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In amongst the glitter and the squashed blueberries: Crafting a collaborative lens for children's literacy pedagogy in a community setting

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Abstract

In this paper we bring together relational arts practice (Kester, 2004) with collaborative ethnography (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015) in order to propose art not as a way of teaching children literacy, but as a lens to enable researchers and practitioners to view children's literacies differently. Both relational arts practice and collaborative ethnography decentre researcher / artist expertise, providing an understanding that 'knowing' is embodied, material and tacit (Ingold, 2013). This has led us to extend understandings of multimodal literacy to stress the embodied and situated nature of meaning making, viewed through a collaborative lens (Hackett, 2014a; Heydon and Rowsell, 2015; Kuby et al, 2015; Pahl and Pool, 2011). We illustrate this approach to researching literacy pedagogy by offering a series of 'little' (Olsson, 2013) moments of place / body memory (Somerville, 2013) which emerged from our collaborative dialogic research at a series of den building events for families and their young children. Within our study, an arts practice lens offered a more situated, and entwined way of working that led to joint and blurred outcomes in relation to literacy pedagogy.

Keywords: Collaborative ethnography, dialogic arts practice, literacy pedagogy, emplacement, materials

Introduction

In this article, we argue that relational arts practice (Kester, 2004) combined with collaborative ethnography (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015), can inform literacy pedagogy and research in distinctive ways. Both relational arts practice and collaborative ethnography situate the researcher within her field of practice rather than commenting from a position of difference. In particular, in our study, ways of 'knowing' about young children's literacy practices that were embodied, material and tacit were brought to the fore through collaborative ethnography and relational arts practice. We were interested in small, sometimes apparently meaningless moments when children and adults were engaged in activity, drawing on Olsson (2013, p.231), who likewise focuses on the "littleness" of meaning making, …"the littleness that lies there and glimmers in its becoming underneath

the large, noisy events" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 163 in Olsson, 2013). In this paper, we extend understandings of multimodal literacy to stress the embodied and situated nature of meaning making, viewed through a collaborative lens (Hackett, 2016; Heydon and Rowsell, 2015; Pahl and Pool, 2011).

The study involved a series of family events in which young children built large-scale cardboard dens, and took part in table based craft activities. These events were researched collaboratively by university researchers (Abi and Kate), community researchers (Jo and Tanya) and an artist (Steve). We focussed on what Kester (2011) calls moments of "learning and unlearning" (p.227) unfolding within our collaborative research. We collected fieldnotes and video data at each of the den building events. This data collection at the events themselves were nested within, and took place in dialogue with, longer-term ethnographic and collaborative research carried out in this community by the authors over a number of years. As part of the Community Arts Zone (CAZ), we looked at the intersections between participatory arts and meaning making (Rowsell, 2015) during the den building events.

Throughout our study, we focussed on what Kester (2011) calls moments of "learning and unlearning" (p.227) unfolding within our collaborative research. This helped us to reframe what the children were doing. We were interested in ways in which the children's own ontologies helped us get closer to understandings of communicative practices, which can, in the process, challenge the idea of representational practice. Olsson (2013) describes how by coming closer to children's ontologies of literacy, representation fades out in the process, and "We might discover that children are challenging the image of thought as representation and reproduction through making use of sense as production of truth." (p.231). This movement in and out of representational practice was something we tracked in our own fieldnotes and observations. Kuby et al's (2015) concept of 'literacy desiring' helped us to see this unfolding process more precisely as having implications for literacy pedagogy and practice. Our contribution to CAZ was to re-think the knowing that happens in literacy pedagogy and research with young children through a focus on materiality and collaborative ways of knowing. Our aim is to present a lens that could help think through the relationship between artistic modes of knowing and children's understanding of literacy that was situated and drew on ontological ways of being and seeing the world (Olsson, 2013). In doing so, we de-centre the reader and the research inquiry in favour of a more situated and embodied understanding of what was going on.

The project team

Here, we signal what we brought to this project. Kate has a background in outreach work but became interested in children's meaning making through her work with young children in a nursery (Pahl, 1999). She developed a research focus on children's meaning making in homes and communities and has continued to write about this, considering the ways in which literacies are materialised in different ways across different sites (Pahl, 2014). Her work has begun to engage more strongly with the arts not just as a mode of delivery, but as a lens for understanding the world. In this she has been helped by her collaboration with Steve over time.

Steve has a background in visual arts. Originally trained as a sculptor, he is interested in how children interact with space. This has led him to develop numerous projects where young peoples' ideas and concerns are centralised. He aims to foreground playfulness through messing about with stuff as valid ways to learn about the world and how to interact with it for people of all ages.

Abi has worked in this community for several years prior to CAZ, and has previously done collaborative research with Jo and Tanya, parents she met at the Children's Centre. Abi, Jo and Tanya were all mothers of young girls (five in total between them, now six). Abi has written about the experience of researching young children's experience alongside fellow parents, whilst also parenting her own young child, and the implications of this for relationship building, positionality and research lens (Hackett, 2016). Therefore, whilst Abi's research on young children's literacy draws on a framework encompassing multimodality (Kress, 1997), ethnographies of literacy (Heath, 1983) and the role of place in literacy (Somerville, 2015), her research lens combines these propositional ways of knowing with more situated, embodied ways of knowing young children from her everyday life.

Thus, as a team we recognised that we brought to our practice ways of knowing and understanding the world from the arts as well as from ethnography and a focus on multimodal meaning making (Campbell & Lassiter 2015; Coessens, Crispin, & Douglas 2010; Kress 1997). As we communicated across the CAZ international projects through a shared closed blog, common ontologies across the projects seemed to include a commitment to thinking critically about the nature of collaborative research relationships with communities (Larson et al., 2011), an interest in the reflective lens participants brought to work across movement, music, photography and drama (Rowsell, 2015) and a taking seriously of the ruling passions of artists, teachers and students manifested through the arts (Griffin, 2015). In our project, we drew on arts practice and collaborative ethnography as methodologies for

shared inquiry. We focused on emergent and uncertain moments in the data in order to think through understandings of literacy through lenses that might be unfamiliar or de-centering (Olsson, 2013).

A dialogic lens for literacy pedagogy

In this section, we outline ways that the arts have been used in literacy pedagogy. We bring in theory from relational arts practice and socially engaged art to show how, in our project, the arts was not a discrete entity (music, visual art, photography, theatre) but a way of knowing that informed our lens. In our project, the definition of 'art' came from the practice of Steve who is interested in what happens when art does not focus on an object, but draws on dematerialised arts practice (that is, arts practice with no clear object). In this way, our understanding of art within the project defied a clear focus on 'the arts' as a separate entity. Steve brings a history of practice to the project, allowing the research to sit within the framework of 30 years of practice and exploration. Steve has drawn on ideas from socially engaged art to link his work to the everyday and to emerging social realities with a focus on 'cultural is ordinary' and lived experience (Williams, 1958).

The field of socially engaged art, or participatory arts, has experienced a complexity of framing and range of understandings (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Bishop, 2012; Coessens, Crispin, & Douglas, 2009; Kester, 2004, 2011; Nelson, 2012). One of the biggest turns in recent years in art practice has been a move away from the artist as a producer of work to the artist as a producer of conversations or relationships (Bourriard, 1998). Arts practices organized around conversations were the subject of Kester's (2004) 'Conversation Pieces' in which he described how 'dialogical' arts practices could be organised around exchange and collaboration. Kester made visible the way in which artists were working in ways that were not connected to material objects or any kind of output but were themselves process led and focused on reciprocity and exchange. This involves a 'reciprocal openness, a willingness to accept the transformative effects of difference; (p.173-4) within art practice. Relational art constituted a challenge, he argued, to views of the artist as autonomous within a context. Instead, Kester argued, artists were responding to "the nuances of space and visuality, of integration and isolation, which structure a given site" (p. 152).

The idea of 'knowing from the inside' has been developed by Ingold (2013) in his work on making, to argue that there are different ways of knowing (see also Coessens, Crispin & Douglas, 2009). By bringing together modes of conceiving and knowing with modes of perceiving and doing, knowing is then something that is experienced bodily,

materially and in experience and feeling (Johnson, 2010). Ideas from Dewey (2005) [1934] and Greene (2000) on art and the imaginative transformation of experience recognise the ways in which art can be a form of inquiry that rests on unknowing as much as knowing (Vasudevan, 2011). The value of the arts as a form of world making and a source of imaginative resonances has also been explored by Hull, Stornaiuolo and Sahni (2010).

In terms of literacy pedagogies, creative approaches from artists have informed imaginative literacy work in schools where wider possibilities have been opened up through an attentive artists' approach. In the UK, this work was largely funded through Creative Partnerships, a large-scale initiative that brought artists into schools over a sustained length of time, with a focus on sustaining creative ways of learning across the school curriculum (see for example, Burnard et al., 2006; Heath & Wolf, 2004). Literacy pedagogies as developed within Creative Partnerships were informed by thinking about the way in which artists changed classrooms and made them more emergent, relational and enabled different kinds of things to happen (e.g. Galton, 2010; Safford & Barrs, 2005; Sefton-Green, 2007). Anna Craft and Bob Jeffery wrote about the concept of 'possibility thinking' as a way of describing the unlocking of new ways of working that artists generated within schools (Craft 2000, 2002; Jeffery & Craft, 2004). Teachers and students were encouraged by artists to work in different ways; to not pay attention to time, to focus on process over product and to look differently at the world. Within Creative Partnerships, Kate and Steve collaboratively explored with children the impact of a group of artists in a school. Focussing on moments of 'messing about' in the school day led to an understanding of how important in-between moments of creativity and improvisation were for the children (Pahl and Pool, 2011).

The encounter between Steve and Abi was therefore influenced by a genealogy of practice that included multimodality and visual methods together with collaborative ethnography (Abi) and a history of creative interventions in schools together with a situated and socially engaged art practice with a focus on making and play (Steve). The intersection of these genealogies created the space of practice that was CAZ. This relational quality has affinities with another key influence on this project, collaborative ethnography (Campbell & Lassiter, 2010). In that ethnography is a way of noticing and perceiving the world differently, through a particular lens of participant observation, fieldwork and interviews, collaborative ethnography, like relational arts practice, allows in a dialogic quality to the process of creating ideas with other people. This process becomes the methodology and the way of knowing. Campbell and Lassiter talk about processes of 'reciprocal analysis' which open up when participants shape and construct the research space (Campbell & Lassiter, 2010).

Academics can no longer 'know' everything about a community, rather community co-researchers can frame and construct the field, aided by academics. Both socially engaged art and collaborative ethnography involve 'unknowing' or a kind of radical openness to emergence and staying with a sense of what might happen (Vasudevan, 2011).

Perhaps the most liberating aspect of this theoretical framework is a de-centring of expertise; people 'know' what they are doing and here the knowing is embedded in practice. Academic knowledge takes a back seat when encountering other more located or situated ways of knowing. To conclude this section, then, a literacy pedagogy that rests on 'unknowing' and emergence involves something more than just the presence of an artist. The collaboration between the artist and the researchers, children and parents becomes a site for alternative meanings to emerge. This might mean a de-centring of what is known about literacy or authorities of knowing,

> One important attribute of works of art, and arts based research, can be their capacity for enhancing alternative meanings that adhere to social phenomena, thereby undercutting the authority of the master narrative. (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 124)

Literacy as embodied, material and within movement

Within our research, we were interested in how different modes offered particular affordances for meaning making (Kress, 1997). Work by Pahl (2008), Flewitt (2008), and more recently Hackett (2014) has encouraged a much broader notion of literacy that understands literacy practices to be enmeshed in other modes. Heydon and Rowsell (2015) argue that it is important to recognise "the reciprocity between literacy as embodied and literacy as grounded in relationships" (p. 469). They invite a perspective that recognises everyday lived experiences and their sensory qualities as entangled within literacy. In her study of toddlers' literacy practices, Hvit (2015) stressed literacy as manifested in action, in things that children do. The educators in Hvit's study described literacy as connected to the children's bodies, through for example, drawing letters in a sand tray, and to materials, so that for example, holding a crayon indicated drawing, whilst the same action with a pencil was considered writing.

Ingold (2007), Pink (2009) and others have emphasised the role of movement with regards to how the body experiences the world through its emplacement. This framing, connecting body, place and movement, was taken up by Hackett (2014) to show the role of

children's movement in a museum in the production of shared, emplaced literacy practices. Our cardboard den events were dominated by the experience of place through movement. The children's creation of new spatial experiences took place through constructing and then going into the cardboard dens.

Significant to conceptualisations of literacy that rely on materiality and the body are new materialist theories that move beyond think / do and mind / body dualisms (Barad, 2007, Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Some of this work emphasises the way in which language issues from the body, from tongues, mouths and vocal chords (Lecercle, 2002; MacLure, 2013, 2016). Connecting language back with the materiality of how it issues from the body would enable a reconceptualization of language as "a 'metaphysical surface' on which the very distinction between words and things is played out" (MacLure, 2013, p.663). Somerville (2015) has stressed the entanglement between place and language, showing how the material world calls children to respond in certain ways, including through language or sounding.

Olsson (2013) has shown that children work with their own representational logics in order to make language. In the collaborative projects she describes, the children themselves experimented with ontological understandings of language,

> It seemed to us from our early observations that the children asked about the foundation of language as a representational system and that they enjoyed experimenting with that ontological question through producing new representations. (p.241)

The located ways in which Olsson and her colleagues were able to make sense of the children's playful understandings of the world resonated with us as we tried to engage with the material and sensory engagement of the children with the play spaces. Kuby et al (2015) have drawn on theories of new materialism to explore the role of non-human objects in literacy pedagogy in a classroom. They emphasise the role of time and space for children to explore possibilities of materials, such as how to attach pipe cleaners to a birdhouse model, in developing literacy learning. Kuby et al are clear that such explorations with materials were not simple prompts or inspiration for later writing or story-telling. Rather the negotiations with the materiality of the pipe cleaners, the discovery that staplers worked better than tape to hold them up, was in itself a literacy practice. Kuby et al (2015) conclude

"We are beginning to consider the dichotomy of writing and intra-acting with materials as false." (p.416).

This literature described above foregrounds materials, place and people's emergent inter and intra actions with them (Barad, 2007), as a starting point to understand literacy pedagogy. Much of this interest in materiality, affect and bodily sensation points towards non-representative aspects of literacy practices (MacLure, 2013). Maclure (2013) urges us to pay more attention to non-representative aspects of language and literacy practices, in order to re-attach words to bodies, to recognise the way in which representation "has rendered material realities inaccessible behind the linguistic or discourse systems that purportedly construct or 'represent' them" (p. 659).

In our study moments of a-signification or non-representation within children's meaning making seemed particularly resonant. Our approach connected with this literature on bodily and affective aspects of literacies through an emphasis on shared ways of knowing, between participants and researchers entangled in material and placed contexts. In the next part of the paper, we will explain how these approaches and framings were manifested in a methodological approach. We then discuss some moments from our data set that seemed to offer a particular kind of affective intensity, a tacit sense of how we shared a sense of knowing the significance of what was unfolding, in ways that were embedded in our practice. In the examples below, we have specifically selected moments of 'littleness that lies there' (Olsson, 2013, p.231) that is, moments that resist powerful representational pulls or logics in order to further tease out how arts practice plus collaborative understandings can shape how literacy as a concept is ontologically constructed.

Context for the study

The purpose of our study was to connect literacy pedagogies with emplaced embodied experiences of families and young children in community settings. Working as a team, Abi was the university researcher who carried out the fieldwork, alongside Steve who worked with the children to create the cardboard dens. The other two researchers were Jo and Tanya, mothers from the local community who had done research with Abi before. As parents of young children, Abi, Jo and Tanya all brought their own children to some of the fieldwork. Kate provided reflective research discussions and brought her own perspective on the activities of the team.

Abi has been carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in this community since 2011. Her approach includes a long term commitment to visiting and participating in this community,

captured in fieldnotes and visual data. Since 2013, her ethnographic work with these families has become increasingly collaborative. In previous projects she worked with parents to collect and analyse field data together, through dialogic processes that emphasized the expertise parents have in their own children and lives (Hackett, 2016). Kate had also worked in this community since 2011, on lager scale projects looking at literacy in community contexts. Coming out of these detailed ethnographic projects was an understanding of language and literacy as materially situated and located in practice (Pahl, 2014). The fieldwork for this particular project centered on a series of four family events, each of which took place at a different community venue over the course of 8 months (summarized in Table 1). Each event included large scale cardboard den building, led by Steve, and other craft activities organized by community partners, including the local museum service and the Children's Centre. Each event was attended by local families with children aged up to five years old. At each event, video was collected using a hand held video recorder, and fieldnotes were written following the event. This data specific to the family events was viewed within the context of the wider ethnographic study, the long-term relationships and in depth knowledge of this site and these communities built up over a number of years. Table 1 summarises which members of the research team attended, collected the video and wrote the fieldnotes at each event. Our research team also met three times to analyse our data together, a process which we describe in more detail below.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Tracing the construction of the methods

> "When we got there, the Children's Centre staff were stressing that
> we couldn't make too much mess in the hall. Then they proceeded
> to get out tonnes of glitter for the craft table and blueberries for
> the snacks – the messiest combination of things you could think of!"
> *Steve, describing the third event during analytic discussions*

Reflecting on their collaborative ethnographic research (Lassiter et al., 2004), Campbell and Lassiter (2015) discuss the potential for researchers to learn, be challenged and changed through collaborative ethnography. Pahl and Pool (2011) describe collaborative ethnographic work with young people in which alternate interpretations of the field forced

the researchers to shift their lens, so that understandings of literacy were remade or re-imagined by the young people. We are interested in the possibilities of a collaborative, relational methodology to change the research lens itself; from this perspective, it is not only individual subjectivities which alter (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015, p.6) but rather the way in which shared knowledge is framed and emerges.

Our interpretations of the children's experiences of cardboard dens was grounded in our own emplaced experiences at the den building events. During the events, traditional forms of data collection such as video making and participant observation were mediated through the chaos and business, our participation in running the activities, and, often, our supervision of our own children. As we looked through video data and fieldnotes we had collected at the events, these prompts evoked our memories of being there, rather than acting as evidence in their own right (Pink, 2009). When Steve talked about the blueberries and glitter in the above quote, it made us laugh, but it also resonated because for our collaborative research, our emplaced ways of knowing emerged from our time spent crawling on the floor, through the cardboard den doorways, in amongst the glitter and squashed blueberries.

In her book '*Water in a dry land*' Margaret Somerville (2013) describes how her own embodied experiences of her world meshed with those of her participants and with place. For Somerville, place-learning happened through her bodily engagement with the materiality of place; consuming rabbit stew, digging for grubs and massaging a friend's torn foot. These practice based activities were the lens through which body / place memories were created, through which Somerville and her participants "thought through country". Describing "a methodology of lemons" (p.59) Somerville explains how thinking about, handling and eating lemons became an everyday practice, a lens for thinking, so that "it is only then that I can know, through the lemons" (p. 60). Following Somerville, we seek in this paper to outline an approach to collaborative ethnography in which knowing emerged from our emplacement and entanglement with the human and non-human world at den building events. This methodology of blueberries, glitter, cardboard and chaotic, embodied meaning making led to a reframing and emergence of shared knowledge.

Once we had soaked off the blueberry juice and brushed off the glitter, we met for a series of group analytic discussions. Vasudevan and DeJaynes (2013) propose the potential within the arts to making meaning in different modes, as a route to seeing differently, to reimaging and to "render visible the unseen" (p.3). Taking a stance of unknowing and being open to 'possibility', Vasudevan and DeJaynes ask "Who is being heard and silenced? For

what purpose are we engaged in this work?" (p.10). Taking up Vasudevan and DeJaynes'
questions, and extending their proposition that arts is a route to seeing differently, we argue
that our shared lens gave us alternate, emplaced ways of understanding the literacy
pedagogies we observed during the den building events.

Below we present a series of incidents from the den building events. Drawing on the
notion of place-learning (Somerville, 2013) and unknowing (Vasudevan, 2011), we resist
drawing conclusions from these incidences. These incidents are not obvious moments that
demonstrate 'learning' or 'engagement'. Rather, we offer the 'little-ness' (Olsson, 2013) of
these moments, their inconclusive nature and resistance to categorisation, as examples of
what emerged as meaningful from our collective body / place memories as we tried to make
sense together of what we had participated in.

Den building at the cusp of chaos

> The scene begins with a shot of the castle and a path made of two
> narrow parallel sheets of cardboard which Steve has constructed,
> running from the castle across the room. Giggling, a little girl
> climbs into a wooden trolley (intended for wooden bricks), while
> her slightly older brother takes up position to push her in the
> trolley down the cardboard path. The trolley is too wide to fit down
> the path, so as the boy pushes his delighted sister faster and faster
> down the path, the paths falls apart, the cardboard becomes
> caught in the wheels, the whole structure collapses. At the end of
> the path, the trolley falls over, spilling the little girl onto the floor
> where she lies laughing. The boy drags the huge pieces of
> cardboard around the room balanced on his head, before running
> with a large piece of cardboard towards the open door out of the
> community centre.
> *Vignette taken from video footage, June 2014*

When we planned the den building activities, we wanted opportunities that would be
appealing to the children and child led. However in practice, the children were often reticent
at the start of the den building. Steve was central to engaging the children with playing in
the structure, by getting the older children to help with building the structure and then

playing hide and seek with them. Often at the start of the events, the children were hesitant, they were shy to engage and did not seem to have many ideas about how to play with the den. They needed Steve in particular to mediate their engagement with the den, give them confidence and ideas for how to play with it.

At these times, we as a group of researchers felt a sense of disappointment or confusion at the hesitant and unsure way the children tended to engage with the cardboard den building, which we had conceptualised as being child orientated and offering open possibilities for creativity. In particular, Jo and Tanya noted the way in which the children seemed to copy each other, or do similar, repetitive things in the cardboard dens, such as run through them.

Jo: "I'm usually keen on the children doing things in an unstructured way, but they only seemed able to interact when Steve finished building the castle and could engage and guide them. "
Tanya adds: "Every single child ran through the structure once, then went and did their own thing."

This sense of disappointment and unmet expectations resonates with Rautio's (2014) description of her reactions during a study in which she invited a group of children to do anything they wanted during a series of child-led research meetings.

"I expected the children to come up with all kinds of things to do in our meetings. I envisioned races with the toy cars, building things, exchanging things, throwing things, making up games and plays. Instead, the children began to imitate each other in a way that to me, at first, seemed like a disappointing and an uncreative way to respond to the situation; almost all begun to repeat and copy an activity that one of them had quite randomly initiated." (Rautio, 2014, p. 9)

Later, as their confidence grew, children's play in the den became wilder and increasingly bodily. We noticed that several times the play would reach what we termed 'the cusp of chaos', at which point it seemed certain that someone would get hurt or something would get destroyed, like the incident with the trolley described above. Half a dozen children bouncing up and down inside the castle, banging the 'roof' repeatedly until it

seemed certain it would come flying off and the structure would collapse. Or a group of children dragging each other across the room in a cardboard 'canoe' faster and faster each time, and releasing the canoe so it spins freefall at the end of each go. Just when we were beginning to think we needed to step in and stop the action, things would simmer down, the children would disperse, leave the structure, perhaps wander over to sit at the drawing table for a bit.

Hackett (2014b) has written about a group of children imitating each other drawing on a row of padded benches in an art gallery. Drawing on Pagis' (2010) notion of intersubjectivity produced through shared bodily interactions, Hackett argued that the children worked together in the art gallery to produce shared embodied experiences. Similarly, Rautio (2014) proposes the concept of imitating as a way of thinking about the children's similar activities as a collaborative way of exploring the possibilities of places or materials with their bodies. As the children in our study ran together through the cardboard den or spun together across the floor in the cardboard canoe, engagement with materials led to shared ways of framing and knowing the space. This diffuse view of literacy pedagogy resonates with Finnegan's (2002) view of communication as processes through which people "interconnect with each other" using "the resources of our bodies and our environment" (p. 3).

Den building alongside table based craft activities

> The main room for the event a bright and newly refurbished. On
> the right side of the room, Steve lays out his large sheets of
> cardboard, carefully balances his Stanley knife on a window ledge
> out of children's reach, and begins to construct a huge castle. On
> the left side of the room, a number of trestle tables have been laid
> out by the museums service for craft activities. Children can choose
> one of two craft activities, crowns or swords, and there are
> appropriate materials, some sample crowns and swords to show
> what the finished object should look like, and staff on hand to
> guide the children.
> *Description taken from fieldnotes, March 2014*

At each of the events, the staff from the museums service and Children's Centre provided table based craft activities to complement the den building. This contrast between the

activities at the event gave us a chance to reflect on where structure and lack of structure sat within the arts based literacy pedagogy of this project. Sakr et al (2016) outline the passionate debate between the merits of unstructured, process orientated art making in early years pedagogy, and what McLennan (2010) calls "cookie cutter craft", in which children are assisted to complete a predefined craft activity. Within this debate, open-ended arts materials and opportunities are described as offering children richer opportunities for creative engagement (McLennan, 2010). On the other side, it is argued that all art is a remix of what has gone before, and rich examples of children's modification of structured resources can be found (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Mavers, 2011; Sakr et al, 2016). Much of this debate rests on understandings of children's intentionality in relation to meaning making. From a socio-cultural perspective, predetermined intentionality is used to justify the value of children's own creations through unstructured work with craft materials, as representing specific meanings and messages.

In contrast to this interest in intentionality, other research highlights emergence rather than predetermined intention in children's art making, arguing that the ongoing interplay between children and materials lies at the heart of children's art making (Kuby et al., 2015; MacRae, 2011; Thiel, 2015). In her description of a young boy making a rocket at the junk modelling table, MacRae (2011) draws on Foucault's notion of heterotopia to problematize the assumption that "a representational purpose" (p.104) underlies unstructured art making. Rather, MacRae's analysis identifies that some junk models represented nothing, some began with a representational intention which dissolved during the making process, and some did not start with a representation in mind, but that some quality in the materials suggested a representation during the making process. Somerville (2015) notes the quick shifting in imaginative meaning making of young children playing under a tree, as dirt, twigs and fallen flowers become a cake, then a castle, then a building. As was often the case during cardboard den play, there is a moment-by-moment reaction to the materiality of the place, which seems at odds with notions of predetermined, fixed and invested intentional design. Kuby et al (2015) debate how to term their observations of children's craft activities during a writing workshop. Rejecting the term 'designing' because it implies an end product in mind from the start, they select the term 'literacy desiring' to reflect the emergent nature of the art making, in which children "were not always intentional and / or sure about what they were creating in the moment" (p.6).

In many of these examples of children's meaning making with arts materials, we note both the role of intra action with materials in moment-by-moment meaning making

(Kuby et al, 2015; MacRae, 2011), and also the role of embodied sensations and notions of emplacement in how the children collaboratively created and shared meaning through their play with the materials.

> Standing enclosed within a column of cardboard taller than himself,
> peeping through small windows Steve had cut into the 'tower', a
> young boy spun round and round, chanting 'duhduhduhduhduh'
> stopping, and then continuing, whilst several children and adults
> stood just 'outside' the cardboard tower, watching him.
> *Description taken from fieldnotes, March 2014*

In this case, the child could be understood as intra acting with the cardboard, yet the wider context of children, adults, place and materials also all played a role in the emplaced ways of knowing and experiencing cardboard dens, which were collaboratively produced during this episode.

Reflection

We have resisted a neat analysis of the children's activities but instead, opened up more questions about how we 'know' in relation to literacy pedagogy using an arts research lens. Drawing on Somerville's (2013) notion of place-learning as central to generation of collective ways of knowing between researchers and participants, we propose that our methodology was one of blueberries and glitter, playing out on the floor of the Children's Centre and inside the cardboard dens themselves. Knowing within our research emerged from our emplacement and entanglement with the people and materials at the family events. The children and adults (including the research team) knew through their emergent meaning making with the cardboard and craft materials, as new possibilities for intra-acting with the materials came into focus each moment through the children's playing and experiencing.

Kester (2004) traces the possibilities of relational arts practice to enable people to collaboratively look in new, more open and perhaps more critical ways at their worlds. What emerged dialogically through our collaborative lens as our project progressed was a growing sense that there were ways of being with children which are authorized and validated by policy, and then there are these other ways of being with children, which feel more

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dimensional, real, that resonate with how we actually are, but that are hidden, whispered voices. These ways of knowing resist neat explanation, rationality or academic authority.

In Kuby et al's paper (2015) Tara the teacher describes her unease as the giant giraffe sculpture that her class has made is about to 'go public' by being displayed in the school hall. Feeling a sense of needing to justify her teaching practice, she had told colleagues that her classes' exploration with craft materials happened "'in between' the required expectations, perhaps as a way to justify my actions" (p. 413). We are interested in Tara's sense of unease (Kuby et al, 2015), in Rautio's (2014) sense of confusion and disappointment at what the children chose to do, and in Vasudevan and DeJaynes (2013) proposition that arts are a route to re-imagining. Within our own study, the moments of children playing in the cardboard den, ploughing down the structure with the bricks trolley and sitting at tables making glittery crowns that emerged dialogically through our collaborative analysis seem significant in their "littleness" (Olsson, 2013), in their refusal to fit and provide convincing examples of the power of the arts as a panacea to teaching and learning literacy.

Conclusion

The 'littleness' (Olsson, 2013, p.231) of these moments led us to reframe our lens for understanding what literacy is (Pahl and Pool, 2011). This lens, drawing on notions of unknowing (Vasudevan, 2011) encompassed the parent's, children's and research team's ways of knowing and making, the histories of the practices of the researchers and artist and the cardboard, oil pastels, glitter and embodied sensations of being in place with which we all interacted. It was through this framework that we observed emplaced literacy practices emerging.

In this article we have discussed how ethnography and arts practice worked together. We feel that the CAZ allowed the coming together both of individuals and disciplines. This project allowed us to work together in a way in which no disciplinary perspective took priority and each participants' ways of knowing were given voice in specific and relational contexts. Ingold (2014) describes anthropology as being about the potential to 'do with' and a practice that is concerned with intentionally living with others. Somerville (2013) describes research as a meshing of her body and world with her participants and with place. We attempted to work in this way, and we think this way of working has potential to open up new emergent spaces where interesting things can happen.

Our framework for literacy pedagogy encompassed our adult and child collaborators and their and our engagement with materials and place. It allowed us to understand the ways in which children themselves can contribute to ontological understandings of literacy and language through engagement with materials and within and between our own understandings and realisations (Olsson, 2013). These insights were connected to a pedagogy of unknowing (Vasudevan, 2011), the agency of materials within processes (Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Rautio, 2014) and an understanding that the processes of making were themselves forms of thought (Ingold, 2013). This then pushes the field of literacy and language away from strongly representational forms and towards knowing from the inside, and acknowledging the ways in which we might come to know through place, body and materials.

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Table 1: Summary of the community events and data collected

Date and Event	Place and attendees	Main activities	Data collected
November 2013 Toddler Takeover	Organised in partnership with museum service in the museum. Widely advertised to all local families. A group of families from the Children's Centre came to the event.	Cardboard den building Soft play area Cookie decorating	Fieldnotes
March 2014 King Jack and the Dragon	Organised in partnership with museum service in a community venue. Widely advertised to all local families.	Cardboard den building Craft table – making swords and crowns Rhyme time and book reading	Handheld video data Fieldnotes
May 2014 Princesses and Castles event	Children's Centre event in a school gym. All families who use the Children's Centre were invited to book a place for this free event.	Cardboard den building Craft table – shields and crowns Dressing up clothes (princess dresses)	Fieldnotes Handheld video data
June 2014 Den building activity	Local playgroup session in a community centre. Attended by the families who normally came to the play group.	Cardboard den building Colouring sheets	Handheld video data Fieldnotes