

## The Value of 'Craptivities'

It is Valentine's day today and my daughter (age 7) has proudly brought home a Valentine's card for her daddy. I have no doubt that the class probably all made similar cards and the proud look on my daughter's face as she presented her hero with her creation is one that I will treasure for a long time to come. Why then is this type of activity, which provokes such feelings of pure joy, increasingly being scathingly referred to as a 'craptivity'? A recent addition to my own personal word bank, "craptivities", are seemingly defined as, the conveyor belt of identikit activities which children are expected to do at key times of the year e.g. Mother's day, Easter and Christmas. It is reported that these activities do the children no favours whatsoever, there is no curiosity, there is no learning, therefore what is the point? Who are we doing this activity for?

Now to point out the blindingly obvious, we are doing the activities for the mothers, the grandparents, the fathers; who have been working really hard, who feel guilty that they perhaps haven't spent as much time with their little ones as they would have liked. We are also doing it for the children, to give them the opportunity to make a recognisable gift for their loved ones. It does not matter one iota that there are 30 seemingly identical Mother's days cards, they are not all made by your daughter/son therefore yours is unique.

Forty or so years on from the creation of my own 'craptivities', my eighty year old mother still values them. Has she kept the ones which were a scribble and a splash of glitter? No, she has kept the ones that 'look like something' and were made for a special occasion. They are still stored safely, as important and irreplaceable as the ancestral family heirlooms from centuries gone by. The happy memories evoked by these experiences has actually led me to recreate many of the same 'craptivities' with my own children, including christmas trees out of old Readers Digests, Viking ships out of polystyrene food trays and thumb pot hedgehogs out of clay. There is a reason why the Blue Peter Christmas Advent Calendar was such a perennial favourite: Anyone could make one and it would look brilliant. Surely this would be considered the ultimate in 'craptivities' if we wanted to make them today in our nurseries/schools?

I am an early years teacher. I encourage the use of loose parts, free play and the creation of unique and individual crafts. However, I also recognise how a child feels when they cannot create what they want in the way that they want, because it isn't good enough (to them) and it ends up crumpled up and in the bin. Sometimes, identikit crafts (read 'craptivities') show a child that they can do it, they can make something which mummy will treasure forever and will not end up in the 'bin' as the other run of the mill, daily crafts do. The child knows that what they are creating is for a special occasion and although mummy always says something nice about the daily gallery brought home, she recognises that there was something extra special about the Mother's Day card and is amazed that the flower that she made out of yellow tissue paper, an egg box and a green pipe-cleaner, actually really does look like a daffodil - and she did that.