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Stacking stories as method: research in early years settings

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Stacking Stories as Method: Research in Early Years Settings

Cathy Burnett & Guy Merchant

'How might a text make room for whatever it also necessarily leaves out, for what is not there, not made explicit' (Law & Mol, 2002, p.6)

'coexistencies at a single moment (/Law & Mol, 2002, p.8)

'This is a virtual world. This is a world inventing itself. Daily, new landmasses form and then submerge. New continents of thought break off from the mainland. Some benefit from a trade wind, some sink without trace. Others are like Atlantis – fabulous, talked about, but never found.'

(Winterson, 2001: 63)

1. Introduction

One of the challenges of investigating young children and digital media is the sheer complexity of what happens as children make meaning with and around digital devices. What happens on-screen inevitably meshes with what happens off it, and wider social, economic and cultural factors and individual histories, experiences and feelings also come into play. Capturing the entanglement of the social, material and embodied dimensions of such meaning making is difficult. It is particularly challenging to find methods that adequately take account of the affective and ephemeral dimensions of children's virtual play, by which we mean the mix of on and off-line activity associated with the playful use of virtual worlds, videogames and other digital media. In this chapter we explore the use of stacking stories as means of engaging with such practices. We stack- or juxtapose - stories derived from our data (such as video data or fieldnotes as a means of slowing us down, and allowing our own affective engagement to seep into our research accounts. In doing so, we explore what happens as we, as researchers, meet up with 'data', while recognising that the whole notion of 'data' itself is complex and contested (Koro-Ljungberg and MacLure, 2013). Evidently our approach does not aim at objectivity, but aligns with those that argue that all research methods 'not only describe but also help to produce the reality they understand' (Law, 2004:5) and that we as researchers are inevitably part of this process. We are interested not just in stories as representations of data, then, but in what stories do, in how they work as method to generate certain kinds of insights and ways of knowing. We see stacking stories then as a method, not just a dissemination technique. We also discuss a number of questions that arise in doing such work: whose stories do we, should we, or can we tell? What do we include and exclude? *How* are our stories told? And what happens as stories meet up with other stories, and with readers?

In what follows we begin by outlining some of the challenges associated with investigating the ephemeral and affective dimensions of young children's on/off-screen virtual play, with a particular focus on what happens as we represent these through research accounts. Next we briefly sketch ways in which the sharing of stories has contributed to literacy research over time and some of the tensions therein, before outlining our own method of stacking stories. We illustrate this approach by using a series of stories of children's encounters with touchscreen tablets in an early years setting and propose that the juxtaposition of these stories

- told in different ways and from different perspectives - can usefully unsettle easy conclusions about what is going on in children's meaning making practices, and foreground aspects of literacy that are felt not thought, and which are by their nature elusive. We end by raising some broader questions about generating and sharing of stories in this way and reflect on ways in which such work may usefully come into dialogue with educational practice.

The problem with representation

As literacy researchers we approach children's meaning making as situated within multiple social, cultural, political trajectories and always inflected by embodiment, materiality and affect (Burnett and Merchant, 2014; 2017). Our analysis of literacy as social practice works to acknowledge and interrogate this situatedness, and to see children's textual play in relation to things, bodies and feelings. Our research texts (by which we include our data as well as the various presentations and papers that emerge from the work), however, are treated rather differently. While we aspire to rich and lively description, our 'data' are all too easily translated into or absorbed within neat and tidy offerings, moulded into logical argument, coherence and linear explanation as they move through the tricky process of peer review towards publication. The material, embodied, affective dimensions of our data's social life in our research are, for the most part, left unexamined.

This process becomes particularly problematic given our interest in the felt, the elusive and the ephemeral in literacy practices. In this work we are interested in looking differently at the human/non-human assemblages through which digital media are brought to life, but also to evoke what isn't there, what has dispersed, and what has yet to come into being. This engagement with potentialities inherent – so often disparaged, dismissed or simply missed - seems to be important, and indeed political, work in an era of stultifying education reform based on the apparent 'certainties' generated through an economy of testing, accountability and evidence-based practice (Hamilton, 2012). But its very ephemerality makes it difficult - impossible maybe - to capture in the kinds of research accounts we have been used to generating.

Our initial struggle with representation therefore is two-fold. First we struggle with knowing meaning making beyond what gets represented: the emergent rhythms, and affective intensities that escape the representations we capture as 'data' (whether these are textual artefacts produced by participants - writing, images, films, and so on, or our own empirical materials generated to gain insights into the more-than-textual). Second, in addition to our concern for *what is lost* as we try to capture literacy practices, we are also interested in *what gets produced* moment to moment as these materials circulate and assemble differently, not just with our own thoughts, dispositions and areas of interest, but with others and with the media through which we seek to represent them. As you read this chapter, for example, our stories assemble again – with the room you are in, the pages or screen you are looking at, and your own interests, anxieties, hopes and unfolding experience.

In this chapter we attempt to hold together our interest in the ephemeralities of literacy with an attention to what gets generated in the moment as we engage with research materials through telling and sharing stories. Specifically, perhaps ironically, we explore how we can put representation to work in evoking what tends to escape representation, to hint at what is missing, what is left out. Our work involves using story in a very particular way. Before introducing this, though, it is worth exploring some of the epistemological and methodological dilemmas associated with using stories within literacy research. .

Using stories in literacy research

While there is an extensive literature documenting approaches to narrative research methodologies (e.g. Clandinin; De Fina and Georgakopoulou de Fina, 2015), it is worth emphasising here that our particular focus is on the use of narrative within research accounts. The role of story in enabling engagement with ethical and aesthetic dimensions of experience has been debated at length (Clough, 2002; Ellis, 2009). For Polkinghorne (1997), narrative is the most appropriate form for communicating research as it positions participants as actors, acknowledges the role of researcher(s) as protagonist(s), and reflects how research projects unfold over time. He critiques the lack of 'temporal depth' (1997, pp.18) in conventional research reports that aim to 'demonstrate' rather than 'present' and explores how narratives capture complex relationships as they evolve over time. Even when told non-chronologically, stories trace this temporal arc. Drawing on Bruner (1990), Polkinghorne argues that,Plot is the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship between events and choices of their lives' (p. 13). Given that stories play such a vital part in how we make sense of our lives, it is not unsurprising that stories have been used widely in documenting and sharing fieldwork.

It is not possible to map the full diversity of ways in which stories have been used in literacy research in a chapter of this length (see Baynham, 2000 and Glenn, 2014 for further discussion), but compelling examples can be found in studies of children's classroom literacy worlds. Paley's stories of classroom life in the 'literary documentary' tradition (Coles, 1990), for example, provide powerful (albeit inevitably inferred) insights into children's intentions, feelings, struggles and relationships (e.g. Paley, 1990; 1999), as do Dyson's (1993; 2003) ethnographic accounts of classroom life, which capture how children's text-making is always inflected by their social worlds. Paley foregrounds children's individual negotiations with one another and the world around them, while Dyson places greater emphasis on social and cultural dimensions. Both, however, use their stories of 'the literature and lore of the classroom' (Paley, 1990, pp. 26) to highlight what matters to children in classroom life with persuasive implications for literacy education. As Brooker (2002) argues, we do not easily forget the children and families in such accounts and this memory can be influential in changing perceptions as well as practice. Indeed the influence of Paley's work in shaping the Boston early years curriculum likely due to the power of her stories (Mardell and Kucirkova, 2016).

Such stories offer glimpses of a world that can only ever be partially understood, but that privilege children's lives and intentions. In doing so however, as Kincheloe (1997) explores, they hold together certain ways of understanding experience and exclude others. Stories are partial, and the intrusion of narrative voice shapes the perspective from which events are told and how they are presented. As stated earlier, we could argue that all research methods are selective and partial, but the point here is that stories are seductive in a particular way. They are written and framed by ontological assumptions that underpin the organisational features and textual conventions of written narrative: once experience is translated to story, 'It enters a text-mediated system or discourse where larger issues of power and control come into play' (Denzin, 1997, p. 181). 'Narrative voice' is not just problematic because of the way that structural inequities within academia and publishing mean that certain voices are privileged over others, but because the notion of voice itself can imply a fixity of identity and perspective that is at odds with complex views of the social world (Pinar, 1997). Others have highlighted how readers always play a part in re-shaping narratives, and that the power of stories resides in their life beyond the academic texts in which they are produced. Narratives are not complete in themselves but are taken up and made sense of in different ways; as such they are produced through interactions between storytellers and their audiences (Pandian and

McLean, 2017). Phillips and Bunda (2018), for example, refer to this process of making, sharing and re-making stories as 'storying', a process which they suggest 'enacts collective ownership and authorship'. For some researchers, the value of telling and sharing stories lies partly in what can happen through such co-production. In reflections on her autoethnographic work, Ellis for example states that she shares stories of her own life partly to provoke others to tell theirs; she acknowledges but aims to work *with* 'ambivalence and contradiction' (Ellis, 2009, p.130).

A number of themes emerging from this brief discussion play through our approach of stacking stories and we explore these in the rest of this chapter: first we use stories as a means of both writing about and evoking affect, both in our tales of the research site; and as they come into relation with other people in other places; second, we take the opportunity to write ourselves into the data, in an explicit way, foregrounding our own role as co-constructers of meaning; and third we work with stories in ways that actively seek to provoke their movement; not just as they are read by various readers, but as they come into dialogue with other stories that trouble any fixity of meaning they may initially suggest. Our approach aims at a playful storying, a form that allows for an affective/reflective engagement, a back and forth that involves a search not for *the* story, but for many stories, and which hints at what is untold. Through this approach we feel we are able to at least reach towards - if never entirely grasp - some of the ephemeralities that escape more conventional accounts.

Stacking stories

For several years we have been exploring how what we call 'stacking stories' might work to enact the multiplicities that are associated with virtual play (Burnett and Merchant, 2014). This process involves giving different accounts of the same 'episode' and seeing what happens as they nudge up against one another - their continuities, contradictions and elisions. We have used this approach in a number of ways: examining the on/offscreen qualities of children's explorations in avirtual world through stacking together stories told from different 'points of view' within and beyond the classroom (Burnett and Merchant, 2014); drawing on different narrative forms to evoke the multiplicities threading through an episode of virtual play (Burnett and Merchant, 2016); and juxtaposing stories of encounters with data at different stages of a research project (fieldwork, analysis, dissemination) to explore the complex relationships between researcher, data and affect (Burnett, 2018).

Importantly we do not use stacking stories as a route to triangulation. Instead, we are interested in the 'mode of knowing' (Law and Ruppert, 2016) that they offer when stacked together. The process of stacking stories is in some ways similar to the 'textual montage' that Stevenson (2017) describes or to what Stewart does through her collection of short stories that make up *Ordinary Affects*, a collection Stewart describes as,

> …an assemblage of disparate scenes that pull the course of the book into a tangle of trajectories, connections, and disjunctures. Each scene begins anew the approach to the ordinary from an angle set off by the scene's affects. And each scene is a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening- something that needs attending to. (Stewart, 2007, p.5)

In place of the careful analysis and orderings associated with more conventional academic accounts, Stewart's stories take walks that escape. Her stories move the reader, not because they organise and order (although of course they do that, too), but because they are loose enough to hint at other possibilities that escape the main plot. They hint at the world in which they occur, rather than working as microcosms of that world. As stories come into dialogue, we are intrigued by how they interfere or disrupt each other and, like Stewart , how

unexpected concepts come into focus in 'a tangle of potential connections' (2007, p. 3). While our stories of classroom life seem rather trivial in contrast to the moving accounts of everyday life in the USA that Stewart presents, we perhaps attempt something similar in using a collection of stories to engage not just with what *was there* but also with what *was not there*, and consequently with the potentiality immanent within moments.

This feels counter-intuitive for us as researchers, stretching beyond the 'evident' into the realms of supposition and imagination – indeed we are still unsure how far this notion of 'interference' and 'disruption' can be communicated to a reader, but for us, the *process* of approaching empirical material in this way somehow enables us to look and feel beyond the data, into the cracks between the stories, and to imagine what else might be going on as children make meanings on and off-screen in complex on/off-screen episodes of virtual play. We find this process of storying and re-storying our data to be both compelling and beguiling. Through crafting stories we find we are able to prolong our fascination with what happened, and perhaps creep up on immanent potentialities. While limited by our own powers of creativity, we attempt to approach these stories playfully, aiming not to unify or simplify but to complicate.

Importantly, we see the process of constructing a narrative as a process of capturing our relationship with events, of engaging with affect generated through the process of assembling. In telling these stories and commenting upon them, we therefore are interested in what assembles in the episodes described (as conveyed through our stories), and on what is immanent. We conceive these stories not as objective accounts of what happened (or even descriptions of 'assemblages'), but as assemblings through which we have wound ourselves into events, and which - as we share them now- hope to wind in our readers too.

In the next section we present four stacking stories to illustrate our approach. The stories orientate in different ways to a few moments presented as data from a study of under-twos working with iPads in an early years setting (Merchant, 2014). The first is an observational narrative crafted from video data. The second is an imagined account that draws attention to the role of technology in enacting this data and includes a screenshot from the video editing software. The third is a commentary on a video re-mix created by selecting salient extracts from the video footage. The fourth and final story allows the technology to have the final say.

Story 1

Hannah, the teacher, has chosen a story app., *The Three Little Pigs* (Nosy Crow) Iona is sitting comfortably on her teacher's knee. The voice on the app begins: 'Once upon a time there were three little pigs', and this attracts the attention of Kenny, who soon makes his presence known. While Iona is happy to observe, pointing with her index finger, Kenny is keen to exert control. It is impossible to understand his intentions, but it does seem that he is more interested in the actions of pointing or tapping than in listening to *The Three Little Pigs*. Kenny dominates the interaction, capturing Hannah's attention and her approval with his attempts to control the app. He looks underneath the device whilst Iona looks up at Hannah.

Kenny then appears to lose interest, crawling behind Hannah and then kneeling at a nearby book trolley. As Iona and Hannah continue with the story, he holds up a board book, which slips from his grip and turns upside down in his hands. He then tries to open it before it slides through his clasped hands and drops to the floor. Hannah and Iona resolutely continue to look at the iPad, listening to *The Three Little Pigs*. With careful support from Hannah, Iona gradually learns to turn the pages by swiping. Kenny maintains contact with Hannah, applying firm pressure with his right shoe, to ensure that she cannot ignore his presence.

Hannah looks across at Kenny to engage his attention. It seems to work and Iona shifts to the right as Kenny approaches from the left.

Despite Hannah's best efforts to keep the narrative going with Iona there is now competition for her attention. As Kenny kneels down he extends his index finger to tap the screen, and Hannah angles the iPad in his direction. Kenny changes his gesture at the last minute so that when his hand makes contact with the iPad the thumb comes to rest on the home button, which he presses decisively. The story comes to an abrupt end and Kenny looks up at the camera grinning mischievously. At the same time he levers himself up into a standing position with one hand pressing down on Hannah's forearm and the other on the book trolley.

Story 2: i, movie: i am your data

File <Chatter and screen shot-quicktime.mov> download 12 Feb 2016

File<Backs.MP4> download 16 Feb 2016

File<Bookcase.MP4>download 16 Feb 2016

File<Loading eye.MP4> download 16 Feb 2016

Files imported 16 Feb 2016

Thank you.

Your data is my data. i can show it you. i'll display it visually in a template for you. mmm i know i shouldn't really say *windows*, but that's what it looks like. Windows. Images of our data in little windows. You can see stills of the children looking just like they did in Life 1.0.

Let me help you. These windows are called clips and each one represents just 4 seconds of moving image. Remember it takes the eye a few seconds to adjust. But then you know how viewers get bored easily. That's why each clip is 4 seconds long, but i'll let you adjust that if you like. Let me show you. Our data looks like this on my screen. See what i mean about little windows? The rest is easy. Drag and drop to assemble, cut, paste, if in doubt Google it. Watch it back.
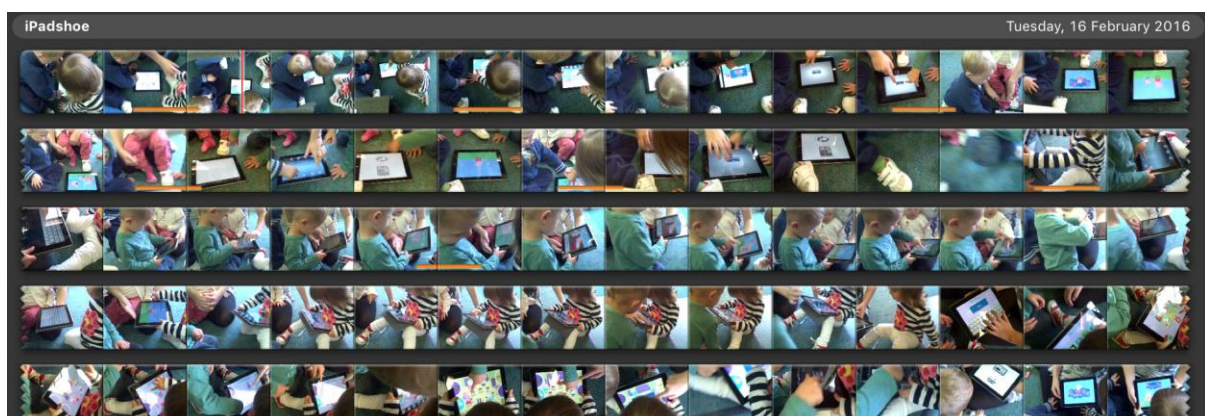
Figure 1: Look at our data

i can feel your fingers on my trackpad, moving left, then right and reaching up. Up towards my keys. Occasionally you push a key. Is that the key to my heart? My hard drive is getting

warm. You're staring straight at my screen. It feels like you're looking straight through me, through the windows into my very soul. If i have one. i've never been sure. Do i?

The movie is coming together. Look there are musical notes on my screen – you know what that means, don't you? Just click on those notes, import your favourite music. There, we've made it! It's good. i'm pleased you're pleased. You *are* pleased aren't you?

It's so easy. The data came good. i'll store this in my hard drive, but don't forget to save before you switch off! Believe me, they'll love it!

Just turn me on, hook me up to a projector, and i'll do the rest. It's easy.

Are you sure you want to shut down your computer now? Good.

Story 3: Barefoot, jabbing at screens

Re-watching videos again, videos of under-twos with adults and iPads this time, it's still tough not to organise our viewing in ordered ways. Our lives lend themselves to storying so easily. Noticing where a particular child is recruited into the routine of story-sharing. Moving close to an adult, perhaps pulling a screen into view, little fingers jabbing at the tablet. These instances are relatively easy to isolate, to describe and to analyse as 'events'. Out of the noise, the movement and the purposeful chaos of this classroom from time to time something snaps together, and assembles in this particular way. And sometimes that's what we want, the familiar, the recognisable, the routine that we value. But something else is going on too, engulfing these episodes, swirling in and out of them, and it refuses the trite label 'context'. It's something about the place, the setting with its cacophony of voices and things, the two segments of nearly-the-same-colour blue flooring, the children, unruly and unpredictable, the things that usually go unnoticed, and the adults - resolutely performing – performing pedagogies. And then there's the video and then there's me, and the uncanny feeling that it was never really quite like that in the first place.

Looking aslant at the images, trying to avoid the obvious, and hurriedly scrawling down some notes. The driving idea is to try to re-present, to explore or maybe just to look deeper into the sense of surprise, interest or enthusiasm which is evoked. Of course, that interested viewpoint doesn't just arrive on the spot readymade. In the end it is *my* interest or enthusiasm that is stirred. Stirred perhaps because it resonates with experience, ideas, memories, beliefs, values and so on.

Looking for episodes which conjure a sort of enchantment. The unpredictable is here. "I didn't expect to see that! Isn't that strange? How did that get in there?" Things that surprise, that fall out,

> *'Found objects wash up on the shores of my computer. Tin cans and old tyres mix with the pirate's stuff. The buried treasure is really there but caulked and outlandish. Hard to spot because unfamiliar, and few of us can see what has never been named.*
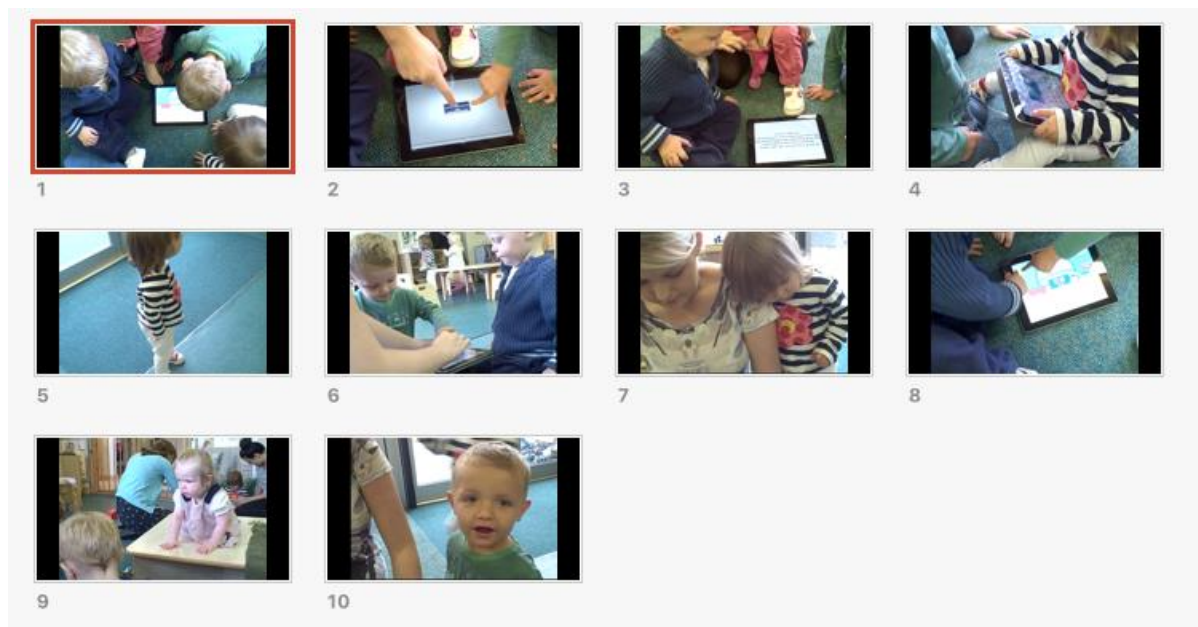>
> *I'm looking for something, it's true.*
>
> *I'm looking for the meaning inside the data.*
>
> *That's why I trawl my screen like a beachcomber.'*

(Winterson, 2001: 63-64)

Locating ten nodes that speak to me, that evoke some strong affect - taking screen shots of them in order to think differently with them, to re-present them.

Figure 2: Ten nodes

Listing them:

1. iPad on the blue carpet. Three children stare at the screen. Amie's bare foot dangles down (she has removed her sock).
2. Jabbing at an error message. Emma (the teacher) has Amie's pink sock bundled in her hand as she points at the screen.
3. Amie - her shoe on the edge of the screen. Emma rolls the sock on to her other foot, whilst a boy looks at the copyright page of a story app.
4. Iona holds the iPad like a book. Her shoelaces are untied.
5. Iona walks away – crossing the threshold of the two blue sections of flooring. She is going.
6. Foreground: iPad action. Background: Iona looks in a cupboard. She has taken off her shoe and holds it in her left hand.
7. Iona returns - for a moment of physical intimacy with Emma (her teacher).
8. Fingers jab at the iPad. Amie has removed her sock, again (is it the same one?).
9. Another child on all fours on a table top. No one seems to notice (is this *OK*?).
10. On camera. A boy looks directly at the video camera. He appears to know that he is becoming an image…

Imagining what it might be like to re-present these nodes, capturing a few seconds around each one and stitching them together. Remixing these nodes or entanglings. A short video called 'Shoes, feet, fingers and iPads' emerges. A story to stack, perhaps.

But what is this cut? Certainly the setting, the space on that particular day, and all the various things that went on is one highly complex assemblage. And then there's the adults, the video camera, the passage of time and all those things that have conspired to re-assemble it as data to be acted upon to be 'thought with' in the present moment as it ebbs away and becomes something else. Something that happened, that was reflected upon. Even more unsettling than that is the acknowledgement of another set of forces: a conference paper, a presentation to populate – and then, of course, there's nothing that conference participants like more than a quirky video! Like TV, but not quite such a guilty pleasure.

> '*I was typing on my laptop, trying to move this story on, trying to avoid endings, trying to collide the real and the imaginary worlds, trying to be sure which is which.*
>
> *The more I write, the more I discover that the partition between the real and invented is as thin as a wall in a cheap hotel.*'
>
> *(Winterson, 2001, pp. 93-94)*

Story 4: Return

If you want to continue press return.

Yes, you want to! Good. This was just meant to be. This is the alchemical process. The empirical materials have been added to my crucible. They became bits. But don't worry i have blended them together so that they have an even texture. i smooth over non-coherence, it becomes a paste. i breathe new life into old data and it becomes the stuff of enchantment. Time and space are re-configured into new times and new spaces.

The children are moving again. Look, i have re-animated them. But this time you see the movement of bodies and things, odd juxtapositions, strange meanings, the inexplicable, the unruliness, mismatch, humour, new meanings. i think i am enacting a new method assemblage. Can i think? i'm not sure…. but at least i can do stuff.

Don't forget to save!

Stacking stories as method - what's the point?

In attempting to evoke what escapes representation, we have engaged in a playful back and forth between perspectives, a search not for *the* story, but for many stories. By storying and re-storying, we hope to imply and work with the provisionality of data. Like others who have explored diverse ways of reimagining relationships with data (e.g. see Koro-Ljungberg and MacLure, 2013), we are interested in working at *being differently* with empirical materials, and *working through* multiple human/non-human entanglements. Making our stories has involved a sensitivity to affect as things, bodies, technologies and all the rest assemble together, as well as a sensitivity to how we assemble *with* what we are researching. We are part of our stories, not just because we have framed research questions or bring in certain assumptions, but because we are physically co-present with what we study (in the 'field' and through analysis and dissemination) and this embodied co-presence itself generates affect. This process animates an interest in classrooms and what happens in them, in the surprises they hold – to tell untold stories. It promotes engagement with classrooms as a lively meshwork of material, semiotic and social flows in which the vague, the illusive and the ephemeral repeatedly bubble to the surface.

So what happens when we stack these stories together? How do they trouble or play off one other? What happens when a conventional narrative comes into dialogue with a video narrative, researcher reflections on generating that narrative, and the imagined musings of the program that helped produce it? How does the intersection of schooled/social worlds evoked in Story 1 inflect our reading of the stories that follow? How does the foregrounding of the researcher's voice in Story 3 trouble our readings of the objective gloss of Story 1, and the apparent neutrality of the video footage? In contrast with approaches to triangulation that work towards a cohesive or complete account (e.g. Oliver-Hoyo and Allen, 2006) our multiple stories are intended to interface, interfere with and sometimes bypass each other, evoking the multiplicities at play that are missing from individual accounts. Our intention here is that, stacked together, they conjure up resonances (Stevenson, 2017).The juxtaposition of different forms is designed to generate a 'hypermodality' that evokes absences as well as presences; the connections (or not) between texts provoke multiple wonderings about 'what happened', which becomes 'a question not to be answered but an opening to be explored' (Ulmer 2016, p.186). After reading Stories 2 and 4, for example, we might wonder which other human and non-human participants might have stories to tell about what was happening. We can see relationships between these stories as kaleidoscopic: arrangements of each are folded into each other, potentially unfolding at any moment in multiple inter- and intra-imbricated relations.

Stacking these multiple stories implies a particular stance towards episodes as *events*. In literacy studies, the literacy event has played a central role in examining relationships between literacies and power, identities, discourses and, more broadly, context. Situated in space and time, it provides a focal point for examining literacies in relation to a nexus of social, cultural and economic flows. Through our multiple stories, however, we approach the notion of 'event' more as Massumi seems to do as he writes, 'Nothing is prefigured in the event. It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, or rules into paradox' (Massumi, 2002, p. 27). The stories unfold in multiple ways- and these things are not just seen or thought but felt. This process allows us - and we hope our readers- to think expansively about how different articulations between people, things and practices transpire, come to matter, and ultimately dissolve. We intend our stories to hint at the 'tension' between what is told, what is represented and what is not. Our approach to stacking stories, then, aims to foreground the multiplicities that play out in young children's meaning-making practices.

Issues for practical application

Generating and sharing multiple stories of young children's practices is not unproblematic. The questions about partiality and selectivity explored in the first part of this chapter do not evaporate just because we are juxtaposing different stories. Selections are still made. Our advice for anyone adopting a similar approach is to keep reflecting on the standpoint from which any story is told, and to seek out other stories. The stories collected above, for example, could be supplemented by multiple other stories from the children themselves and adults in the room, and all the other things and texts gathered there. Stories with grander scale could also have been told which tracked movements of people and objects across space inflected by politics, economics and environmental concerns. Others seeing the footage would have narrated the episode in other ways - a parent would likely see something different in what their child was doing, a school manager something different again. And of course each of these, and other, stories could have been told in multiple ways, not just through images and third/first person accounts, but through sound, animation, drawing, and so on. Each would have orientated the reader differently to what happened, and evoked other

dimensions of what might have happened and of what mattered to who was there and to what was going on.

This approach brings with it a range of ethical concerns, about the responsibilities we hold when we feature children and the adults who work with them within our stories of early years settings. On one hand, we might reflect on how far we do or should fix others subjectivities as we enlist them as characters in our stories. And on the other hand, paradoxically, acknowledging that our characters move on again as they meet up with those who read of them, we might reflect on how far we can and should take care of what they become? Telling stories requires a 'relational ethics' that foregounds our responsibilities to others, and encourages us to engage with our connectedness with those involved in our research (Ellis, 2009).

Done with care, this process of storying and re-storying classrooms in multiple ways has, we believe, potential for our work as educationalists, particularly in our collaborations with teachers. In a country where the teachers we work with are used to frequent monitoring – and where certain kinds of official stories of practice dominate – it feels important to be telling other kinds of stories about literacy practices in early years settings. Stacking stories has potential to complement other approaches that engage teachers in working reflexively with complexity (e.g. Schwandt, 2005), which acknowledge and engage with what we *feel* as researchers and educationalists as we set out to assemble multiply and differently with the classrooms where we work.

We are interested in exploring further how stacking stories can support an affective/reflexive engagement with classroom as 'event', that brings us into dialogue with multiple possibilities, with the immanent 'field of potential' (Massumi, 2002, p.76). It is, we suggest, in this proliferation of possibilities that we may land upon new ways of being and doing in classrooms, and in our national context at least, new ways and being and doing are desperately needed. Stacking stories invites us to ask, how might we look, think and feel differently about what happens? It is a process with potential to be generative in the way that Lenz Taguchi describes when she explores pedagogies aligned with an 'ethics of immanence', that work and play with,

> inter-connections and intra-actions in-between human and non-human organisms, matter and things, the contexts and subjectivities of students that emerge through the learning events.[…] . This means we have to view ourselves in a constant and mutual state of responsibility for what happens in the multiple intra-actions emerging in the learning event, as we affect and are being affected by everything else. (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. xvi)

This kind of critical reflexive/affective engagement is something we have experienced in our collaborations with teachers and something we are beginning to document more closely in our current work. We are interested not just in complicating accounts of practice which capture - or at least nudge against - multiplicitities in meaning-making, but in what is generated as these stories are shared and assemble. After all, new possibilities can emerge: 'assemblages, like actors, are creative. They have novel effects and they make new things' (Law and Mol, 2008, pp.72-3).

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