

Association of Teachers of Mathematics

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‘Thoughts on Emergent Maths’

Suzanna Jacoby

Suzanna Jacoby writes of the frustration she had felt with some aspects of maths teaching in Reception in the past that caused her to question ‘recorded work’ as the outcome of practical work, that only ‘records the doing, not the thinking...’

Jacoby comments ‘fortunately I had been reading an excellent book called *Children’s Mathematics: Making Marks, Making Meaning*’ that helped her re-think her mathematics teaching. She began to consider why she had not previously thought about mathematics in this way, in spite of the fact that the National Numeracy Strategy had encouraged teachers to provide activities to challenge children’s thinking. She observes: ‘what we don’t do very well, still, is to observe children in their thinking and encourage them to record it in a way which makes sense to them.’ Focusing on the case studies in *Children’s Mathematics*, provided the impetus for Suzanna to plan contexts that encouraged children to *use* mathematics ‘rather than just to regurgitate it’ and led to a number of changes in her teaching. In the article she comments on the valuable insights that the children’s mathematical graphics had begun to provide into the children’s mathematical thinking.

The changes to her practice that this teacher made included more observation, planning open activities, development of a graphics area and an emphasis on children representing their mathematical thinking which provided her important insights into the children’s mathematical understanding. An invitation to lead a workshop at a conference at this time, led to Jacoby exploring many of these ideas through a ‘thinking shop’ in which she challenged delegates’ ideas about their provision for mathematics.

Jacoby emphasises that *Children’s Mathematics* was helpful in encouraging her to look at the development of children’s representations and for assessment purposes. In the article she describes the first sample of a child’s mathematical representations from her class, commenting: ‘I was thrilled to have such a clear example to illustrate how children are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but already have a vast base on which to build, if only we have the courage and insight and humility to listen to, and value, their contributions.’

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