

Sometime ago we had a child in our program who presented with some very challenging behaviour. Although much of my work with children has been with children with disabilities and/or challenging behavior, this little girl, whom we shall call Phoebe, needed support from us on a very deep level. I was both professionally and personally challenged by what Phoebe (age 5) presented to us. There had been little glimpses into how we could connect with Phoebe, such as her love of animals. After an inspiring presentation from Sandra Frain where I experienced for myself tree pasting, I decided I would invite Phoebe to work with me on applying tree paste to the trees.

I created a pictorial image for Phoebe to work with and told her that the bark was skin of the tree. We needed to help heal the trees in Periwinkle's garden by putting the healing tree paste on them, like a bandaid from Mother Earth. The tree paste was medicine for the trees and it would help them to grow strong and healthy. Phoebe wasn't afraid to get dirty and neither am I, so together we rolled up our sleeves and began!

I chose to do this with our bare hands, as I felt Phoebe needed to physically engage with the process. She needed to touch the mix of clay, cow manure and sand, and to feel it as she smoothed it over the exposed parts of the trees. As we applied the paste I sang very softly *The Healing Song* (Shea Darian adapted by Sandra Frain). I became very attentive and meditative about the task at hand, and Phoebe imitated beautifully. Phoebe sustained interest in this healing work for some weeks and so we kept it up. Weeks later Phoebe would find a tree at the bottom of the garden with a 'sore' and she would yell, 'Xiola, we have to help this tree.' And help the trees we did!

What I found extraordinary was that this simple process offered this child an opportunity to *connect*. Through this tree pasting, Phoebe began to show empathy in a way that she had been unable to do with her peers. She spoke with such love and warmth to the trees, saying things such as, 'Don't worry tree. We'll look after you. We'll make you better.' She would come across an insect on the tree and with the greatest delight show every one in the playground, and then place it gently back on the tree.

What is beautiful here is how this 'healing work' of tree pasting was deeply symbiotic. Our task was very practical, and yet it was so therapeutic emotionally for Phoebe to engage in this task. She appeared relaxed and absorbed when engaging in this work. Might I add, it was also therapeutic for me to have found a way to really engage with this child!

My work with the young child has affirmed over and over the place that the natural world has in supporting a child to feel connected. For children with special needs, the sense of connection, awe and warmth made in the natural world can be used as the foundations from which to build loving and respectful relationships with other humans.

Thank you Sandra for continuing to inspire my work with children!

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