All Brand New

There’s something lovely when you buy or are given something ‘all brand new’. There’s the smell of freshness that transports you back to when you held a baby and nuzzled your face into theirs for the very first time. There’s the look of immaculate cleanliness—no marks, stains or dirt on this one. There’s the touch of freshness—a crisp, pristine perfection with no memories or history yet made to mark the territory. Hmm...don’t we all love something all brand new!

The new ELC was delivered to us via a long birthing process on 24 January 2011. I personally had waited 15 years for its arrival! What a gestation period it had been! The Cottage at 13 Walsall Street had served us well as it had become the foundation on which we had built our history, pedagogy and reputation. It had been good to me; hence, it was so very important that our new building reflected the warmth, care, respect and dignity that are the hallmarks of our ELC philosophy.

I was very privileged to take part in the design of the building, and possibly even more honoured that the architects were sympathetic to the dreams and aspirations I had held for over a decade. It was very important to me that this building was a children’s centre as much as a beautiful design. I can remember the look on the architects’ faces when I said ‘I want a building where walls hug children. I want the ceilings to go up and down so that we can respond to children’s imaginations by creating a cave one day and a rocket ship the next; where children, from the moment they enter the environment, will be naturally invited into its many spaces and where they can immerse themselves into their own deep and much-valued wonderings and inquiry’. This building, I believed, had to be a ‘magic place’.

Days, months and over a year went by and we all watched and waited. The ELC children of 2010 were treated to the daily visits of tractors, builders, hammers, drills, saws, cherry pickers, and men in bright orange vests wearing white hard hats. Their afternoon
playground time became an adventure in bricklaying, carpentry and electrical wiring as they watched and role-played the many different professions of their new-found friends. It will be interesting to watch this cohort of children as they progress through their years at Pembroke to see how many seek a career in the building industry!

So, as for all things, the day finally arrived when we were allowed to venture into this new beginning of ours—our new Early Learning Centre building. It didn’t disappoint—it is beautiful; it is ‘all brand new’; it is ‘magical’. However, even more importantly, this building is gentle, tender and caring in its capacity to allow children to ‘be’ within its walls. It is humble because it gives way to the children’s art, design, creativity, delight, adventure and learning. The children are the soul of this building, just as I had always imagined that they should be.

It has been almost a month now since our ‘birth day’. The children have been enchanted by all the wonderful new play spaces and adventure rooms that the building delivered. There are now ‘marks’ of children’s presence within the centre, which is even more delightful. The amazing sandpit manages to give away ‘sample bags’ to the children to take home every night!! Parents just love it and have suggested that we include ‘1 plastic bucket’ on our book list next year so that they can recycle the sand back to us the next day.

The huge glass windows within the building and the amazing light they capture reflect the images on the children’s faces as they learn, grow and discover within its walls. As teachers, we cannot help but be inspired by this environment surrounding us and, in turn, deliver to children a much richer, deeper and more thoughtful curriculum. We continue to always ensure that we create spaces that are not only aesthetically appealing and inspiring but which value relationships and human connectivity. Our intent then is to provide opportunities for children that deliver rich learning as well as limitless possibilities for engagement and dialogue.

In summary, it is an environment that provides a pathway for understanding, appreciating and honouring the image of the child. It is designed to provide the best possible learning opportunities for all children, which ultimately nurture their innate ability to construct knowledge.

The children take over now as the architects and designers; as a result, I know our future is full of limitless possibilities and enduring optimism. Our world is in great hands.

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