

Moving hands in classroom assemblages: puppet play in a post-world

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Moving hands in classroom assemblages: puppet play in a post-world

This article proposes a reading of children's small toy/ puppet play that takes account of bodily movements within classroom assemblages. The researcher/author created representations of episodes of activity that focused on children's ongoing bodily movements as they followed their interests in one Early Years classroom in England. By drawing a contrast between a traditional logocentric interpretation of puppet play, and an embodied theorisation, the article provides a way of understanding young children's literacy practices where these are seen as generated through bodily movement and affective atmospheres within classroom assemblages. Analysis suggests that affective atmospheres were produced by the speed, slowness, dynamics and stillnesses of children's hand movements as they manipulated the small toys/ puppets. Three interrelated contributions are made that generate further understandings of embodied meaning making: Firstly, the article theorises relations between hand movements, materials and affective atmospheres within classroom assemblages; secondly, the technique of analysing still shots of hand movements offers a way of understanding the semiotic and affective salience of hand movement and stillness; and thirdly, the paper offers a methodology for re-examining taken-for-granted pedagogical practices such as puppet play. Together these contributions re-explore literacy as an embodied and affective endeavour, thereby countering logocentric framings of early literacy.

Introduction: the current policy context and reframing early literacy

This article draws from episodes of data I generated during a study conducted in the North of England, the overarching aim of which was to explore the kinds of literacy practices that emerged during child-initiated learning in an Early Years classroom. This involved investigating how movement plays out, moment-to-moment, in young children's meaning making practices. Findings from my larger study (see Daniels, 2018) draw attention to meaning making as an affective and embodied experience where literacy practices emerge anew moment-by-moment through children's engagement within classroom assemblages. Seeing young children's literacy in this way challenges notions of linear trajectories of literacy development, and stands in contrast to a view within the mandated curriculum where literacy is presented as 'fixed' and autonomous (see Street, 1995).

As noted by Siegel (2006), as research into the literacy landscape expands conceptualisations of what literacy *is* literacy in school appears to be shrinking to fit educational policies. Logocentric framings of early literacy currently hold the mainstay in policy discourse in England and the US (see Kuchirko, 2019). In particular, uncritical acceptance of the 'word gap' (Hart and Risley, 1992) and its associated deficit discourse of the linguistic competency of low income families, is regaining currency and exacerbating inequalities forged by power relationships inherent in literacies (Street, 1995). In this article, I offer a post-structural critique of text-centric readings of early literacy activity by presenting an account of embodied meaning making that dissolves distinctions between mind and body, and challenges the notion that the generation and expression of meaning is mediated solely through spoken language. In order to do this, I examine the logocentric assumptions that underpin the common pedagogical practice of providing children with puppets and small toys in Early Years classrooms, and provide a post-world reading of such activity. This re-examination contributes to an exploration of the relationships between

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3 literacy and the human body. It involves finding ways of seeing children's activity as
4 'mobile, affective, and indeterminate' (Johnson and Kontovourki, 2016; p.5), and where the
5 human and non-human world are seen as emerging in 'co-dependency' (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010:
6 p.47).
7

8 **Traditional literacy practices as words, re-enactment and narrative competence**

9
10 Classroom practice is steeped in norms, shaped by pedagogical intentions and goals, and
11 involves the 'provision of and organisation and materials, space and routines' (Brock, Javis
12 and Olusoga, 2014:17). Puppets and small figures, such as play people or animals, are
13 familiar resources in Early Years classrooms that come with the pedagogical intentions of
14 encouraging children to engage in imaginative play and re-enact stories. Puppets and small
15 figures can be 'lifelike' animals, or be anthropomorphised, such as the familiar and often
16 stereotypical animals in children's stories. Puppets can range in size, and in the episodes
17 presented in this article, I focus on those small enough to be held easily in the hand and
18 moved by children as they play. Such classroom resources can be understood as artefacts
19 that have distinct sensory qualities, and as multimodal and sensory texts that embody lived
20 experiences, values, identities and cultures (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). **From this stance,**
21 **materials intentionally placed in classrooms, act like tools, mediating children's experience**
22 **of the world and urging them towards pre-determined goals.**
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27 Retelling stories in sequence and engaging in character dialogue is seen as an early literacy
28 goal towards understanding the narrative structure of and comprehending stories. It is
29 therefore unsurprising that investigations into puppet play have traditionally borne
30 logocentric readings, focussing on the ways in which the use of story props and puppets
31 might promote children's expressive language (see Sierra, 1991; Soundy & Gallagher, 1993).
32 This language use is often characteristic of narrative play, with direct reference to gains in
33 early literacy. Nicolopolou (1996) suggested that through the process of symbolic
34 transformation and metaplay that it involves, narrative play enhances narrative
35 competence, pre-requisite for engaging with the symbolic representation involved in
36 reading and writing (Sawyer and DeZutter, 2007). These ideas sit closely to ideas of make
37 believe play (Singer and Singer, 1990) and play texts (Bateson, 1995) where children play
38 out narratives related to imaginary and social and cultural experiences.
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43 **Children's literacy practices as mobile and affective.**

44
45 Logocentric readings of children's activity, such as the traditional reading above, have
46 neglected the body and its movements (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). More recently,
47 ongoing bodily movements and their interrelationship with meaning making has become a
48 significant area of study (Wetherell, 2012) that has been fruitful in generating new
49 understandings of meaning making. Furthermore, such studies draw acute attention to the
50 'indeterminacy and emergent potential' of the here and now (Leander and Boldt, 2013,
51 p.22). They hold important implications for how we might go about re-thinking everyday
52 practices in classrooms in ways that challenge logocentric framings of early literacy, and
53 theorise new understandings of children's literacy learning. Hackett (2014), for example,
54 identified that for young children walking and running can constitute an intentional
55 communicative practice. Turning attention to pedagogy, Olsson (2009) noted that where
56 practitioners followed children's movements and interests, children's learning experiences
57 and practitioners' understanding of the significance of these were enhanced. Sellers (2015,
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p.14) observed the continual flow of children's movements, identifying the here and now as the 'productive moment of becoming'. Hackett and Somerville (2017) examined the interrelationship of sound and movement as children played together and proposed that speaking, gesturing and sounding arose from embodied and sensory experiences as children moved. In this way language and the world are seen as emerging simultaneously in ways that 'offer new forms of literacy and representation' (Hackett and Somerville, 2017, pp.374-5). In order to contribute to these debates, I draw on the concepts of assemblage, bodily movement and affective atmospheres, in order to provide a post-world reading of puppet play. That is, rather than focusing on the ways in which tools, such as puppets, mediate children's thought, I focus on what happens when bodies come together in productive intersection with materials within classroom assemblages (Daniels, 2019b). I further theorise my framing in the next section.

Classroom assemblages, bodily movement and affective atmospheres

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) see the body as moving within space and time, and always in relation to an ever-changing environment. Human activity therefore, is part of a network or assemblage of time, place, people and material objects that act on semiotic, material and social flows simultaneously (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), and where bodies, objects, events and discursive practices move in and out of ever changing assemblages (Buchanan, 2015). The concept of assemblage therefore, collapses binary distinctions between mind and body, 'subjective' human and 'objective' physical world, the 'natural' and the 'socially constructed', and instead connects these as 'underlying expressions of material forces and flows' (Hroch, 2014; 59). For the purposes of this study I saw children's meaning making as arising from a direct interplay across three dimensions of an ongoing assemblage, with three constitutive threads as follows: (a) the classroom, its four walls, furniture, norms, routines and practices; (b) the materials available to children; (c) children's bodily movements (See Author, 2019a). In order to understand these three constitutive threads, I draw on the two concepts of assemblage and affect. While the concept of assemblage 'enables us to disentangle it and render visible its constitutive threads' (Buchanan, 2015: 386) at the same time, it suggests the impossibility of separating children's bodily movements, the classroom and its resources and materials, and the meanings that are generated through the complexity of the ever-changing assemblage.

On starting school, young children, enter the education setting, bringing with them a diverse range of home and community experiences. They carry out playful explorations of the classroom, and explore its potential. Ehret (2017) describes how children cultivate belonging by creating meaning and meaningful places where they can participate and belong. Examining everyday classroom events through the lens of assemblage, can amplify the constituent threads of the process of this cultivation.

The second concept is related to affect and the flows of energy, or intensities that are manifest within assemblages. *Affects* are non-conscious visceral bodily experiences related to sensations of the body as the body continually passes through experiential states of being (Massumi, 2002) as it moves, feels and interacts with the material environment. Moving bodies within classroom assemblages can be seen as saturated with affect and affective flows. Building on affect theory, Ehret and Hollett (2014, p.428) proposed that the moving, feeling body creates "*affective atmospheres*" that influence meanings that are made in

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3 unpredictable ways. Such atmospheres can be generated by manoeuvrability experienced
4 by children in literacy activity, as new possibilities of being and doing open up (Lenters,
5 2016).
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8 In earlier work (Daniels 2019b), I proposed that children's continual, patterned and dynamic
9 flows of bodily movements in classrooms held a communicative and affective quality that
10 created 'affective atmospheres' that were contagious and flowed alongside the production
11 of meaning and meaningful places. By bringing together the concepts of assemblage and
12 affective atmospheres I theorised bodily movement, the material configuration of the
13 classroom, and the affective atmospheres that were produced as children moved, as
14 relational to the ongoing production of meaning moment-to-moment (See Figure 1, below)
15

16
17 **Figure 1. Conceptual model of movement, affect and meaning (Daniels, 2018).**
18

19 In what follows, I apply notions of the moving body within classroom assemblages and
20 affective atmospheres to instances of puppet play in one Early Years classroom. I focus
21 specifically on the flows and dynamics of children's hand movements, as they come into a
22 'productive intersection' (Daniels, 2019a, p.18) with the material configurations of the
23 classroom in order to re-think puppet play.
24

25 26 **Introduction to the study, methodology and ethics** 27

28 The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017), England's statutory guidance for the
29 education and care of children aged 0-5, details children's educational entitlement and
30 maintains a child-centred view of learning where children are seen as unique, are
31 encouraged to explore, and to be creative and critical. Common practice in England's
32 provision for children aged 0-5 is to blend teacher-led activity with periods of child-initiated
33 learning. Continuous provision is a term that describes children's access to an enabling
34 environment, where they are relatively free to follow their own interests and lines of
35 enquiry. My research aim was to investigate the emergence of young children's meaning
36 making practices moment-to-moment during self-initiated play. The participants were a
37 class of twenty-four, 4-5 year olds during their first year of formal schooling. According to
38 census data, the schools served a social, cultural and linguistic diverse community of pupils
39 including those of White British, Portuguese, Asian and Afro-Caribbean heritage. The study,
40 guided by the principles and practices of ethnography, was qualitative in its approach (Hatch
41 and Coleman-King, 2015). I gained ethical approval from my own institution to carry out the
42 study, and gained appropriate consent and written approval from parents and caregivers.
43 The notion of negotiated ongoing consent (Flewitt, 2006) was essential, as I was observing
44 children in 'real time' and therefore continually sensitive to children's responses to being
45 filmed.
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51 I carried out regular visits to a setting, and conducted naturalistic observations of children's
52 self-initiated activity (Punch, 2009); I would observe what was capturing children's interest
53 in the classroom environment and closely observe their activity. I took video footage and
54 where I judged I would not distract children from their activity, and talked to them about
55 what they were doing, ensuring I played, where possible, the least adult role (Gallacher and
56 Gallagher, 2008). I carried out 15, 2 hour visits over the course of the year photographing
57 the learning environment, writing field notes, and making maps and plans of the classroom
58 and children's movement. I gathered 159 filmed episodes of film footage.
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3 Due to my interest in the kinds of meanings made by children and the ways in which these
4 emerged, I decided to observe children during self-initiated learning time, where they were
5 largely undirected by an adult. The teacher and nursery nurse had provided a range of
6 resources for children to stimulate their play, and I observed to see what was capturing
7 their attention and interest. Thinking with theory when undertaking the study, I was drawn
8 to the continual movement and generation of a shifting multiplicity of meanings made by
9 children. Drawing on the work of Eisner (1998), as I observed the processes of the world
10 through bodily senses, I saw that my sensibility as a researcher was to perceive this
11 presence of ongoing bodily movement and interpret its significance. In this way, self as
12 instrument (Eisner, 1998) became a crucial concept for perceiving and theorising the
13 affective flows of energy that I report in the next section.
14
15
16

17 Keen to explore how interest and movement played out moment-to-moment, I drew
18 movement maps to show the flows and directions of children's movements. Filming with a
19 small, hand-held camera meant that I could return to data episodes and analyse what might
20 be contributing to the affective atmospheres I had perceived during my field visits. Analysis
21 involved repeated watching of video footage, looking at what was produced, followed by
22 analysis and fine-grained hand-movement mapping. I arrived at a process of still shots of
23 hand stillnesses, interspersed with the flow, dynamics and direction of hand movements as
24 they handled classroom materials.
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28 **Following the flow of movements in puppet play**

29
30 In this next section, I draw on two separate episodes of data where a child is playing around
31 a focal point, that is, where the resources and materials they draw upon are contained
32 within one classroom area. It is important to note that puppet play at the point of filming
33 had become a very popular activity. I write an account of the data that draws particular
34 attention to the movement of children's hands and the sequences of hand movements that
35 took place. In addition, I include details of the dynamics or quality of children's movements
36 accompanied by their facial expression and gaze. It is notable that these episodes do not
37 contain any speech. The episodes took place early in the study, and children very often
38 engaged in activity that did not involve speech, but yet felt saturated with meaning. My
39 explorations highlighted how meaning arises from moving, sensing and feeling within the
40 classroom assemblages; there is much to know about the process of children's meaning
41 making when words are not present.
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44

45 The first illustrative example takes place as Sylvia takes two puppets to a brightly painted
46 book box. The second presents an example where Sam takes hold of bear figures at a small
47 world station. For each account I provide the following:
48
49

- 50 • a description of the assemblage
- 51 • an image of the assemblage / coming together of child/ movement/ resources
- 52 • a narrative account of my thinking as I observed
- 53 • a sequence of still shots that show hand movements
- 54 • a description of the episode which includes the child's facial expression and the
55 dynamics of hand movements
56
57

58 **Puppet play 1: Describing the assemblage- hands, the book box, tiger and fox**

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3 I begin this section with a narrative observation of Sylvia/ puppets/ book browsing box. The
4 puppets, stored behind the book browsing box in a basket, are plush with a soft feel. I
5 assume that the teacher has placed the puppets here, directly near the book box, to
6 encourage children to tell and re-tell stories or make links between the books and puppets.
7 Sylvia appears to be playing alone at this point, but there are children playing nearby on the
8 carpeted area.
9

10
11 Figure 2 Still image of assemblage – Sylvia (about here)
12

13 *Narrative account: Sylvia is playing on the carpet area of the classroom, at the side of the*
14 *book-browsing box, which is painted red, brightly coloured to attract children's attention. I*
15 *stop to film this episode as this kind of activity is very common and I am intrigued why this*
16 *might be the case. What is it that compels children to take small objects and toys one in each*
17 *hand, and re-enact what look like social interactions between the two? This kind of activity is*
18 *exactly what children do... it is just play... but it has become so common across the classroom*
19 *recently that I want to know more. I notice that it very often occurs without much noticeable*
20 *direct interaction with another child, apart from a glance or a shift in body position.*
21
22

23
24 *I notice common movements, such as the momentary touching of the noses or faces of the*
25 *puppet characters, the sudden moves away or apart, or when one character goes out of*
26 *view, then reappears. Are fundamental human experiences of being present and together,*
27 *and then apart, being re-enacted? I notice how quickly I start to anthropomorphise the*
28 *puppets as they begin to move. The child's facial expressions often plays a part in what*
29 *appear to be re-enactments, mirroring the possible emotions of the characters as they come*
30 *together and move apart. I want to examine this further.*
31
32

33 In the hand movement mapping below, (Figure 2) the sequences and direction of movement
34 are shown by arrows. The sequence moves from left to right, top to bottom. There are ten
35 still shots in the sequences of movement carried out by Sylvia. The lines I have sketched
36 onto the still shots represent the movement and direction of Sylvia's hand as it has just
37 occurred moments prior to when the still shot is made.
38
39

40 In the sequence, note how the puppets are repeatedly together, then apart. Each
41 movement of either one or both puppets varies in speed but is quite fluid. When the
42 puppets are together or apart, they are held still for a few moments. The above images also
43 show the points of momentary stillness. The puppets are positioned either facing each
44 other, or facing in opposite direction. Sylvia seemed to take a few moments to get these
45 positions right, often wedging the puppets between the books. Throughout the episode,
46 Sylvia's facial expression is one of concentration, mostly still but tentative and she
47 occasionally opens and closes her mouth. Hiding the puppets seemed important to this
48 activity. See the first and third image where the tiger is placed horizontally behind the book
49 as if obscured from sight. The movement of the fox between the first and second image
50 goes directly beyond the tiger, and then takes a U-turn, changing direction to what appears
51 to be a sneaking-up on the fox. Sylvia follows the puppets closely with her gaze, which
52 seems to show her deep interest and absorption in them. The puppets remain in this
53 position for a few moments and then the fox moves back into the bottom right hand corner
54 of the book browser, partially hidden from sight again. In the eighth image, the fox is
55 completely hidden from sight in the right-hand corner of the book browser. In the final
56 three images, I noticed how the fox again was sneaking up on the tiger from the right, and
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3 from behind, but then the tiger has moved to a position behind the fox, this time positioned
4 so he can see the tiger approaching. The orchestration of hands, gaze, facial expression,
5 puppet, and shifting dynamics and speeds of movement is complex, and an intricate and
6 often patterned interweaving of bodily movement and materials, rendering the separation
7 of each impossible.
8
9

10 Figure 3 Sequences of hand movements- Sylvia (about here)

11 **Puppet play 2: Describing the assemblage- hands and bears**

12
13
14 Hands, puppets and small world scene come into assemblage here. In this instance, the
15 small world spot tray has been set up as a forest with grass floor, pine cones and sawdust,
16 pieces of wood and three bear figures of different sizes. Sam comes over to the spot tray
17 and kneels down. He takes a bear in each hand.
18
19

20 Figure 4 Still image of assemblage - Sam (about here)

21 *Narrative account*

22
23
24 *Sam's hands are out in front of him, each hand holding a bear. The bears' noses are*
25 *touching. Sam's gaze is fixed on the bears' faces, his eyes widen and his head lowers, as if*
26 *mirroring the action of the bears. Hands move away from the bears and they remain in*
27 *position. Sam's jaw clenches. He looks up, then down, and then back up at the bears. Hands*
28 *move under the spot tray, out of sight, and the bears fall over. Hands move back into view*
29 *and take up a bear in each hand, positioning them upright. Sam's mouth opens and closes*
30 *as though he is talking, but he is silent. Then he presses his lips back together. Right hand*
31 *and small bear are raised. Left hand moves small bear to the side of large bear. The bear*
32 *wobbles but is stable. Sam flicks the bear with his left forefinger and it falls. He flicks the*
33 *second bear and it falls. The small bear is moved to the top of the large bear's head. Both*
34 *are lifted into the air and held together.*
35
36
37

38 Figure 5 Sequence of hand movements – Sam (about here)

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40
41 The still shots above demonstrate patterns of hand movements. The sequences of
42 movement were similar to those in the previous example as the bears came together and
43 moved apart. Likewise, the movements are punctuated by moments of stillness. In the first
44 two images, the bears' noses are tightly pressed together and held in stillness for a few
45 seconds. Sam then lifts them up into the air and apart then brings their faces back together
46 in the third image, his mouth opening and closing tightly as the bears move together, then
47 apart. In the fifth image, one bear is concealed under the tray and a second remains on the
48 grass. In the next image in the sequence, the bear re-appears. The final two images show
49 the bears balanced together, front feet and noses touching. The small bear is touching
50 noses with an adult bear. Throughout the sequence, Sam's gaze is fixed on the bears, apart
51 from one moment when he looks up, as another child passes by him. The intensity of Sam's
52 gaze seems to grow as he brings the bears together and presses their noses tightly together.
53 Sam is deeply engrossed as this complex orchestration plays out.
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57 **Discussion: Relations across assemblages, hand movements and affective atmospheres**
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3 The representations of the two episodes draw attention to the movements of the hands
4 during what appear to be a very typical episode of play with small toys/ puppets. Such
5 movements often seemed to follow patterns, coming together of characters, touching of
6 faces or noses, moving away again - one puppet going 'out of the sight', then re-appearing.
7 Patterns of hand movements were relational to the shifting assemblage of bodies, bears,
8 puppets and hands. These things were shaped by the configuration of the assemblage:
9 movement of tiger and fox followed the lines of the spines of books, or rapidly dropped
10 down the vertical cliff-edge of the book box, before looping back up, over the edge and
11 landing in a crevice between differently sized books. The book box with its horizontal lines
12 and vertical edges seemed to suggest pathways of movement and falling. Bears balanced
13 against each other, touching noses, rose up then fell back, behind and under the black
14 square tray of the small world forest. Unexpectedly, the bears, precariously balancing with
15 noses touching, toppled over and backwards. The unpredictability of the materials shaped
16 the direction of what subsequently took place as the motion of the falling bear was echoed
17 by the second bear, flicked by Sam's hand. Thinking in this way with the data provoked
18 three readings that contrast with more traditional print-centric interpretations of puppet
19 play and meaning making presented earlier. I present these below.

24 25 *The affective quality of hand/ puppet movement*

26
27 The quality and dynamics of children's movement seemed to be affected by, and affecting,
28 the material configuration of the assemblage. I noted this through my observations of the
29 speed, purposefulness, directness, or the meandering, stop-start of hand movements.
30 Movement then, appeared to generate a symbolic salience and convey meanings that
31 played a part in the assembling, influencing the practices that emerged, in a kind of
32 orchestrated ensemble of patterns of movements. As they moved along lines, the trajectory
33 of the puppets and the fluctuating dynamics of their movements, seemed to create affective
34 atmospheres (Ehret, 2017; Lenters, 2016). The bears came together with force; the
35 movement of the tiger, propelled along the book spine, is slow and careful; then it speeds
36 up, and slows down. The dynamics and flows of puppet movements generated an affective
37 quality of the episodes: the tiger 'hops' in large strides towards the fox; bears noses touch
38 with precision and prolonged force; the fox slides down the book box. The quality,
39 dynamics and contrasts in moving puppets, further intensified by children's facial expression
40 and the intensity of their gaze, firmly fixed on the puppets, are generative of what I
41 perceived as highly affective encounters. I questioned how quickly I was attributing human
42 emotions, feelings and actions to the puppet movements within the assemblages, which
43 seemed to me to compound the affective quality of what was taking place.

48 49 *The affective salience of stillness*

50
51 Deleuze and Guattari's suggest that 'Perception can grasp movement only as the
52 displacement of a moving body or the development of a form' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987;
53 309). Drawing from the work of Bergson, Massumi (2002) describes the impossibility of
54 accounting for or perceiving ongoing movement:

56 'continuity of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable divisible
57 space it can be confirmed as having crossed... points or positions really appear
58 retrospectively, working backwards from the movement's end'
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3 Massumi, 2002, p.6
4

5 This assertion by Massumi resonated strongly with my experience of observing children's
6 hand movements. In order to make sense of hand movements, I presented the still shots of
7 hand movements by *tracking back* from stillnesses and tracing the dynamics and direction
8 of movements prior to the stillnesses. This is suggestive of how I tried to account for
9 movement from looking at filmed footage, but may equally be suggestive of the ways in
10 which children were interpreting the movement, or exploring the meaning making
11 potential, of the moving puppets. Looking closely at the patterns of hand movements not
12 only prompts reflection on the frequent stillness, or pauses that took place as the puppets
13 shifted positions, but on the affective salience that accompanied the contrasts in stillness,
14 speed, dynamic or the affective quality of the motion. Stillnesses then, appeared to present
15 time to engage with the significance of movement, and the affective salience of these
16 pauses is what constituted their intensity.
17
18
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21 *Text production or exploring the potential of movement?*
22

23 It would seem reasonable to assume that the textual quality inherent in the puppet as a
24 thing to be animated, as a discursive flow, 'puppet in classroom', within the assemblage, or
25 as a textual artefact, had some bearing on what took place. As Sam and Sylvia appear to
26 create and re-create the separating and moving apart of the puppets, they could be seen as
27 'trying out' ideas about the human world, about being present then apart, then present,
28 then apart. Both children turned the puppets' faces toward each other, as though imagining
29 their meeting. The salience of these episodes however, resides collectively within the
30 repetition of patterns of movements and stillnesses, the fluctuations in speed and dynamics
31 of hand movements, and the intensity of the child's attention and gaze. This reading
32 foregrounds the affective quality of hand movements (and stillnesses), providing an
33 alternative reading to more conventional or logocentric readings of narrative puppet play.
34 Rather than focusing on events or 'happenings' in the story, which might constitute a
35 'textual' reading of the episodes, my attention was drawn to the embodied and affective
36 quality of the episodes generated by the ongoing movement/ stillnesses within the
37 assemblage. Rather than 'authoring' a narrative text, children appeared to be exploring the
38 potentiality for abstract possibilities brought through the sensory experience of moving and
39 feeling, and exploring what that could mean and feel like in the ongoing present. In itself,
40 this exploration did appear to produce text, or a 'play text' (Bateson, 1995) but seen in this
41 way, the text arose from the exploration of the potentiality of movement within the
42 assemblage, rather than from a pre-determined story line or narrative to be re-enacted or
43 'told'.
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49 **Implications: knowing literacy as an embodied and affective endeavour**
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51 Finding a way of conceptualising and representing the quality of movement was central to
52 building my understandings of the significance of embodied meaning making during
53 episodes of puppet play. By focusing on the affect generated through the productive
54 intersection of hand and puppet prompted me to see meaning as contingent, inseparable
55 and continually generated and re-generated through visceral bodily experiences as the body
56 moves through shifting assemblages and their material configurations. My methods were
57 generative of alternative ways of understanding episodes of puppet play in a way that shifts
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3 attention from the words or texts that children produce, instead drawing attention to the
4 affective qualities of bodily movement, and how play texts may *arise* from such activity.
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6 The two episodes took place within a heterogeneous hive of ongoing activity in the
7 classroom on this particular morning in school. My analysis is representative of a theme that
8 flowed throughout the larger study: children's opportunities for meaning making were
9 heavily contingent on their bodily movement and the material resources of the classroom.
10 This observation relates to what Ehret (2017) terms *cultivating belonging*, as through their
11 bodily movement, within classroom assemblages, children cultivated places that made
12 sense to them and where they could participate. In this particular classroom, children were
13 given time and space to explore, forge friendships and find ways of being together.
14 Movement signalled interest and attention across and between children and explorations
15 were often without words, or with a few exchanges, yet they involved much negotiation,
16 communication and shared understanding, realised through bodily movement. Everyday
17 classroom resources such as puppets, paper, card, bricks, and so on, were intentionally
18 placed for children's exploration. Often, children readily and flexibly explored the potential
19 of these things, adapting, re-imagining and repurposing them, seemingly drawn to the
20 textural and sensory qualities or possibilities of the materials. Meanings emerged
21 spontaneously through children's shared and collective movements as they re-shaped, re-
22 purposed and re-imagined classroom resources. Play texts often arose, but rather than
23 being representations of texts 'exterior' to the assemblage, play texts emerged as forms of
24 expression realised *through* assemblages.
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30 Close examination of bodily movements heightens sensitivity to the potential in the here
31 and now and is significant for any classroom where taken-for-granted pedagogical practices
32 exist unchallenged. The methodological approach, focusing on bodily movements and
33 affective atmospheres can be extended to any common practice, offering a potential lens to
34 see practice differently and generate new understandings of the ways in which movement
35 and affect play out in the emergence of literacy practices. St Peirre (2000, 481) refuted the
36 'idea that language mirrors the world' and indeed, as a basis for defining and understanding
37 the practices and experiences of literacy learners, we need to see the 'words' that are
38 produced as a small part of the story. Literacy is deeply implicated in the social world, and
39 emerges from ongoing, affective and embodied experiences. By looking at what children can
40 do in the here and now, and the potentialities for the emergence of literacies in the ongoing
41 present, we are better equipped to recognise and support students' participation in literacy
42 learning.
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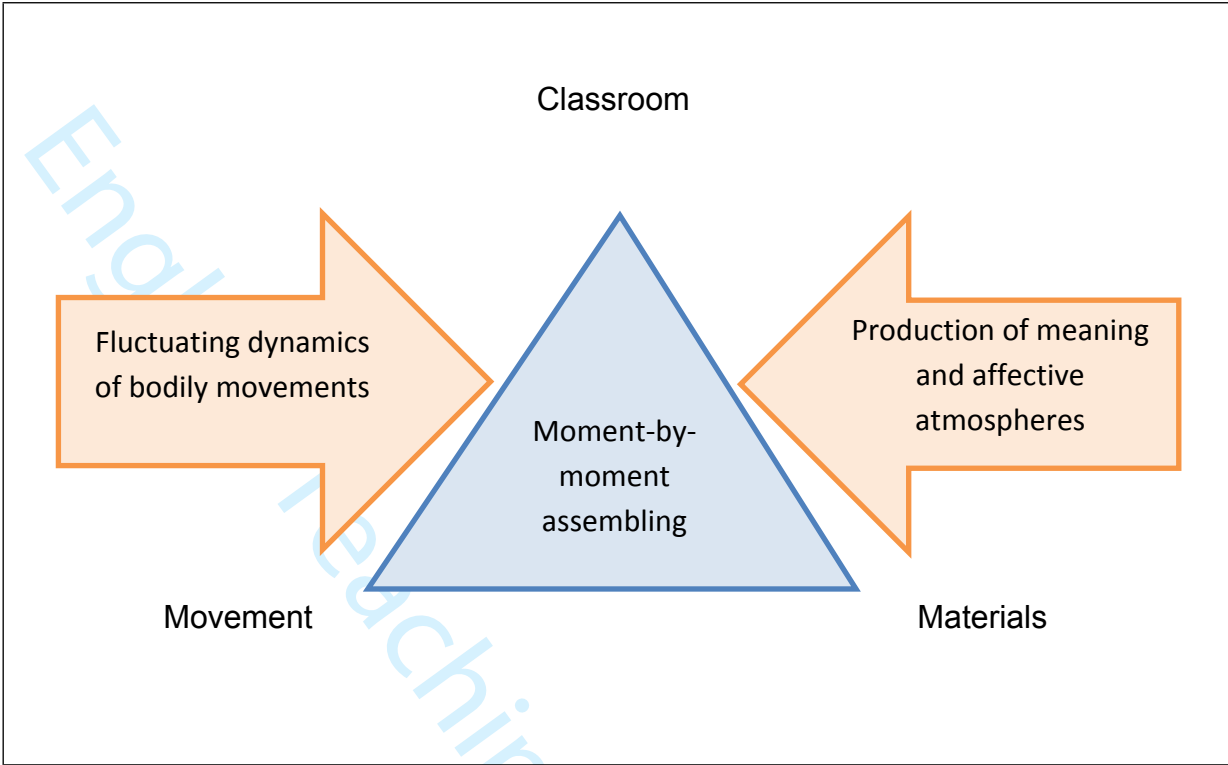
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Figure 2 Still image of assemblage- Sylvia

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Figure 3 Sequence of hand movements - Sylvia 1

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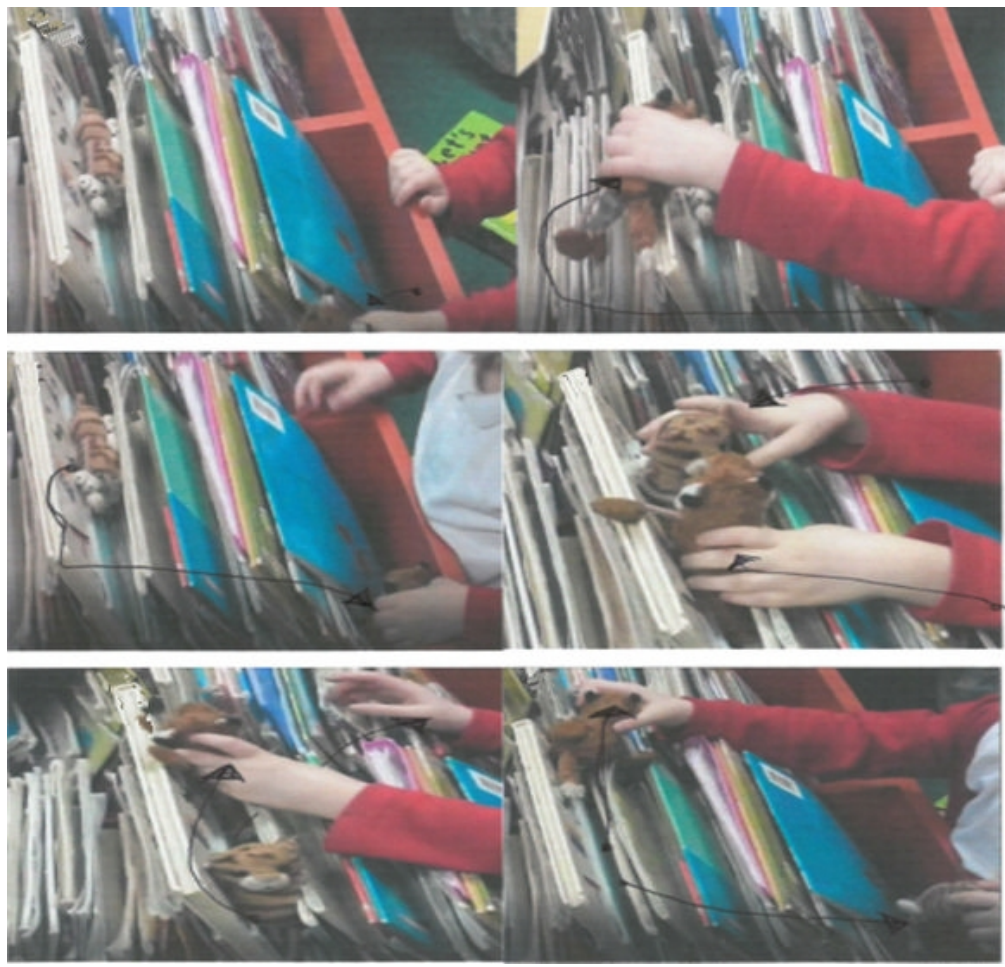


Figure 3 Sequence of hand movements -Sylvia 2

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Figure 4 Still image of assemblage - Sam

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Figure 5 Sequence of hand movements Sam 1

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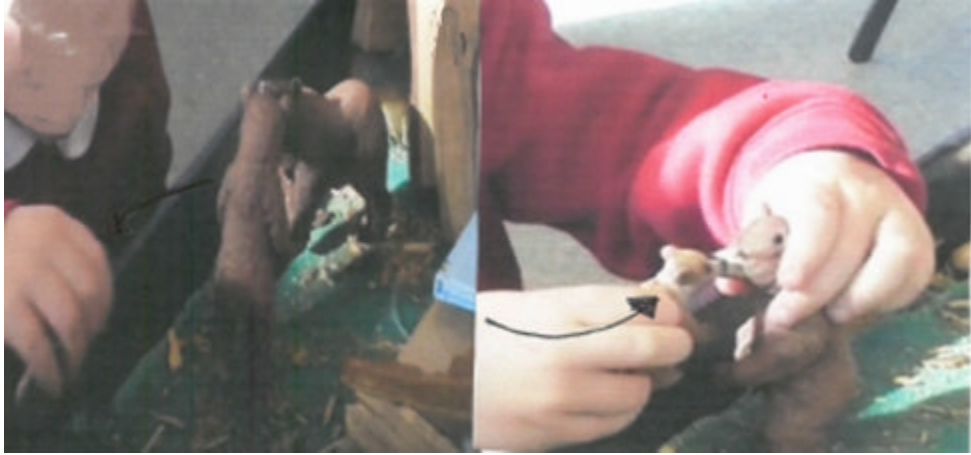


Figure 5 Sequence of hand movements Sam 2