

Phoebe's puzzling morning

The busy puzzling morning – Part 1

Phoebe often enjoys setting herself the task of solving puzzles. Today she carefully tips out an interesting puzzle that shows lots of pictures about te ao Māori – the Māori world. She turns the pieces over and then is soon absorbed in studying the features of the puzzle. She holds up a comb piece and puts it into the appropriate place, commenting to Ann that she has combs at her house. As she selects hei tiki she wrinkles

her nose in perplexity and wonders what this one could be? Ann talks about the tiki – how it is often made of pounamu (greenstone) and is worn as a necklace. She talks about how the tiki is special. Phoebe is very pleased with this and confides that she wears necklaces sometimes and they are at home.



Phoebe is keen to work from left to right today and sifts through the pieces remaining on the floor for the two fish-hook pieces (hei matau). She holds them up to show Ann, one in each hand. Ann smiles and tells Phoebe she has noticed that Phoebe has chosen two matau for her puzzle – two fish hooks. Ann shows Phoebe the pictures of hei matau on our kindergarten walls and she laughs – “They’re the same! What are they for?” Ann replies that they could be used for fishing – or worn like a necklace – some are made of bone and some of greenstone.

Phoebe nods and says that she likes the colours and the green one on the wall is “sort of swirly” and Ann agrees the photos show how the milky white one is shiny and the green one is a bit more “see-through” than the puzzle shows us.

She explains to an engaged Phoebe that if these sorts of carvings are worn a lot, they absorb oils from your skin and are supposed to take on some of the special spirituality of the person who wears them. She goes on to show Phoebe that some of them are decorated

to show respect for the sea and its creatures. Phoebe comments that it looks beautiful and returns to the task at hand. She puts the tiki poutangata – the ceremonial adze – into place and then scans the walls for one like that. “Look there’s one!” and Ann agrees that Phoebe’s careful eyes have found another tiki poutangata for digging or making the houses or waka. Phoebe puts in the last shaped piece and stops to look at it closely. “That’s funny – what do you do with it?” Ann tells her that the wahaika is a club or a weapon that important Māori chiefs would have used in the old days when fighting a war or defending themselves, but these days it is worn to symbolise trying hard at something that is tricky – like solving puzzles! Phoebe says “I am nearly finished my puzzle” and sets about placing the words in by trial and error to find where they will fit.

Phoebe puts the last piece in, grinning from ear to ear, and notices that Ann has the camera sitting next to her. “I worked hard,” she confides to Ann – “I’ll take a picture of this puzzle.” Ann reminds her how to look at the screen and push the button, which she does.

What learning was happening here?

Phoebe you have taken an active interest in artefacts of Aotearoa that were unfamiliar to you. You showed some interesting strategies to make sense of the visual and auditory information you were interacting with. You could make links between things that were the same at home and at kindergarten. You could compare what was the same and what was different. You



used great skills to engage further with this interest – asking questions, listening closely and explaining your perceptions using descriptive language. You engaged with the task that you set yourself and demonstrated an awareness of the value of finishing it by commenting about this and documenting the finished product with a photo. The photo is great! As you were exploring commonly found traditional artefacts, you were demonstrating a developing sense of yourself as part of New Zealand’s bicultural nation.



The busy puzzling morning - Part 2

Phoebe is having a “puzzling” morning today!

She replaces her taonga Māori puzzle on the shelf and selects herself a puzzle with an array of people pictured. She tips all the pieces out and turns them over – looking at the pieces very carefully. She begins to group the people on the carpet outside the puzzle frame in twos and threes – matching a male and female and then adding one other to the pair – usually a child. When they are all allocated she studies it and then moves some around. When satisfied with her sorting, she begins to replace them in the frame – making assumptions about where they might fit and using trial and error strategies to find the corresponding hole if it didn’t fit ... and then she takes a photo of it when it is finished!



She then gets out a puzzle she has been working on a lot this week – on her own, with the teaching team and with Charlotte – depicting lots of vegetables. “These are healthy,” she comments to Ann as she sets about taking out the pieces, one vegetable at a time, until she has three out each time. She then sets about reassembling the removed vegetables upside down on the carpet. Each vegetable has three pieces and she assembles them all face down – which was quite tricky! Sometimes she peeks at the face of a piece to help her, and sometimes she looks at the hole in the frame to give herself some clues.

What learning was observed today?



Phoebe is using a wide range of criteria to sort and compare information as she takes great interest in the subject matter being depicted and makes the decisions required to solve puzzles. She defines her own criteria and organises the pieces based on shape, subject matter and family groupings. She is using a lot of her prior knowledge to assist her in this work. Phoebe is practising her skill in making spatial judgments in this fine motor activity and is gaining confidence and accuracy. Phoebe you worked very hard today!

What's happening here?

Phoebe is solving puzzles, and she communicates her exploration, her learning about puzzles, and her learning about the elements shown on the puzzles with the teacher, Ann. When she has completed the puzzles, Phoebe takes a photograph of what she has achieved for her portfolio.

What does this assessment tell us about the learning (using a Communication/Mana Reo lens)?

Phoebe is engaged in tipping out and replacing three puzzle boards: one relates to artefacts of te ao Māori, one is of people, and one is of vegetables. In each case, Phoebe is “reading” the pieces, often in discussion with Ann, the teacher who is writing the learning stories. The pieces might be seen as a symbolic language, like words, that Phoebe is discussing with Ann; together they are making meaning from the visual image in the puzzle. With the people puzzle, Phoebe is telling her own story, creating her own text, by grouping the people pieces in twos and threes before replacing them in the correct spaces on the puzzle board. With the vegetable puzzle, she recognises the message: “These are healthy.”

The way that Ann and Phoebe discuss the meaning of the te ao Māori artefacts is a good example of “bridging” and “structuring”. These are two processes of guided participation that Barbara Rogoff¹² suggests appear to be worldwide. (See also the annotation for “Self in the mirror”, Book 13 of *Kei Tua o te Pae*.)

Ann and Phoebe are mutually involved in “bridging” meaning. For Phoebe, the meaning of the task is not just (if at all) about getting the pieces to fit the spaces, and she indicates this by asking questions (wondering what the hei tiki could be and asking “What are they [hei matau] for?”) and making connections from her own experience (commenting to Ann that she has combs at her house). Ann provides information from her own understanding, answering Phoebe’s questions and adding comments. Ann also makes an analogy between the wahaika as a symbol of challenge and the tricky task of solving puzzles. The puzzle provides a “structuring” for a conversation about artefacts of te ao Māori, and pictures on the walls assist with this.

How might this documented assessment contribute to Communication/Mana Reo?

“Recounting of narratives”¹³ is also a structuring activity – returning to the learning and setting up an opportunity for more conversation. This exemplar presents such a structuring activity as a narrative about the construction of meaning from puzzle pieces.

Ann is very specific about the valued learning; she lists the skills that Phoebe demonstrates: asking questions, listening closely, explaining her perceptions using descriptive language, being engaged, commenting on (valuing) the finished product, taking a photo, using a wide range of criteria (and she lists the criteria) to sort and compare, and making spatial judgments.

Ann also highlights continuity when she comments that Phoebe had been working a lot on one of the puzzles that week, sometimes on her own, sometimes with teachers, sometimes with another child (Charlotte).

What other strands of Te Whāriki are exemplified here?

This exemplar demonstrates elements of Exploration/Mana Aotūroa as Phoebe explores ideas and makes spatial judgments as well as communicating with Ann. One of the indicative outcomes in that strand is that “Children develop the knowledge that trying things out, exploration, and curiosity are important and valued ways of learning”, and Phoebe is illustrating these strategies here.