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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

Teacher Diary 2

I had decided, early on in my tenure at the school, even though I knew little about it, to introduce clay work to the children. Perhaps I did this because I can remember enjoying the activity when I was at primary school or because there were clays of interesting colours in exposed ridges around the school. We would explore clay work together.

At last the clay was here. We cleared the desks, and the timetable, and began. The children were ebullient. Trevor's first coiled pot rose swiftly and largely, then slumped to the table. He pronounced it a huge success. His next one, though, was more cautiously built and it rose firmly and solidly. The potters talked about form and decoration as they worked. The ebullience became more focused as the work itself appeared to maintain a new control over the individuals. There was a sense of intense satisfaction amongst all; everything seemed in balance – I felt we were surfing. (Only children involved in drama were ever to match the holistic satisfaction evident when children worked with clay.) The children bent to their work.

Then, when completed, we carefully placed the prized objects on the table for drying. We were to be somewhat brought down to earth (to not avoid a pun) when the pots cracked. (The best environment we found was to place them in the dark of the store-room cupboard for slow drying.) However, as potters we were on our way.

In the months ahead, clay work became an important part of our classroom culture. As we persevered and experimented, design became an important issue for the children. We collected red earths from a ridge near the school and made it into slips. Designs were also drawn into the raw surface as well as through the red slip to the cream coloured surface below. Much of the early decoration was clichéd, but I held to my belief of giving children time to work through such issues. And I was rewarded – before long trees and fish gave way to line, mass, colour, and texture expressed in an abstract way.

After a time, a small group of children became recognised as the skilled experimenters, and it was those children who led the advance into large pot construction. 'We'll have to roll coils quite differently,' said Bevin.

They prepared a large bin of clay mixed with shards and raupo and other seed-heads. The handling and thumping down of each coil required new hand techniques. When the coils began to rise on the pot shape it was found most convenient to sling coils over the shoulder so that both hands were free for the moulding. The process gradually assumed a rhythmic pattern as the potters shuffled around their growing pots. The noise of children involved and enjoying themselves went on until they broke off to eat their lunches. They sat around their pots and talked about their experiences, in particular, the satisfactions of clawing handfuls of clay off a pot to trim it to form, and 'bonging' a wall to correct contour.

The children worked out for themselves that the surfaces of the large pots were better if they had textured surfaces, so the shapes were smoothed off without water. They also decided that the surface should not be 'busy', but decorated with a few bold strokes. There was always a large audience during any transformation of clay into pots. Murmurs of approval, and of



reservation, were to be heard. It was a useful forum for the discussion of artistic values.

Two other techniques became popular. The process of pressing clay into plaster mould, smoothing-off, designing, and decorating was quickly grasped by the children; the other technique was clay-pressing which involved pressing many kinds of natural surfaces like bark, leaves, and shells into clay to form, for instance, decorated tiles.

Finally, we gained access to a kiln. The use of the kiln was to be an adventure of triumphs and setbacks. As well, there were the struggles with glazing. There was great excitement amongst the children at both the first firing and the first glazing. Each re-beginning in pottery was different, but each time, even though we became experienced in the processes involved, I attempted to preserve some of the feeling of discovery that we knew at the first firing.



The children were working on some papier mache masks when I noticed a boy wander over to a few wasps congregating on an apple core. 'All workers still, but it won't be long now,' Eric said to his sister. That was the beginning of a prolonged study on wasps.

Towards the end of the study the nest was tracked down by two fathers. It was on a hill behind the disused dairy factory close to the school. Two boys accompanied their fathers. The fathers and their sons found two water sources which wasps visited, and assumed the nest must be between the two. Eric told us of their discovery: 'We followed the wasps up the hill and watched the sky to see the line of flight. The number of wasps increased until we heard the low buzz of the nest in a nearby dry gully bank. The ground seemed to throb.'

David said laconically, 'Eric and his father got too close and they both got stung. Eric got stung twice.' The children paid close attention to the boys' account. 'Those are the guards,' Eric said. 'Those ones. All the ones that fly close around the hole are there on duty. That's why he "got" me.' The study of wasps had taken off again. I took the children for a walk near the nest at a safe enough distance.

Eric and David reported back on their next visit with their fathers. 'We hadn't been digging long before Dad got stung again. We dug out the nest and the rest of the earth. The wasps came storming out and we had to wait for them to settle before we could dig anymore.' 'Then,' said Eric taking up the story, 'we went back on Friday and really got to work.'

Many of the children took it on themselves to visit the nest site in their own time. (I warned them of the dangers but these were country children who display a certain kind of fearlessness. Anyway, I was making observing and interacting with their environment central to their learning and here I was thinking of making them stand back from it.)

Georgia said, 'We have just been up there. The hole is two metres deep and three metres wide and there are chunks and layers all over the paddock, just where they left it. Ann put her finger over one of the cells and wow, she was stung. Mere dug up some of the paper cells and Ann carried them because she had a cold and couldn't smell the stink.'

'I went up there, too,' said Lewi. 'The nest is dead. We saw the queen and the drone. The nest is well dead because of the rain.'

Dead wasps were examined and drawn; a slide of wings was made for projection; various foods were tried to establish which were the best enticements (honey was the best); a diary was made of wasps' preferences and behaviours; microscopes were used for detailed examination; a survey was undertaken to establish whether the day being sunny or dull made any difference to the numbers visiting. Towards the end of the study, the children went to the computer for further information (I keep them away from the computer till their own thinking runs out), with the study being extended to ichneumon flies, horn-tailed wasps, and the yellow wasp. There was, of course, the usual flurry, of poems, descriptions, paintings, lino cuts, and diary entries.

Oh the joy of the incidental being central to the programme.

