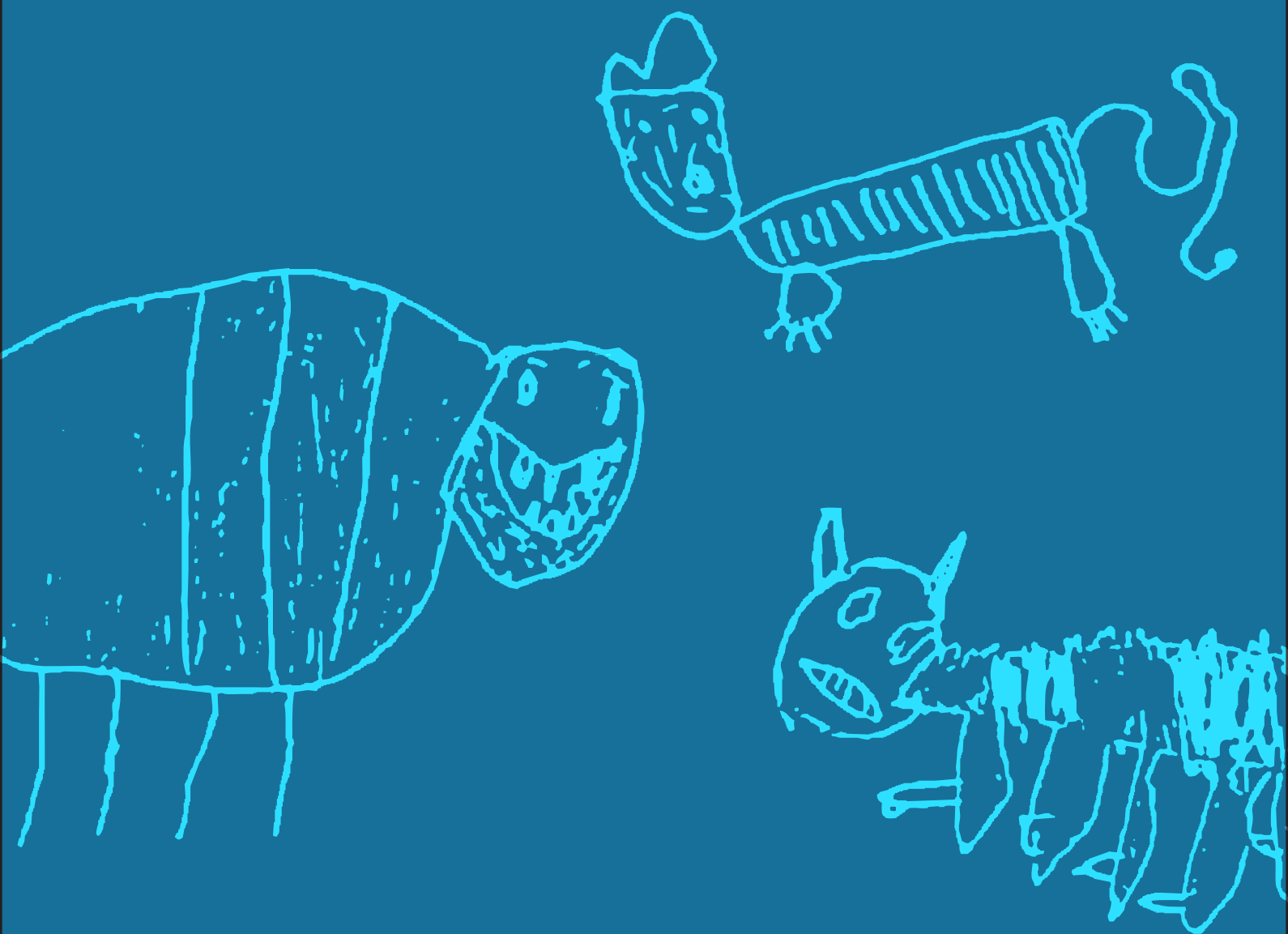


Redesdale Primary School

Powerplay



Tigers?

A group of boys who enjoy playing together start to invent a game. In their close-knit group they often struggle with issues of leadership and control. Their game is observed and recorded.

Nasser: 'I want to catch you!'
Callum: 'Yeah! We're tigers. Grrrrr!'
Nasser: 'Yeah and we're hungry.'
Educator: 'What do tigers eat anyway?'
Callum H: 'Chicken.'
Nasser: 'Grapes.'
Callum R: '...and hats.'
Holly: 'Children.'
Alex: '...and Wellington boots.'
Lauren: 'Stop! Stop! I don't want to be chased!'
Educator: 'Lauren doesn't want to be chased but maybe she could make you something to eat.'
Lauren: 'This box can be the table'
Chloe: 'These can be chairs.'
Alex: 'Cook some grass as well.'
Chloe: 'Okay.'
Lauren: 'I like chicken but I'm busy.'

Calum R: 'The lion lives here!'
Osama: 'Oh no! It's broken.'
Educator: 'I'm sure I saw something leap out of that ball when it cracked open. I wonder what it was?'
Osama: 'I saw a black one, a black Tiger.'
Nasser: 'I can see a black Jaguar.'

The boys' excitement seems to be centred on big cats. The educators join in the game, supporting and maintaining the flow of ideas.



A decision is made to act whilst ideas are most powerful. Chalks are made available enabling the children to transform their ideas into something real that exists with them in the playground where their game has been enacted. By representing their ideas through a concrete medium, visibility and reinvention is possible.

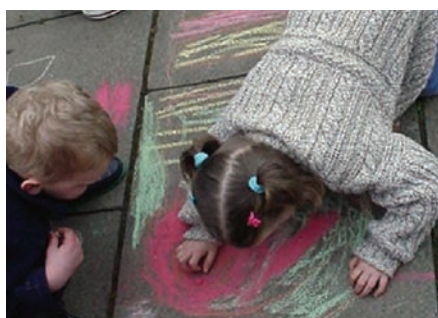


A number of questions arise for the educators concerning the most appropriate way to sustain and extend the boys' delight and interest.

Would the possibility of the children visually representing their imagery offer them an opportunity to develop their ideas?

What medium could be selected for this and when and where should any representation happen?

Would a change of environment break the continuity of their game?



Can this idea be sustained by a group drawing that changes the scale, delivering the boys' strong designs around fear and menace?

The following week this challenge is offered to the group. Though other children take it up, the tiger boys lose interest before long. Other children are drawn in attracted perhaps by the nature of the activity, materials and scale.



The educators reflect on these developments. What is going on? Has the interest of the tiger boys dissipated?

Looking deeper into observations and documentation with the project mentor, (an educator who can offer an outside perspective), the educators develop a theory. Perhaps the boys' interest was focused on their developing concepts of power, of the 'Raaaa' in their game, the fierce and scary? Does this resonate with their own contest for power and leadership within their group?



A change of environment introduces more choices for the educators. Will moving indoors, away from the game, disturb and interrupt the level of engagement observed outside? What to do to maintain it? How can the collective group ideas be preserved?

Roles within the drawing group are provisional and changing as individual skills and competencies became apparent.

Nasser is making his way in a new group. By following the lead and expertise of Callum, he finds a way in.

Nathan too, is keen to be part of the group and makes an enormous effort to engage in the drawing and keep up with the others so that he is included too.

As a group the children develop skills and aptitudes. More experienced children lead the less experienced members and provide the reason for them to stretch themselves.

There are so many possibilities for supporting play but drawing still seems appropriate; it enables work to continue in a group. This will allow the boys to assimilate each other's understandings and make new meaning as they exchange thoughts and ideas. A drawing medium is offered that allows the finer detail that may be a feature of their thinking.



Nasser: 'Mine's a hundred years old. It's fierce – it's going to eat the children.'



Alex: 'Mine's scary – it's a hundred years old, and there's a spider and a moon.'



True education flowers at the point when delight falls in love with responsibility. If you love something, you want to look after it. Common sense has much to learn from moonshine.

Philip Pullman

One suggests something; another takes it up, another incorporates that into his work. They toss ideas back and forth, discussing them, taking, and then relinquishing the lead.

From the original playground game that involved many different wild cats, a tiger emerges as the dominant one, fierce and scary.

Are the boys playing with leadership within the group whilst developing ideas together?



An opportunity to visit the seaside the following week enables the boys to be together again in a group, exploring the beach and rock pools. They invent a game of 'shark' using the rocks as a refuge.

Their fascination in fierce, strong animals is compelling and echoes and reinforces the idea of powerplay identified.



The boys become absorbed in their game, perhaps allowing them to revisit their earlier feelings, unconsciously playing with concepts of power and danger in the safe context of their group game.



The educators discuss how to support the boys developing conceptual understanding and social interplay. How will they preserve and guide group learning and exploration within this context?





Returning to nursery, the children discuss their beach visit and are invited to research the powerful creatures that are the focus of their games.

As part of the broader beach project for the larger group, the boys discuss making a fish for the nursery. Their joint decision is to make a swordfish, the biggest and most powerful creature they could find in the books.

Big and Powerful



A further drawing collaboration is now made easier by previous exchanges and developing group relationships. Their mutual respect and gathering, cumulative knowledge of each other enables a more effective learning group to emerge.



In groups we encounter new perspectives, strategies and ways of thinking that enable us to learn from others. We also learn with others, modifying, extending, clarifying and enriching our own ideas and those of others.

Making Learning Visible





The boys are again actively engaged together with ideas that extend and develop their original interest. They are filled with new information and imagery.

This process of shifting from vying for dominance and being individually powerful, to working as a team, is lengthy one but it is likely that their collaboration in project work has helped them.

The project began in January, and the boys arrived at this understanding in June.

Their contest for leadership abated, perhaps the boys understand that they can work in a team.

Can this new collaboration be supported with another challenge, a communal drawing that will reveal their developing skills, as well as their ability to work together as a group?



The project has provided the boys with an additional focus for working together and extended their thinking as group.

The possibility of collaborative work allowed the growth of sociability and inventing together in friendship, a powerfully motivating factor in their coming to develop their own creative drives and group culture.