

## Dressing up, painting faces, and making masks



Today a group of boys came out from the back room, all dressed up.

They asked if they could use the waterpaints and promptly got to work with the paint brushes, applying lipstick, rouge, eye shadow and nail polish.

Giving children the opportunity to explore what it might be like to be someone or something else is important in developing their understanding of themselves and how they, and others fit in to the world around them.



### The next day ...

I thought that their interest in dressing up could be used to design their own costumes and make them, using the sewing machine.



Wiremu chose to make a Batman costume.

He drew a plan of his design, chose the material he wanted to use and set about transforming himself into Batman!



He designed a cape and a mask with ears sewn on to it.

It was Wiremu's interest in dressing up that led me to reintroduce the sewing machine. It is in this way that children's interests guide the centre programme, encouraging them to extend on their ideas by utilising centre materials and equipment.

Wiremu's planning of his Batman costume design enabled him to think about how he wanted his costume to look and how he would go about making it. He cut the material to

his plan and then used the sewing machine to join the pieces together.

Wiremu, I really enjoyed working with you on this project. You had an idea, you considered how you would pursue your task by making a plan, and then you completed your undertaking using the necessary tools.

Jenelle  
March

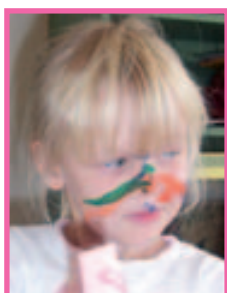
### Painting faces and making masks

Painting faces is an activity children have long loved, but it has also raised issues surrounding children's own creative art experiences.

As a team of teachers we have long felt that adults painting children's faces in an early childhood setting, while it may promote some imaginative play, does not encourage or develop children's own art experiences.

As a result of this thinking we moved towards children painting their own, or each other's faces. However, this raised its own issues ... Can they paint faces whenever they want and with whatever they want? Yes and no! We feel children should be able to experiment with and experience this form of art when they show an interest, but they need to take into account the limitations of time and daily routines. Face painting gives children

the opportunity to practise fine motor skills, develop artistic and creative skills, encounter the unique sensory experience of having their faces painted, as well as giving them the opportunity to develop this art activity into imaginative social play with their peers.



Painting with any paints available to them throughout the centre, however, would not necessarily be appropriate due to the sensitivity of skin. Providing watercolour paint blocks and a mirror to observe their “living art” as

it develops, allows children to take control over this activity – that has long been experienced by children as being teacher directed and “done to” them.

As the children in our centre initiate and participate in this style of face painting, we are noticing a significant leap in their face painting skills and the imaginary play that is evolving from this, in children of all ages.

This interest has led us on to making and decorating plaster-moulded masks of children’s faces.

## The process of making plaster masks



First we applied cream to protect our skin.



Then we moistened the plaster bandage pieces and laid them over our faces.



After leaving the masks to dry for several days we varnished them with a binder medium so the paint wouldn’t soften our masks.



The masks felt funny and we had to breathe through our mouths.



We looked at ourselves in the mirror while we waited five minutes for the mask to dry and go hard.



Finally we decorated our masterpieces.

**Jade's mask is complete!**

Jenelle  
May





### What's happening here?

A group of boys are dressing up and applying waterpaint make-up, exploring and imagining “what it might be like to be someone or something else”. The teachers follow up on the boys’ interest in different identities by encouraging them to design and make their own costumes (using the sewing machine), make masks, and paint each other’s faces.

### What does this assessment tell us about the learning (using an Exploration/Mana Aotūroa lens)?

This exemplar is about imaginary play. The children are involved in choosing and making props for taking on new personas and (as one teacher describes it) “transforming” themselves. They are playing with identity and are also exploring materials and the technology, including a sewing machine, for working purposefully with materials.

### How might this documented assessment contribute to Exploration/Mana Aotūroa?

These excerpts from the children’s assessment portfolios illustrate for the families, and for the children, how the children’s interests and play themes are taken seriously and how play themes can develop in challenging ways: for example, Wiremu “cut the material to his plan and then used the sewing machine to join the pieces together”.

The teacher has also taken the opportunity to reflect on the children’s painting their own faces as part of their imaginary play. The question she raises (“Can they paint faces whenever they want and with whatever they want?”), shared with other teachers at the centre, contributes to the centre developing a thoughtful, reflective practice.

Revisiting these stories invites discussion about the transformation that a different costume and make-up can create. For example, how is the dressed-up character “new”? What might he or she do differently? In what ways might girls be treated differently from boys?

### What other strands of *Te Whāriki* are exemplified here?

Aspects of art and drama, and the technology associated with them, are also demonstrated in this exemplar. These aspects relate to the Communication/Mana Reo strand of *Te Whāriki*. Experimenting with being a different person is also an aspect of exploring *belonging* to a different community.