

LITERACIES, MATERIALITY, AND WORKING-CLASS LIVES:

ENCOUNTERS WITH MUCHNESS

by

JENNIFER ANN JOHNSON THIEL

(Under the Direction of Stephanie Jones)

ABSTRACT

Conceived as a special issue journal that comprises of five essays called *encounters*, this post-qualitative dissertation using Deleuzoguattarian and feminist new materialist theories, examines autobiographical accounts, the multimodal out-of-school literacies of children in a working-class working poor neighborhood, and the preservice teacher education classroom as a site of muchness. Each of these essays represents the expressions of what are situational and fleeting understandings of the phenomenon of muchness. Each encounter is linked by its origin (muchness) but very distinct from one another in the ways they conceptualize how muchness unfolds. This dissertation is guided by three research questions: 1) What is muchness? 2) How is muchness related to early childhood literacies, and 3) Under what conditions does muchness flourish for adults and children?

Muchness is defined as intellectual fullness that manifests through a compulsion to be engaged in an activity that one has a particular affinity for or curiosity about. To this end, this research observes muchness manifesting in three interconnected, overlapping and mutually influential ways: through affect (embodied and emotional

engagements), through objects (everyday materials and things), and through composition (exercising creativity). These three expressions of muchness are illustrated in depth throughout this special issue journal and its contents.

INDEX WORDS: social class; multimodal literacies; Deleuze; new materialism;
objects; writing pedagogy

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by

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In closing—So many people, places, and things have been an integral part of this journey--many of which I may never be aware of. To the unnamed and unknown I extend my deepest and sincerest gratitude.

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Journal of literacies, materiality, and working-class lives

encounters with
muchness

a special themed issue

Journal of Literacies, Materiality, and
Working-class Lives:
Encounters with Muchness
A Special Issue Journal

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Jaye Johnson Thiel

—Dedication—



Figure 1: Writing Inspiration Courtesy of Finnie Blair

*This special issue journal is dedicated to the kids at The Awesome Clubhouse and to
scabby-kneed girls growing up in trailer parks everywhere.
You make the world a much more muchier place to live.*

—Letter From the Editor— A Storyteller's Journey Into A Special Issue on Muchness

I know I am a storyteller, something I learned from my grandfather, whom I affectionately called Paw-Paw. Until I was too old, too big, too grown-up, I would sit on my Paw-Paw's lap for hours while he told me wild memoirs of his life as a boy. Although the stories would change a little each time, a few things remained the same: the main character was always a red-haired, freckled-faced boy from a working-class life and that boy always got into mischief. A nail accidentally lodged into the boy's head while hiding in a shed, a squirrel bitten finger during an attempt to skip school, a pet goat that mysteriously went missing the same night his momma served the "best stew ever-and-the-most-food-he-had-seen-in-weeks" and a beloved dog named Pete that died at the foot of a bed from lack of heat were my favorite childhood tales. He would end each story by asking me if I knew who that redheaded, freckle-faced boy was, and of course, it was always him. These memories and "first writing lessons" influence every piece of work I create. This dissertation is no exception.

As I write and struggle with philosophy and theory, there is one question that I constantly revisit: What is it I truly want to do with this work and where do I ultimately want it to go? *I want to tell a story of working-class children. I want to tell a story of things. I want to tell a story of muchness.* Simple enough. Yet, with traditional forms of writing up dissertation research, I continued to feel as though I was trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Were traditional methods too simple? Too essentializing? It was

clear something needed to be different for this project. It was clear that I needed the stories.

In an attempt to accomplish this I take up seemingly ordinary narratives of my own working-class experiences and being entangled with children during playful literacy engagements in a Reggio Emilia inspired after school center (fondly known as the Clubhouse) located in a working-class community. The effects of economic and racial disparities can be seen here but do not singularly define this community.

I write this dissertation as a way to show the many ways life bubbles and breathes and flourishes in spaces where the working-class and working-poor live despite and in spite of the very real economic, political, and social structural forces that pull at them and become entangled in their everyday living. And just as my Paw-Paw taught me through his fantastical memoirs, it is from paying attention to the ordinary, that the extraordinary occurs. Therefore, I chose to use this dissertation to give life to working-class narratives that are lived out everyday. And I do so the best way I know how—storytelling...



Figure 2: Red the Storyteller

Jaye Johnson Thiel
Editor-in-Chief

Muchness: An Introduction



Figure 3: Busy hands

— Editorial — Chasing Muchness...

"'Curiouser and curiouser!' Cried Alice.... 'Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was!'" (Carroll, 1865/2010, p. 8)

In the hot and muggy summer of 2011, I found myself working underneath my carport stripping the paint off of a door that usually hangs in my dining room, hiding the stairs that leads to the attic that was converted to my son's bedroom. Having watched Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* a few months before, I was still besieged with the words from a scene where the Mad Hatter said to Alice, "you have lost your muchness" (Burton, 2010). Feeling as though this muchness somehow equated to my own identity of working-class woman, I hoped that there was something in the work of stripping this door that would get me back to what I so desperately worried I had lost—my working-class resolve.

Now, two years later, I am still wrestling with this idea of muchness and how it might be experienced in a person's life, an idea that becomes "curiouser and curiouser" over time. I have spent many hours of many days trying to come to some sense of what it means to be muchy by writing through my own experiences of feeling muchness. It is from this autobiographical writing that I realized my moments of muchness often connected to memories of childhood growing up in a working-poor family, such as my grandfather's storytelling—where I am convinced I became a writer; and my mother's aptitude for turning fabric remnants and old furniture into masterpieces that adorned bodies and homes—where I believe my penchant for making things began. *But what is*

muchness and what role does it play in working-class children's and adults' experiences inside and outside of school? As a scholar, I was interested in exploring this question of childhood and the unfolding of muchness. And it was this curiosity that eventually led me to the empirical work that unfolds in this special issue journal. Specifically, you will be reading five pieces: one in which I theorize muchness in my and my mother's life, three in which I analyze what I call my "encounters" with the muchness of young working-class children in a community-embedded educational space that I describe below, and one in which I analyze my attempts at creating a teacher education pedagogical practice centering muchness and the theories and philosophies of new materialisms.

The Community of Ruby Crest: A Brief Context

My mentor professor came to me with a proposition of working with her as a research assistant on a community-based project. Serving in a partnership with the Northeast Georgia Foodbank and Wild Intelligence (a back-to-nature inspired program) we were to reopen a community center in Ruby Crest, a working-class residential neighborhood, to offer a summer enrichment program and if the stars aligned, we would continue this work in the fall with an afterschool program. And so it began. I spent almost every weekday that summer assisting in providing free lunches and interest-driven activities (Legos, board games, book making, science experiments, weaving, clay work, painting, etc.) to children in the community. And when the stars did align to continue the program in the fall, I, alongside my colleagues, worked for weeks to recreate the space of the community center (affectionately known as The Clubhouse at la Escuelita). Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education, class-sensitive pedagogies, and theories of social critique and justice, we aimed to provide an atelier-like environment where

children are seen as full of potential, competent, capable of building their own theories, and were able to express themselves in many ways (Hewitt, 2001). At the end of this renovation, I became a co-facilitator two days out of the three days the clubhouse was open. The program was free of charge to children and their families and the children were able to come and go as they pleased—like screen doors banging against a house in the summer time.

Approximately seventy-percent of the families living in Ruby Crest are Latin@ and approximately thirty-percent are African-American. I do not pretend to know what it means to be a person of color in America but I did once share a similar economic reality to the residents of Ruby Crest. As a white, middle-class woman, my life is now very different that it was during the days that I was a scabby-kneed girl living in mill villages and dirt road trailer communities. In retrospect, the time I spent at Ruby Crest (in part) helped me feel reconnected to the working-classness I had feared had been left behind—although I now realize that it never really disappears. It just becomes entangled with all of the other encounters a person experiences in a lifetime.

My Work as a Teacher Educator: A Brief Context

I came to my role as a teacher educator after having spent eight years in the early childhood classroom. During that time, I noticed an increased emphasis on high-stakes testing and teacher accountability. Once I began teaching literacy methods courses to preservice early childhood educators, the demand for teachers and students in the public school classroom only became more stringent. In addition to being the primary indicator for promotion and retention, these high-stakes assessments also began to be linked to teacher pay and pay raises through value added measures. All the while, a National

Standards Movement for K-12 public education has taken a stronghold, offering strict guidelines for what should be taught at each grade level and various interpretations of how these standards should be taught as well. Now, this move of standardization has started to trickle into the preservice classroom with the most recent measure being the gradual implementation of edTPA (Teaching Performance Assessment), a standardized assessment of teaching for preservice educators, in many colleges across the Nation.

In my role as a teacher educator and through my experiences as a teacher consultant over the past few years it became clear to me that preservice and inservice teachers were feeling defeated. For example, some of the preservice teachers I taught would spend hours after class asking for advice on how they might find a balance between doing what they felt was pedagogical appropriate and the demands of public school standardizations. When I asked a first grade teacher during a consultation how she felt, she responded by telling me that in all her years of teaching, no one had ever asked her that question. And most recently, while working with a former student at her request, she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, “I knew the first year was going to be hard. I just didn’t know it was going to be cruel, too.”

It seemed the muchness that brought these teachers to the profession of education was slowing being usurped in some way. It became important for me to start thinking about how I might find ways to set up the conditions to experience muchness in the preservice classroom so that it might find its way into the early childhood classroom. I began to explore the relationship between materials and muchness through a project with my colleague Brooke Hofsess in the preservice art education and early childhood education courses that she teaches at a small, rural, southern college. My hope is that this

project will offer new insights into the experience of muchness as well as how the conditions for muchness can be put in place in both in school and out of school educational settings.

Chasing Muchness

I began to try and make sense of muchness and all its particulars through paying attention to the ways muchness seemed to manifest in these contexts as well as my personal life. The research in this special issue journal addresses the following questions:

- 1. What is muchness?*
- 2. How is muchness related to early childhood literacies?*
- 3. Under what conditions does muchness flourish for adults and children?*

My methodological practice to theorize the notion of muchness comes out of my experiences of being a working-class woman in academia. In this issue, I explain this in the first encounter. In conceptualizing and theorizing muchness, I use new materialisms and Deleuze and Guattari to think through my and my mother's experiences with muchness. While writing these autobiographical accounts, I became intensely curious about how, if, and when children experience the phenomenon of muchness and under what conditions it becomes possible. This led me to my fieldwork at the clubhouse and teacher education.

Methodology

I approached this study with the same discernments that Vagle (2010) uses to define post-intentional phenomenology. A rupture in descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, post-intentional phenomenologies see the phenomenon as always slipping away, not quite an understanding that one can corral, but more like a brief

glimpse into the possibility of awareness of the ways a phenomenon might manifest itself as one experiences it (Thiel & Hofsess, 2013). Seeing muchness as a phenomenon to chase, I situate this research almost as a feminist, poststructural ethnography by embedding myself in the community of Ruby Crest. In addition to working with the children at the clubhouse over the summer and during the school year, I also spend time with families in their homes, sat and talked with extended families in their front yards, regularly walked the neighborhood with the children, introduced myself to new residents, and offered my assistance when needed, making myself a regular fixture in the community. This relationship building is part of my ethical commitment to providing and honoring dignified spaces for working-class people.

Data Collection

In addition to learning about the community in a broad sense, I took notes, photos, videos, collected artifacts and wrote reflective field notes about my work at the clubhouse. I was an active participant during this project rather than a fixed observer. This made it difficult to write detailed notes in the field. Instead, I often made quick notes about particular events when I wanted to remember quotes or specific details about our engagements together. I would go back and fill out these notes in detail later. Daily photos, videos, and artifacts served as reminders of the events as I sat and reflected on my data.

As I sat with the data, I looked for the moments where intensity seemed to swell in the work being done. Some of the things I would look for when chasing muchness were sustained engagements with an activity, when participants seems as if they were swept up in the materials and discourse of an event that they dug into the work,

unstopped by challenges or frustrations. This sustained engagement is illustrated by the work of a young girl learning to weave on a loom. Time and time again, her weaving would come undone because she would forget to change the direction of the fabric as she was threading it through the loom. Instead of quitting, she would hunker down into the work over and over again, day after day until she had created a small woven mat. There was also a “richness” in the work that seemed to come through during moments of muchness, such as the preservice art educator who not only used glue to adhere magazine pictures and drawings to a large piece of white paper but also spent time to do the intricate work of sewing blue thread through the paper to make the work full and lush.

Bodies moving in big, less inhibited ways also signaled muchness to me. I noticed one preservice teacher who put her body in awkward, uncomfortable positions to get the dress she was creating to hang a certain way or to reach the angle she needed. Kids would use large motions and gestures to create stories through their bodies. At the same time, bodies in muchness made small, careful movements to craft a project “just right.” I saw this when I would go into the block room at the clubhouse and noticed children lying on their bellies to carefully place a block while building complicated structures or when a preservice teacher would delicately pinch clay or light brush strokes in their mark making to give the work dimension. Muchness could also be seen in the way materials could make a person pause. So many times I noticed children walk scanning the supplies on a shelf or a table and stop in their tracks to turn their gaze to one particular item, pick it up, and move it around in their hands in contemplation.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also account for the residual affects present when I experienced muchness or witnessed it occurring during this research. I don’t have words

for what is transpiring during these times, these embodied moments where muchness seems to flicker in my gut and torso, where muchness is felt in the data rather than seen, Affective data that creates an intensity that radiates throughout my body. In these moments I know muchness because I feel it.

There were many examples from notes, photos, and videos that I did not recognize as muchness as well. It didn't seem as if muchness was being experienced when a child hastily picked up a book, thumbed through it, and tossed it aside or when children would flit to different materials and activities without sitting with a project long-term. Children did not seem to be in muchness when attempting to finish worksheets for homework (at the request of parents). And I noticed that when the demands of other children interrupted my work with small groups of children, sometimes the groups would slowly dissipate to find something else to engage in because I was not attentive enough to their project. I see this as a disruption to muchness as well. In the teacher education classroom, I noticed a teacher who sat in on a stool while others worked. When approached and asked what she had decided to work on, she responded by telling us that she had taken a photo with her phone and she was done. I did not see this as muchness, either. In all of these “non-muchy” examples, participants did not seem as engaged in or compelled to sustain work over time.

Thinking With Theory

While in the thick of my research, I was reading the philosophies and theories of new materialisms and Deleuze and Guattari. As things unfolded during fieldwork, I noticed myself thinking with the work of these theorists to make sense of what was happening and my research became saturated with these philosophical concepts and

theories. For example, one day a child was explaining her clay sculpture to me and it fell from their hands. As the clay hit the ground, the child looked at me and said, “My clay friend likes to do flips, too.”

Immediately, I read this moment as a line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Instead of letting the mishap of the clay falling to the floor disrupt her work this child used the incident to create a new characteristic of the clay sculpture. In another instance I saw a child take pipecleaners, craft a belt, armbands, and an over-the-ear communication devise in order to “fight crime” on the playground. I saw this as the child and the pipe cleaners intra-acting (Barad, 2007) where both the child and the pipecleaner became something different than they had been before they had worked together. When I looked back at my notes about activities choices, I noticed how one child chose to work with Legos almost every day of the summer. Using my theoretical lens these Legos were actants (Bennett, 2010) in his play. There was something about the power of the Legos that drew him in and compelled this child to spend so much time with them that summer. I also became fascinated by the way the day was shaped by who was at the clubhouse, what materials were available, the weather, what snacks were eaten, etc. These things became the daily assemblage that Deleuze & Guattari (1987) speak of when they write about how seemingly unconnected things become entangled to create the conditions for things to happen—such as the stories that unfold in this special issue.

After spending many hours thinking, writing, and analyzing my data through the lenses of these theories, it seems that muchness can be defined as intellectual fullness that manifests through a compulsion to be engaged in an activity that one has a particular affinity for or curiosity about. To this end, I have observed muchness manifesting in my

and my mother's lives, at the clubhouse, and in a teacher education space in three interconnected, overlapping and mutually influential ways: through affect (embodied and emotional engagements), through objects (everyday materials and things), and through composition (exercising creativity). These three expressions of muchness will be illustrated in depth throughout this special issue journal and its contents.

This Special Issue

Collectively, my autobiographical narratives, my work with teacher education students, and the work at the clubhouse are represented in five essays. I call each of these writings *encounters* to represent the expressions of what are situational and fleeting understandings of the phenomenon of muchness. Each encounter is linked by its origin (muchness) but very distinct from one another in the ways they conceptualize how muchness unfolds. The philosophical and theoretical concepts used in analysis will be unpacked within each encounter.

The first encounter, "Working-class Women In Academic Spaces: Finding Our Muchness" is a series of vignettes from my autobiographical project of exploring muchness. This piece explores muchness in the context of self as a working-class woman desperately trying to find my way in academia without losing my working-classness.

The second encounter, "Bumblebee's in Trouble! Finding Muchness Through Embodied Literacies During Imaginative Superhero Play" uses the Deleuzoguattarian (1987) concepts of assemblages and lines of flight to explore muchness as embodied literacies as they unfold during the children's superhero play at the community clubhouse.

The third encounter, “Finding Muchness in the Vibrant Matter of Fabric: An Intra-active Look at Literacies” uses concepts from feminist new materialism (Barad 2007, Bennett, 2010) to explore muchness through children’s action-oriented textual play with fabric to make costumes and fashion designs at the clubhouse.

The fourth encounter, “Writing Differently: Using Theories of New Materialism to De/reterritorialized Multimodal Literacies” uses the Deleuzoguattarian (1987) philosophy of deterritorialization and becoming to analysis the children’s multimodal literacies as ways of engaging in writing pedagogy.

The final encounter, “Aesthetic Material Biography as Pedagogical Method: Muchness in Teacher Education Spaces” uses new materialism, a/r/tography (Irwin et al., 2006), and collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006) to conceptualize a pedagogical approach to working with preservice and inservice teachers that provides an environment conducive to experiencing muchness in teacher education spaces.

As a conceptual offering, each of these encounters will rethink what might be possible when the tenets of muchness are put in dialogue with traditional language arts pedagogies and at the very least, might be seen as a way to enact social class-sensitive practices when thinking about and working with children in multiple contexts (Jones & Vagle, 2013). What are the implications for policies and practice? How might muchness be produced and put to work during educational opportunities in and out of schools? I invite you to explore these questions and to discover your own questions as we journey together into encounters with muchness.

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—Encounter One—
**Working-class Women In Academic Spaces: Finding Our
 Muchness**

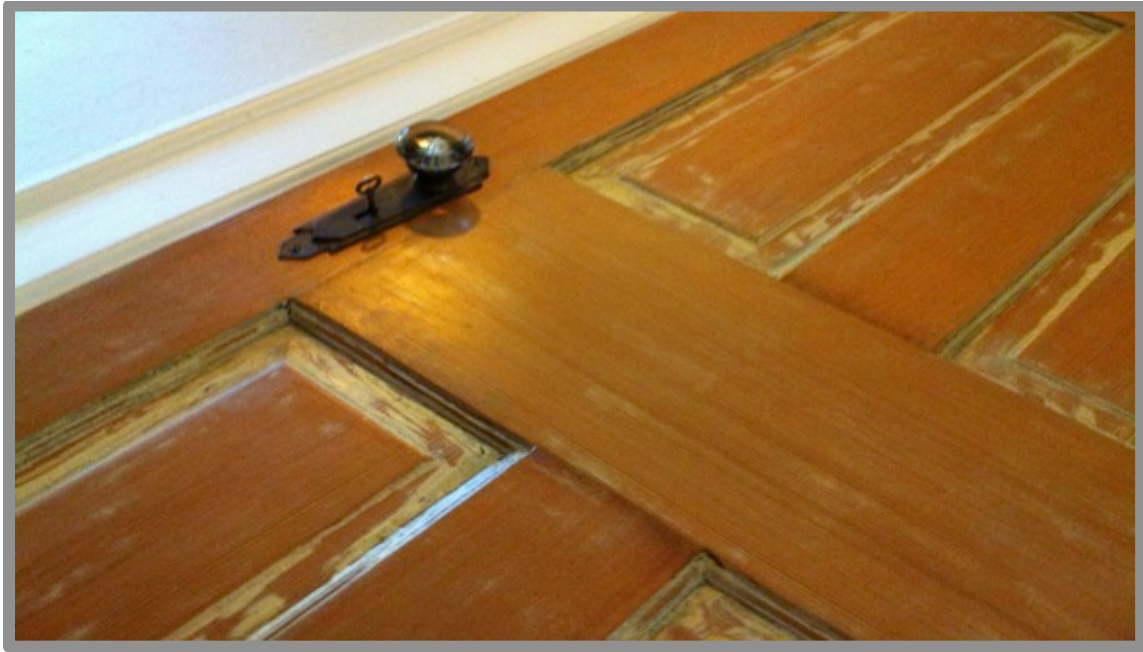


Figure 4: The Doorway Down the Rabbit Hole

“When I say, ‘Alice becomes larger,’ I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now, she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 1).

—ABSTRACT—

In the Tim Burton (2010) cinematographic reimagining of *Alice in Wonderland*, there is a moment when the Mad Hatter looks sincerely at Alice and tells her that inside her, something is missing--that she used to be much more muchier--that she has somehow lost her muchness. Seeing middle-classed upward mobility as a precarious space in which I must negotiate my own muchness, I explore the phenomenon of muchness through an autobiographical lens and the theories of new materialism for analysis.

Working-class Women In Academic Spaces: Finding Our Muchness

“You’re not the same as you were before. You were much more muchier.

You’ve lost your muchness.” (Burton, 2010).

The pulse of intentionality bleeds from my aching fingers.

Dripping.

Seeping.

Into the grains of wood and fine powder grit.

My hands, raw and worn, serve as reminders of my roots and I find myself pushing and poking and picking at them just so I can feel the subtle rawness of my skin. Sweat clings to my face and I swipe it away as the beads of salty wetness commune on my brow and lip. Sticky, dirty, backbreaking, my mind tells me to stop and forget about it, go back to the books and the writing. But my heart, my soul, tell me I must continue, so these hands won’t forget what it means to labor in this way.

Lost in the work, I feel a richness in the moment that is unmatched, as if this had been missing for centuries—and I am left confused, questioning and wondering how anything could be missing in a life as full as mine. Then I think of Alice and the Mad Hatter and it makes sense again.

In the Tim Burton (2010) cinematographic reimagining of *Alice in Wonderland*, there is a moment when the Mad Hatter looks sincerely at Alice and tells her that inside her, something is missing.

That she used to be much more muchier.

That she has somehow lost her muchness.

When I first heard the Mad Hatter speak these lines, the words came at me like magnets to metal, hitting my chest dead center and for a second I forgot to breathe. It was as if the Mad Hatter had spoken directly to me binding me to Alice, Underland, and the Hatter himself. At the time, I wasn't exactly sure why this moment had shown itself to me so strongly. But the nagging was persistent and led me to fall into my own rabbit hole. And now, here I am, bent over a 1930's pine door looking for a muchness I had forgotten existed even though I strongly felt its absence from my life.

Clawing at my skin, which is now bathed in shards of wood and the splatters of chemical paint stripper, I contemplate what it is about this relationship with the physical, with my roots, with these boards held together with nails and glue that makes me feel my muchness. But answers, I have none. All I know is that the labor, this door, allows me to breathe, as if I can once again experience life and rekindle a relationship with the world, a moment that political scientist Jane Bennett (2010) writes as when "human being and thinghood overlap...[when] the us and the it slip-slide into each other" (p.4), when the door and myself get lost in each other.

I know that Monday I will stand at the doors of higher education and watch as the glass moves back and forth, calling to me like the scent of an old lover, the one that got away.

Open.

Close.

Open.

Close.

Automatic doors that have been taught will bring automatic results—magical doors that will remove all the “have not”—a mechanical fairy godmother.

Like most Mondays, I will feel my body tighten a bit as I physically, consciously make my legs move forward into the space.

Something tells me that I don’t belong here.

Never have.

Yet somehow I find myself pushing my legs through the door and up the elevator to take a seat among the academics, desperately needing to feel the plastic of the chair supporting my bones, as if the chair itself helps me to retain my original properties. Here I sit, not empty, but not quite muchy either. In this space, I desperately try to negotiate how to be, what to be, which stories to tell.

This encounter serves as an attempt to tell one of these stories, the story of an often scabby-kneed girl from the mill village and a dirt road trailer community who somehow made it into academia despite the odds being stacked against her—generational poverty, teen pregnancy, and a penchant for performing “unlady-like” when she feels fouled by the world. Through autobiographical accounts of my negotiations as a working-class woman, I will wrestle with what it means to be muchy because of, and in spite of, an institution that brings me both fulfillment and great discomfort and try to uncover the phenomenon of muchness.

Not the Same As We Were Before

"I wonder if I've been changed in the night. Let me think. Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the

same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle!" (Carroll, 1865/2010a, p. 13).

It was the entanglement of the movie, my gender, my class background, the door, and a myriad of other things that I became haunted by the question of muchness, and its role in the experiences of working-class women in academia. Like Alice during her visit to Wonderland, I feel as though I awoke having been changed in the night, someone who is different, someone unsure of exactly who it is I am anymore. Am I still the working-class little girl that made stick gardens in the dirt beside the trailer where I grew up or have I grown into something different, someone else?

Many educational, psychosocial, women's studies, working-class studies, sociology scholars have contemplated similar negotiation and the ways in which working-class women struggle through the tightknit reigns of upward mobility (Christopher, 2009; Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003; Reay, 2001; Tea, 2003; Walkerdine, 2003; Van Galen & Dempsey, 2009; Zandy 1990) and they have all found one similar thing: there certainly "are no easy hybrids. Hybrids may be a cultural and social fact but it is never lived easily in a psychic economy" (Lucey et al. 2003, p. 297). This means that becoming an academic often results in the tensions of performativity of many identities, feeling as though a boundary has been drawn across us in jagged, complicated lines where many start to think their stories must be left behind, or "forgotten" in order to survive. In her personal account of the difficulties faced in the educational system, Professor of English Renny Christopher (2009) claimed that, embracing the promise of an education requires working-class children to construct an inner sense of themselves that is radically different from that of their

parents, siblings, and friends, to betray their allegiance to the only source of identity and support they have ever known. (p. 75)

Sociologist and educational researcher Diane Reay (2001) adds,

among its many promises and possibilities, higher education poses a threat to both authenticity and a coherent sense of selfhood for these working-class mature students. Class hybridity does not sit easily with a sense of authenticity. Feelings of being an imposter are never far away. (p. 337)

For example, women are constantly faced with the tension of gendered inequalities and what educational researcher Hughes (2011) calls “not enoughness” in her study with adolescent women and body image. Women fight their bodies. They struggle to be taken seriously and receive equal pay. They are judged as mothers, as wives, as sexual beings. And to complicate women’s stories even further, as psychology researcher Helen Lucey and her colleagues (2003) explain the “discourses of endless possibility for all *girls* circulate freely...tempered and regulated by the kind of meritocratic principles that can explain any failure to ‘achieve’ and to ‘have’ as a personal one” (p. 285)—the same meritocratic principles that govern classed bodies.

As a woman I have been told I should be able to do anything. As a classed being I am told I should work harder. As both, I am told I am solely at fault if I don’t make it. It is no wonder that I, like Alice, begin to feel lost, changed, and uncertain of the person I am, leaving me with the notion that I must let go of a part of my muchness, desperately wondering if and when I may ever locate it again. And so I am faced with the questions:

When do I feel muchy?

Where does muchness exist?

How can it endure?

Could it unfold through stories of muchness?

Down the Rabbit Hole

"It was much pleasanter at home...when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller...I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life!" (Carroll, 1865/2010a, p. 28).

We tell our stories in many ways.

Some of us write.

Some of us speak.

Some of us are artists through canvas and song.

All of us literate through our work.

My mother tells her stories through repurposing furniture. Meticulously, she transforms old, scuffed, sometimes broken, wooden roadside finds into pieces with chic character that eventually adorn some of the largest, most affluent homes in her community. Her garage no longer holds cars, but rather a treasure trove of pieces waiting for her to breathe life back into their bodies.

I recall the countless conversations between my mother and me regarding her work and the ways she feels she is leaving behind her “duties as a woman” to spend so much time with furniture. I tell her not to stop the work with furniture because I have not only seen the way she creates with these pieces but also the way she approaches a piece when it first catches her eye—the quickness in her step to the piece that suddenly becomes slowed down right before she is upon it. The way she gently caresses the top of

the object, inspects the sides, and opens the drawers looking at the construction—her eyes, wide, dancing with ideas for its capacity.

My mother's bodily reactions to furniture are visible, as if her skin is itching to get in there and work—a material intensity between her and the furniture. In her pause, the furniture becomes what feminist new materialist scholar and political theorist Jane Bennett (2010) calls vibrant matter or an actant (something that alters conditions just by its presence) in my mother's muchness. This need to be with furniture or material intensity is partly because of her acknowledgement of the vitality or vibrancy of furniture and partly because the furniture's vitality and vibrancy calls to her. She recognizes that the stuff in her garage exerts a power all its own—as if it calls to her to push the rest of the world aside for a moment. My mother sees furniture differently—full of life and in the process of transformation they become muchy together as they both swell with vivacity and potential.

I dare not tell her my ulterior, feminist motives for wanting her to continue her relationship with furniture: that there is an undeniable connection between her affinity for furniture and political agency. Political science scholar and feminist theorist Susan Hekman (2010) writes beautifully about the need to put women's bodies in conversation with material politics,

For feminists, the body is unavoidable, but it is also problematic. Women's bodies are at the point of intersection between patriarchal structures and women's lives.

It is women's bodies that feel the pain those structures create, and it is also women's bodies that have been constructed as a cause of women's inferiority. (p. 80)

Heckman goes on to explain that a woman's body must not be seen as a fixed and static entity to be essentialized and dichotomized but integrally connected to the material, natural, social, and political world, each producing the other through their engagements.

Seeing material (such as furniture) as actants that play crucial roles in the social construction of women has undeniable ramifications for the ways the political world is constructed and performed. For example, according to feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham (1996) my mother's appropriation of her own surplus labor can be seen as a noncapitalist enterprise where the demarcation of class subjectivity become blurred through variable performances of what was once thought of as class specific identities (p. 18-19)—similar to Alice in Wonderland always growing larger and smaller, fluid and adaptable in order to become what is needed at the time. These blurred lines of subjectivity and economics open new possibilities for working-class women, specifically when those blurred lines allow materiality to be considered as part of the social and political landscape, where women's bodies are no longer seen as something in crisis, to be gazed upon. Instead, bodies are seen as part of a complex amalgamation that is always shifting and changing, working against a singular definition of what it means to be a working-class woman.

Like political theorist Jane Bennett (2010) “my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (p.ix), that it is easier for humans to see the things that surround us as lifeless, meaningless, without power so that we might have power over them and over each other. Could it be that these same fantasies of conquest and consumption govern the way classed and gendered bodies are perceived and expected

to perform—as mere objects to be used, rendered powerless, and destroyed? If this is so, then each piece my mother reconfigures talks back to a world where there is an increased need to consume things, marginalize women’s bodies, and exert economic control by repurposing furniture as something useful, repositioning herself as someone powerful, and redistributing economics as somehow less hegemonic than presumed, a place where she experiences muchness through the power of things.

Becoming Different

"I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." (Carroll, 1865/2010a, p. 34)

Signs that read “EAT ME” and “DRINK ME” often signify Alice’s experiences of growing larger and smaller. Once Alice eats the cake and drinks from the bottle that are actants in Alice’s journey, all three become enmeshed, changing Alice’s body to perform certain tasks. Alice’s relationship with things is similar to the way new materialism puts subjects and objects in dialogue, similar to the way my mother and furniture collaborate. When I observe my mother and her things—drawers, paint, scrapers, rollers, screwdrivers—the lines between her and the tools she uses become blurred and rather than separate each can be seen as an extension of the other. In other words, she and the furniture and the tools all seem different, like Alice, changed. Paying attention to those differences and subtle changes matters on a much larger scale that one might initially believe.

Barad (2007) writes about the emergence of agency through the interrelationship of bodies (human and nonhuman). These bodies might be things such as furniture, people, space, ideas, or language—virtually anything that constitutes the way the world

comes into being with both becoming different as a result of engaging with each other. She calls this interrelationship intra-action. Barad (2007) explains, “We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather we are part of the world in its on-going intra-activity” (p. 187). Similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) philosophical concept of lines of flight, intra-action occurs through the coming together or assemblage of many bodies (social, political, cultural, material) in a particular moment in time that is generative and transformative. In intra-action, change happens throughout the engagement of these entities, leaving traces well after the intra-action. For example, an old desk might become two bedside tables. My mother’s hands, callused and worn from gripping sand paper and stripper and steel wool, a nagging, persistent cough that doctor’s attribute to her over-exposure of paint and chemicals and dust. Yet, she keeps working with furniture. The cough might nag but the furniture nags more.

I remember my mother’s words as she reflected on her craft, her novels to write, not knowing that I was secretly listening as she stared off into that garage-warehouse of furniture in-wait:

“I have to do this. Without it I think I would die.”

As the words fell out of the tiny crease of her soul, like a drafty window at winter’s chill, she reminded me that her life bleeds through her intra-actions with old chipped, stained wood, sweat, and calloused hands. She experiences muchness through the vibrancy of these old pieces of furniture.

Every detailed grain.

Every coat of paint.

When my mother revives an old piece of furniture it isn't a simple process. First, she goes to thrift stores, garage and estate sales. She never looks for anything particular—just the pieces that in her words, “stand out,” the pieces that look sturdy and strong with dovetailed drawers and thick wood—the ones that look like they could use a good coat of paint or two. She then takes it back to her house and lets it wait. She doesn't touch it right away. Instead, she looks through old home décor books and magazines that she also finds at the thrift store. She peruses the Internet for inspiration and color schemes and one night, when she can't sleep or one day while she is thumbing through pages for the fourteenth or fifteenth time, it comes to her—the moment when bodies assemble, collide, and transform.

I watch my mother as she carefully closes the garage door. It seems the silence is needed in order to maintain the conditions under which she exists, as if her love for this work is a delicate secret she must protect like an infant child and is nothing if not imperative to her humanity. For an instant I felt like an intruder on her life, someone who had witnessed a moment that was not meant for outsiders. But before I have time to consider it further, she moves back into the kitchen and continues cooking as if the event never took place—and for a brief moment I am able to get a glimpse of a woman that is someone other than my mother. It occurred to me that it isn't just the furniture that changes when my mom works—she changes as well. She is strong, powerful, no longer succumbing to the virtual, submissive mother-wife role that the world had told her she *should* be. When she intra-acts with furniture, she experiences an undeniable intellectual and creative fullness. She experiences muchness and this drives her to continue sanding

and painting regardless of the normative social constructs she struggles with or her doctor's recommendations.

Embodying Muchness

"How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another" (Carroll, 1865/2010a, p. 35)

As I watched my mother move away from the garage door, I fight back the tears. I realized we were going through similar identity struggles as she negotiated whom it was she thinks she is expected to be in the eyes of a patriarchal and socially classed world to which she owes nothing. For the first time I think I understand what political theorist Hannah Arendt (1958/1998) meant when she wrote, “whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence” (p. 9). It becomes clear, these aren't just pieces of furniture—they are part of who my mother is, part of what makes her human, allows her to breathe, feel muchness in a way that the rest of her perceived “duties as a woman” do not.

While Arendt may have been focused primarily on humanity, I find the idea of sustained relationships particularly helpful in thinking about the between spaces where life flows, where muchness bubbles. I think about the conditions that make me feel muchy and I am brought back to stories I had forgotten were there. Remnants of the past flash by me like the fireflies I once caught as a child—flickering florescent light scattered in the evening darkness. I know that I am much more comfortable, much more muchier wearing an old t-shirt and blue jeans, sitting around a bonfire on an old dirt road, with one hand wrapped around a smoke, the other wrapped around a long-neck bottle and listening to Willie Nelson, Lynyrd Skynyrd, or Def Leppard.

In her work on embodied literacies, educational researcher Jones (2013) explains two ways our bodies become inscribed with certain habits and actions. First, she describes the automaticity of our bodies when engaged in something we have learned—such as a dancer or pianist might perform without having to think about the way they sashay across a stage or place their fingers on a keyboard. Typically bodies know these things because they have learned how to do them and engage in the practice quite regularly. She goes on to explain that memories can evoke strong, forgotten emotions held within our bodies, a sort of muscle memory, where our body remembers how it felt to live out an experience where something triggers the memory and the same sensations saturate us as if time hasn't passed. Tightened muscles, tears, relaxed/unrelaxed shoulders, stomach flutters, are just some of the ways these embodied literacies might manifest within our bodies.

That bonfire sitting, t-shirt wearing, longneck bottle drinking woman dwells within me. She tiptoes back in when I get too comfortable, too relaxed, too intense about what it is I am doing. She sneaks up on me when Bon Jovi's *Living on a Prayer* comes on the radio and without thinking I roll down the window, turn up the volume, and drive just a little bit faster than I probably should. She slips back in on crisp cool fall nights when I suddenly feel the urge to buy a pack of Marlboro Reds, make strong drinks, and have a hankering to sit around a fire talking shit with old friends until the wee hours of the next morning.

But here I sit, now a non-smoker, in a room with florescent lights and brick walls feeling as though I am expected to become someone who drives BMWs and Volvos, while wearing a crisp, ironed suit with a bottle of spring water in my hand and listening

to Bach, Brahms, and NPR. It is here that I question my choices and wonder where that woman by the bonfire went and why I don't see her as often any more and why she was so quickly abandoned—why both of these people can't seem to live in one place. What brings me to this crossroad where I am bound between feeling like I am on the verge of losing muchness and at the same time at the cusp of experiencing it in a different way? How have these threads become the bricks and mortar of my lived experiences? Like Alice in Wonderland, these visible and apparent changes to my mind and body are so curious, so puzzling. I am never sure who I am or who I am going to be. I am unsure of where and when I might feel muchness.

Multiplicities of Muchness

"I could tell you my adventures—beginning from this morning," said Alice a little timidly; "but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

(Carroll, 1865/2010a, p.80).

I enjoy when that working-class girl that grew up in a trailer creeps in because she reminds me of where I come from and who I am. She keeps me honest. She keeps my academic voice in check. I think back on many of the readings I have actively engaged with in the past few years, women who have made it a point to bring their gendered and classed bodies to the forefront of their writing and scholarship. Women, like author and slam poet Meliza Banales (2003), who have been told there is "no market" for female writers from poor backgrounds. Women, like literacy scholar Renny Christopher (2009), who know the "profound sense of misfitting which comes from the experience of class mobility" (xi). Women, like social scientist Valerie Walkerdine (2003), who have spent countless hours narrating what it means to be "the other" in order to "reclassify upward

mobility” and working-class stories. Women like author Dorothy Allison (1994), who recognize that “class, race, sexuality, gender—and all the categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other—need to be excavated from the inside” (p. 35). It is through these readings that I have come to realize that I am not alone in feeling divided at times. Yet even these texts were not easy to find. Not readily made available to me—eventually assigned by a professor who has confided in me her own perceived loss of muchness and has committed herself to the same scholarly commitments to working-class women in educational settings.

I hear the Mad Hatter’s words faintly in the back of mind—*losing my muchness*—and it feels as if he has looked inside my heart and noticed the parts of me, the working-class parts, are at risk of being sucked out of my body and left to shrivel and die. I close my eyes and I envision myself becoming a marshmallow being forced into a keyhole. Parts stick, but for all purposes, everything is really just a gooey mess. Yet, I know that knowledge in this academic space affords me opportunity to highlight the dignity that people like my mother deserve. And isn’t that one place where my muchness potentially resides? Because if I am honest with myself, at this point, leaving this academic space is just as scary as never returning to the one I get a glimpse of ever so often in the looking-glass, just past my shoulders, in the carpenter’s dust and semi-gloss paint.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term multiplicity to acknowledge a state of being that is ever-changing, always unstable, and continuously being composed. In the Deleuzian Dictionary, Roffe (2005) defines multiplicities as “a patchwork or ensemble without becoming a totality or whole” (p.181). To clarify multiplicities he uses an example of a house:

A house is a patchwork of concrete structures and habits. Even though we can list these things, there is finally no way of determining what the essence of a particular house is, because we can not point to anything outside of the house itself to explain or to sum it up—it is simply a patchwork. (p. 181)

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) go on to explain that these multiplicities vary in speed and intensity and to change the intensive state is to alter the multiplicity. Therefore, it is the multiplicity that helps me make sense of who I am and who I continue to become as I wrestle with moving through intensive states of muchness.

It is apparent I am some sort of multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) or patchwork—always have been—lover of books and writing—performing school—pushing against the work, and sometimes the beliefs, of my family—yet bound to a sense of “makin’ do” and “gettin’ by” in brilliantly creative ways. For example, I know that during a July heat wave, a person can get in their car and spend the entire day at a department store just to keep cool. I know how to build a model of a simple machine out of old sticks from the yard, green tissue paper left over from Christmas, and an old comb that has lost a few of its teeth. I know how to make a huge dinosaur out of a box my mom found behind a grocery store. And I know how to use a ballpoint pen as a gearshift when the stick itself has broken off. Yes, I’ve learned how to stretch a dollar in “sermon-on-the-mount” sort of ways—somehow always finding a way to have loaves and fishes—and knowing that many times it wasn’t my creativity alone that brought me here—but something else.

Sheer luck.

The right place.

The right time.

The right people.

The right amalgamation—where I am no longer this conjectural idea of “self” but have been “aided, inspired, multiplied” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3)—resembling Alice, different than I was before, always growing and shrinking in order to reach new heights and fit through the customary doorways.

Where We Go From Here

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.” (Carroll, 1972/2010b, p 75)

I, like my mother, find muchness in the act of refinishing furniture. Yet, I cannot deny the richness I find in academia that also constitutes muchness for me. Here is where I am often torn, trying to negotiate a new world while at the same time trying to desperately hold onto what once was, balancing two worlds that are seemingly at odds with each other. Still, both are places where I locate fragments of joy, leaving me with the question: how can one possibly *not* hold onto both?

Similar to Alice, I must ask myself where do I go from here? I am still unsure how my muchness might shift and change over time because honestly, I cannot predict what is yet to be. I am like a sieve, perpetually collecting and washing away deposits of a life as I intra-act and mingle with the world. I still worry what might happen if the particles of my old-self become so small, so worn down that the sieve can no longer retain them? This loss, this alienation of my past, is what I fear most and is the driving force behind my need to explore the patchworks that are who I am—holding fast to the

things I find to be crucial, if not imperative to my muchness—like sitting around bonfires and drinking from longneck bottles and refinishing old pine doors. I know there are parts of me that I take for granted, don't understand. So many questions about the stories that shape my identity—choices I made and choices made for me long before I was born—the social and political conditions that altered and continue to alter my multiplicities and my muchness—the ones I punch and kick at every chance I get. These are the questions that haunt me—yet these are the same questions that I feel are too often ignored in our academic endeavors—questions of humanity, experience, and personhood.

Stories like my mom's affinity for and curiosity about furniture matter and are part of what I believe makes muchness a deeply important concept for academic work. It is between the storied lines of personal experiences that researchers can begin to envision the phenomenon of muchness as intellectual fullness and its theoretical implications for scholarship. One way we might begin to think about this is by exploring what it means to be muchy in different contexts and under different conditions. How does muchness manifest itself through bodies and matter and composition in the lives of others? These are just a few of the questions that need to be asked.

Certainly, much work needs to be done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the potential possibilities found within the phenomena of muchness. As I write this, I know that the possible meanings of muchness are immense and varied, and it is highly possible, and most likely, that I will come to a richer understanding of muchness before this paper even reaches the hands of outside readers. I anticipate that like Alice, I will take many trips to Underland, seeking something that has escaped me, or that I have forgotten along the way. I know there is no use in trying to go back to yesterday because

the sparks of muchness have multiplied, diverted, conjoined with new experiences and will continue to do so. Nevertheless, the more aware I am of the ways I embody being a classed woman stuck somewhere in the in-between spaces of social trajectory, the more possibility there is for me to find moments to talk back to the things that try and silence the voices of working-class women in academia and ultimately their muchness.



Figure 1: My Mom's Furniture Booth

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Figure 5: Sand Me: Multimodal Experience One



—Encounter Two—
‘Bumblebee's in Trouble!’ Chasing Muchness Through
Embodied Literacies During Imaginative Superhero Play



Figure 6: Superhero Muscles

*“Everything depends on the dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses, and matter”
 (Stewart, 2010, p 340).*

—ABSTRACT—

In this encounter, I narrate what happened when as the teacher-researcher, I was pulled into a world of imaginary play by following the lines of flight sparked by superhero costumes. As a conceptual offering, I illustrate how this play can be seen embodied literacies and invite educators to imagine what might be possible in the literacy classroom if we are to listen to, enter in, and follow the lines of flight generated during the work of play and see this engagement as a social class-sensitive teaching practice.

**‘Bumblebee's in Trouble!’ Chasing Muchness Through Embodied Literacies During
Imaginative Superhero Play**

“There is no question that the two lines are constantly interfering, reacting upon each other, introduction into each other either a current of suppleness or a point of rigidity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p, 196).

“Bumblebee’s in trouble! We need your help!”

Zack stands over me, hands on hips, his stern, concerned eyes focused downward where I sat at the picnic table on the far left corner of the playground. A rising fourth grader, he was no longer the boy I knew but had transformed himself into Wolverine, a character from X-Men. And now he stood there in a super hero costume that he had slightly outgrown, searching for answers to a problem, a problem I was unsure how to respond to immediately.

“I have no idea where Bumblebee is,” I explain to Zack and the other superheroes, A Power Ranger and Spider-Man, who had surrounded me in the last few seconds. Zack’s eyes widen a bit and without hesitation, he points his dark brown fingers to the empty table space in front of me.

“Did you forget that we gave you the location communicator?” he stated matter-of-factly, as if I had been monitoring the location of each fantasy character on the playground at our community center the entire time.

It is here I had a choice: to be supple or to be rigid, knowing both would produce different things. I respond:

“Oh! I forgot you had given me the communicator earlier today. Sorry.”

And so my assignment at “Superhero Headquarters” began. Reaching down, I made electronic noises as my fingers typed into a pretend keyboard, lodging myself onto the world the kids had already created, brought to me, asking me to join in their improvisational play.

This wasn’t the first time during the summer school program that children had engaged me in play but it was the first time I felt they had demanded that I enter an improvised, imaginative world. As a facilitator, I had worked hard to recast what an adult in this space might look like. I got down on the floor and built Lego buildings, I sat and dug in the dirt looking for bugs, and I engaged in various student-initiated art making activities. Finally, it seemed I had become something else, no longer seen solely as *la maestra* (the teacher) but as someone who might also take off on this wild adventurous flight into a world where several popular movie heroes collided to create a fantastic afternoon of adventure. This article will explore what happened when as the teacher leader, I was open to disrupting the binary between teacher and student and was pulled into this imaginary play by following the line of flight sparked by the children’s pretend world.

In this encounter, I will build the argument that children’s play can be read as embodied literacies. First, I will introduce Zack and the community where this summer program was held and the theoretical concepts used in analysis. Then I will present snippets of the encounter, analyzing how the performance of embodied literacies through costumes, superheroes, and imaginary play spark muchness—or intellectual moments of fullness (see first encounter for an exploration of muchness). In my conclusion, I will suggest that classroom spaces be open to the possibilities of following the lines of flight

created by children's play in order to create learning spaces that attend to social class-sensitive teaching practices (Jones & Vagle 2013), spark the opportunity for muchness, and consider the ways in which bodies are inextricably entangled with each other.

Wolverine and the Awesome Clubhouse

Zack is one of those kids that draws you in the minute you meet him. He is witty. Smart. Sincere. Inquisitive. Gentle. Kind. Creative. Although the room is filled with brown bodies, he is one of the few African American males that join us each day at the community center and one of the few in the group whose primary language is English as well. Even so, Zack commands a room and demands the attention of those around him with just a smile. Although I am bombarded with a chorus of "Hey, Jaye!" when I arrive each day, Zack always makes a concerted effort to say hello again in solo fashion, after the chorus has finished.

Zack lives next door to the community center, a place he frequents during summer as part of the summer lunch program in our county but never attended regularly during the school year due to financial constraints. This summer and upcoming fall would be different for the children and families. Now, the center would be free and open to any one who wanted to come and this summer was serving as an entry point for both the University and Food Bank partners to establish a presence of care and mutual reciprocity and ownership of this community space, which was eventually coined *The Awesome Clubhouse* by the children that summer.

The clubhouse itself sits in the middle of Zack's working-class community, in a house that looks like all of the other rental properties that surround it, a small rectangle building with worn beige siding. Admittedly, until I became an ethnographer here, I

didn't know the neighborhood existed, off the beaten path and tucked away from more visible places in our town. I was welcomed as a visitor in this community despite the fact that my white skin might be read as "middle-class academic." Once upon a time, I had come from a community similar to this one, where most people work long hours in the service industry or factories and barely get through Thursday each week. And I believe it is this past that serves me well as an accepted teacher-researcher in this community, although that fit isn't exact or smooth and at times, life in this community is challenging for me to understand.

I often struggle with language barriers here, Zack and his family being one of the few exceptions. Despite my best efforts, I speak very little Spanish and have to work very hard to communicate. But somehow we make it work with hand gestures and shared linguistic phrases, and children often interpreting for their families when we converse. Most of my time is spent with the children and most of the children (excluding the very young—under four) are bilingual (speaking Spanish and English), which admittedly makes it easier for me, a privilege I don't take lightly.

Even though Zack is a dynamic person at the clubhouse, well-liked, and eager to make friends, he does have moments where he has expressed that he feels as though he doesn't "fit in" with everyone, and these friendships are certainly not immune to the complication of race relations that spills into the clubhouse doors and out on the playground weekly. However, Zack never lets this keep him away for very long, a resilience that I deeply admire, and he is one of the few children who often brings in his personal belongings from home to share with his peers. The superhero costumes were one of those offerings.

Researcher in a Marvel Universe

Like the children in this community, I spent much of my early childhood exploring and playing on the southern asphalt and red dirt-clay between the rows of rental factory mill houses (and later mobile homes) where residents ate dinner, bathed, and slept at night. I was always in search of “something to do” or discover, a young researcher curious about the world and the “what ifs” that floated between the clotheslines, railroad tracks, and fence lines running through the environs of my youth. My community was an intellectual playground just as the enclaves, and driveways, and Clubhouse surroundings are for the children that live in this southeastern neighborhood.

Now as an adult, I find being a researcher just as complex and intellectually engaging as it was during those days of play. Although in this context it is a bit more complicated. As stated earlier, I am not a resident of the neighborhood where I conduct research as a middle-class white woman but have spent the last year as a facilitator of the community summer and afterschool programming. The data presented in this encounter were collected during the summer program that ran three hours daily, Monday through Friday, in an unusually wet and mild temperate June and July for the south.

As a participant observer and teacher researcher in this space my time and attention was in high demand. I would sit to write a few notes about an interaction with a child or a child with materials at the clubhouse and quickly get pulled into working with another child before I could get much down in my research notebook. As a result, I often found it difficult to “capture” these moments on paper during my time at the Clubhouse. Instead of idly sitting by in a corner and taking notes of my observations, I found myself collecting data through photographs taken on my iPhone (some by me and some by the

kids), artifacts created during play, and descriptive and reflective field notes written in the hours and days after the events occurred. Some of the data is also taken from conversations that took place during the afterschool program, which runs for three hours after school on Monday through Wednesday weekly. These conversations were retrospective memories between several of the children and myself regarding our time as superhero friends that summer. My methods therefore include situating myself within Zack's community (visiting homes, conversations with families, neighborhood walks) to chase the phenomenon of muchness and deeply entangled with the theory through which I think and work as a researcher.

Centering Play in Deleuzoguattarian Spaces and Embodied Literacies

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) believed that bodies, both human and nonhuman, are constantly bumping into and building off of one another, producing encounters or multiple and varied exchanges such as instruments and musicians coming together to make music or hands and clay coming together to make ceramic sculptures. These encounters are situational and one of many possibilities within an assemblage (or context) where the social, cultural, political, material (space, objects, bodies, natural world), and discursive (language, literacies, gestures, motions) rendezvous.

In *The Deleuzian Dictionary*, Livesey (2005) defines assemblages as “complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning” (p. 18). In order to provide a concrete explanation of this definition, I offer an example from the video game *Katamari Damacy*, which means “clump soul.” In this third-person puzzle action game, players are asked to pretend they are rolling a magical ball called a “katamari” that allows

anything smaller to stick to its surface. The object of the game is to roll the katamari to various sizes in a given level. Each level is a different space or context such as various rooms in a house (bedroom, kitchen, office, etc.) and within those spaces there are many things that can be picked up using the katamari. Depending on the level and the context, a player might be able to collect paper clips, jacks, dominoes, forks, books, and sometimes even the house cat. However, players don't and can't pick up everything in a given space, only what is available and will create the largest ball of things in the shortest amount of time during play.

In this example, the katamari represents the assemblage where many things come together briefly to produce something new or the "clump soul" of any given encounter. No two "clump souls" (or assemblages) are the same but rather they are innovative and productive arrangements, a coming together of unexpected, but not random, things. In the video game, the make-up of the katamari will be different for each level and each game. Assemblages work in the same way through unexpected connections and varied contexts that "stick together" in impromptu ways. One potential outcome created by this conjuncture is what philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as "lines of flight" or the birth of something new through the culmination of varied entities within the assemblage. For example, a chef might go to the farmer's market and buy several ingredients that are in season, take those ingredients home, and combine those ingredients to create a new recipe. These lines of flight can enlighten and transform but Deleuze and Guattari warn that these lines can also cause destruction and rigidity (p. 205). This is in part, because a line of flight is produced through affects.

Affects are defined in the Deleuzian Dictionary as “the change or variation that occurs when bodies collide” (Colman, 2005, p.11). The changes and variations within the body are explained by philosophers and affect theorists as non-conscious, visceral bodily experiences (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2003; Stewart, 2007, 2010; Spinoza, 1677/2012). This makes affect difficult to conceptualize. As contemporary art theorist O’Sullivan (2001) explains in his writings on art and affect, and affect’s ability to defy deconstructive forces, “indeed, you cannot read affects, you can only experience them” (p. 126). In this sense, affects can be seen as the intense surges and sensations that echo within the body, holding the emergent capacity for generativity and change. Feminist and queer theorist Ahmed (2010) explains in her examination of the function of happiness, affect is “sticky,” it is “what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (p. 29). This “stickiness” is what gets named, remembered, embodied, and performed and ultimately serves as a catalyst to the ways we learn to become and move through the world. This movement may be creative, fearful, traumatic, and/or exhilarating. It may be volatile, subtle, full, and/or obtuse. Affects have the potential to make us walk left instead of right, laugh instead of cry, or to catapult us into traditional notions of normativity and “other,” as well as break up hierarchies and start revolutions.

Through Ahmed’s concept of stickiness, I make the connection between affect and social constructs. Affect may start from the visceral and the unconscious, but don’t necessarily remain in a non-discursive form. Although many philosopher and theorists would argue that affects can no longer be considered such once they have been named, defined, and interpreted and conceptualized as feeling, ideas, theories, and emotions

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Massumi 2003, O-Sullivan 2001, Stewart, 2007, 2010), I would add that these visceral experiences leave residual effects that may become embodied performances or embodied literacies. These performances might be in the form of family routines, superhero play or part of a larger societal construct like the ways we perceive and enact social class, race, and gender. All of these things turn back on themselves, although not necessarily in linear fashion, and become part of another assemblage with the potential to produce lines of flight that free us from inequity and perpetuate unjust practices.

In her work in embodied literacies, educational researcher Jones (2013) explains that our bodies remember and respond unconsciously to these memories, what she calls “awakening an affect” that has unknowingly lain viscerally dormant (p. 528). These dormant affects can make our bodies retreat, shrink, straighten, speak, they can cause our hearts to race in fear or excitement, and can drive us to exuberance and to personal injury. She goes on to explain that so strong are these dormant affects that it is nearly impossible for our bodies to react differently in similar situations when these memories are sparked. They seep into our spoken and unspoken performative actions, language practices, and perceptions of others and self. For example, if a person experienced a car accident that occurred around a sharp curve, any time they are driving and have to take a sharp curve they might get nervous, feel their muscles tense and heart race. They might grip the steering wheel tighter, and/or reduce the speed of the car drastically to over compensate. Just seeing a road sign that indicates a sharp curve or overhearing a discussion of the way a car handles the road might trigger this visceral memory. In this way, materiality and

discursivity entangle with one another and become deeply physiological, psychological, emotional, cultural, social, and political.

So what does this have to do with play and specifically superhero play? Play is the work of children. It is the way they explore, the way they experiment, the way they research, and the way they learn—an ever-expansive form of literacies. In her research on play and literacies, educational researcher Karen Wohlwend (2011) explains that play is meaningful text that allows children to embody literacy practices in multiple ways. She writes,

The notion of literacies reflects the diverse ways we make meaning, in cooperation with others, often coordinating multifunctional tools, across networks and global sites. More over the move from literacy to literacies expands the way we think about familiar nondigital events such as play enactments, drawings, commercial toys, classroom layouts, and so on. These changes present an opportunity to rethink play as a new literacy and, at the same time, revive it as a staple of early childhood curricula. (p. 2)

When reviving play as a staple in the early childhood classroom, the materials and discourses that children have access to during this social practice are also important to consider. Children learn who to be and how to be within the context of their immediate surroundings, making discourses and materials very powerful in the way they work in and through bodies. For example, often people internalize and perpetuate things such as class stratification, heteronormativity, male-centric behaviors, and racial hierarchies through the discourse and material they engage with, have access to, and experience. Consequently, what is allowed and disallowed as play can create very powerful dormant

affects in young bodies. As young bodies grow up to be adult bodies they may find themselves “mired in practices that perpetuate much that is unfair, unjust, unethical, and inhumane” (Jones, 2013, p. 526). For example, if a child is told he can’t dress up in a mermaid outfit during costume play because mermaids are “only for girls,” he might conceptualize gender in dichotomized, normative terms. This is why it is important for adults to consider pedagogical choices in response to the lines of flight created by children during play and more specifically learning to be attuned to the ways children find and experience what I call *muchness* or embodied, intellectual fullness (see the first encounter for an exploration of muchness) during play events. This intellectual fullness is part of the “clump soul” that keeps us pushing the katamari, propels us to follow generative lines of flight. In the sections that follow, I use the concepts of assemblage, line of flight, and embodied literacies to explore the performance of superhero play as a moment of muchness. In addition, I show how being attuned to bodies in muchness can be seen as a way to engage in what education researchers Jones and Vagle (2013) call social class-sensitive teaching practices that are responsive to the affective ways literacies are embodied and performed.

Costumes As Catalyst

The opening vignette of this encounter happened when Zack wore the Wolverine costume to lunch at the Clubhouse. As usual, I walked into the front door to a chorus of greetings. Like clockwork, Zack saved his greeting for last but added a twist by clearing his throat in that, “I don’t really need to clear my throat but want you to pay attention to me” sort of way. It was easy to figure out why Zack wanted me to look at him because Zack was wearing a yellow and black polyester outfit that boasted large foam muscles

build directly into the fabric. Beside him sat his brother, grinning ear to ear and donning a Spider-Man suit of equally foamed-muscle strength.

I greeted him in return, “Hey, Zack!”

He shakes his head left to right signally disagreement as he takes a big gulp of water and points to his chest. It didn’t take me long to realize that Zack was inviting me to address him as something new, as The Wolverine, the identity he was assuming in this costume.

Quickly I changed my response, “Oh, hello Wolverine.”

“Me, too!” said his younger brother, Cedric.

“Hello to you too, Spider-Man,” I replied grinning.

The costumes had created quite a buzz among the lunch tables that were packed with neighborhood children. As lunch continued, Zack convinced others to refer to him as Wolverine and explained that he had brought an assortment of costumes with him to share with others once lunch had convened.

In this scenario, Zack had found a way to be something different in this context and he had also found a way to be powerful in this space, not only as the character Wolverine, but also as Zack, the kid who had something that others wanted. This enactment of power provided Zack an opportunity to negotiate the way his peers read his young African American physique that did not speak Spanish like the majority of his friends. But rather than use that power to exclude, Zack used it to include himself into his peer group, to make himself part of their assemblage that day. My acknowledgement of Zack as Wolverine afforded him an opportunity to show that the superhero persona he had created for himself was legitimate, demanded attention, and was of value. He had

commanded my gaze, as well as the gaze of his peers with his performance and in turn had awakened something in the room that had not been present before now.

The costumes had generated an affect in many of the children at the clubhouse that would later lead to the performance of embodied popular literacies. The costumes seem to have been the trigger or what political scientist Jane Bennett (2010) calls an actant (an object that creates an affects or causes bodies to respond) in the outdoor play that followed. These bubbling and brewing affects opened up a ripe opportunity for lines of flight to occur that would not have been made possible otherwise. The costumes created a space in which Zack was beginning to find muchness and his peers and I would soon follow suit.

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's a Line of Flight

Once Zack decided that I too must be part of the Justice Team that he and several of the other children had created, jumping in felt a bit nostalgic and awakened something in me that had been dormant. When I was a young girl, I was obsessed with Wonder Woman. I would create my own version of this female heroine by putting on my bathing suit or a halter top and shorts, grabbing anything that I might be able to tie around my wrists as bracelets, and oddly enough a green trooper hat that had once belonged to my father and would easily hang around my shoulders by the neck strap. I would go out in our front yard and spin around, flipping the hat off to indicate I had turned into Wonder Woman and was ready to kick some serious ass. My arms would fly up, using my tie on bracelets to shield me from oncoming imaginary bullets. I ran. I skipped. I jumped. I tumbled. And often took my invisible plane from one side of the yard to the other. I was serious about being Wonder Woman. So serious, that I would spend hours fighting crime

alone in my front yard. The work I did as Wonder Woman took a great deal of time, where I would write stories with the motion of my body in play (see the fourth encounter for an exploration of bodies in play as multimodal literacies). Participating with Zack and the others gave me an opportunity to include movement as part of the way I tell stories once again.

While engaging in play, each player brought her/his own knowledge of superheroes to the script to create a unique assemblage of action protagonists that are not typically found together in traditional graphic text. Zack's extensive knowledge of DC and Universal Comics built solid character development, while others ushered in their knowledge of action storylines from the movie Transformers and the television show Power Rangers. For example, when Wolverine initially came to me for help, he wanted me to find Bumblebee, a character known as an Autobot from the Transformer's movie. In addition, Power Rangers are typically given wrist worn communicators as part of their arsenal. By giving me a communicator, Zack was not only writing me into his script, but was giving me a lead role, serving as Headquarters, or the person superheroes go to when they are in trouble or need reprieve. In this way, I was still being read as an adult or facilitator, even during play, although Zack was quick to redirect me when my role as Headquarters didn't match the demands of their play.

The entanglement of these storylines created something new, which can be seen as a line of flight or the Deleuzoguattarian *and* which signals the action of human bodies in continuous composition with other bodies:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other

affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

Deleuze and Guattari's explanation of bodies in composition resonates with the concept of improvisational play, where no one knows exactly what can and will happen next.

Superhero play catapulted all of us into a world of improvisational work that can be read as embodied literacies where our bodies served as the site of action text (Wohlwend, 2013). During our improvisations, certain types of practices were demanded of me in this space in order to be successfully seen as a "peer." And while the performance of superhero wasn't new to me, it was definitely not a role I had performed in quite some time. There were moments where I felt awkward and uncomfortable, and unsure of what literacies I was expected to perform, particularly when the storyline shifted and changed. Boasting well-developed plot lines, the children created scenarios in which characters were enchanted or captured by their nemesis. These conflicts always invoked complex story resolutions that called for me to provide lifelines and special magic potions to revive our heroes. I soon learned to read the bodies around me and recall embodied memories (or literacies) of my own superhero play in the past. In my observations, I noticed that although many of Zack's friends lodged themselves onto and extended these storied-lines of flight, many of the players, both younger and older than Zack, looked to him for endorsement when negotiating plot lines, an endorsement they almost always received.

Even amidst my uncomfortable-ness, I found myself eager to figure out the puzzles that had been set before me. I found that when my stories didn't match the

children's expectations, they altered the story or discussed how to "use my material" to propel the story forward, constantly veering and creating an intellectually shared space. For example, once when I had been summonsed from Headquarters to revive Wolverine after he had been left unconscious from a nasty bout with a fire blaster, the children halted play to confer about my method of revival. As I waved my hands above Zack (Wolverine) while making swirling noises, Zack called a time-out and talked with the other superheroes to decide if indeed my method would work. After the consultation, Zack went back to being "unconscious" and I was instructed by the other superheroes that I would also have to revive Wolverine's heart with imaginary electric paddles that were handed to me by the Power Ranger. The children knew that in most superhero stories, the first method of power resurgence rarely works. So, they opted to have me use a second form of healing as well. In the end, neither of my methods could work alone. It was the combination of moving back and forth between both my magic swirls and the paddles that brought Wolverine back to the living. In this way, everyone could experience muchness while negotiating the story together because the story was developed by a collaborative think tank where we were all intellectually engaged and pool our superhero-knowledge resources.

Meanwhile, Back at Headquarters

During our imaginative play, the children decided I needed to relocate to a more central location in the middle of the playground. This location, which was also known as Picnic Table #4, was where I ran Headquarters, the role given to me when I assumed ownership of the location communicator. This location became a place for children to hideout, locate and rendezvous with other superhero friends, and stash objects that

needed protecting during a “dangerous mission.” Earlier in the day, Picnic Table #4 had served as the site of a water play experiment where a few of the children had decided to make foil boats to discover how many rocks they could place inside different boat designs before they started to sink. Having abandoned the experiment for a new idea, there were two things that remained perched on the table, a pile of rocks drying and me.

While making his playground rounds, Zack spied the rocks sitting next to me and veered off of his original course. Grabbing two of the rocks, Zack looked at them, turning them in his hands gently, and walked over to where I sat at the other end. The following conversation took place between Zack and me as he handed me the rocks:

Zack: *Jaye! I need you to take care of these diamonds.*

Jaye: *Sure. Why don't you put them over there (points to the pile of rocks) with all the other diamonds?*

Zack: *(looks at me puzzled) Those aren't diamonds! Those are rocks.*

Once again, I felt confused and unsure of how I was to respond to this. Obviously, there was something different about these two rocks that made them diamonds. To me, the rocks I held in my hand looked like the other rocks sitting on the table. But Zack's discursive performance had commanded that they were something else. But what that difference was, I couldn't be sure. Our conversation continued:

Jaye: *How do I know the difference between these diamonds and those rocks?*

Stopping to think for a moment, Zack looks around and spies another table working with glitter glue. He runs and grabs an unused bottle of silver sparkling glue and takes the two rocks out of my hands. Quickly, Zack squeezes the silver glitter glue on top of each rock and spreads the glue with his fingers, looks at me and says:

Zack: *Here. These rocks are diamonds! Now you know.*

In this conversation, the material is significant in crafting what was made possible for our performance of Superhero play. Serving as actants, the rocks had demanded that Zack consider them as part of his play work, becoming part of the assemblage that was unique to that specific day at the Clubhouse. While the playground is full of rocks, they aren't often washed, sitting on the table in the sunlight. Here, human and nonhuman bodies collide to create a story. Zack used the material that was available to continue the line of flight. And when my uncertainty about the rocks and diamonds entered the space, he would not allow the line of flight to coil back on itself or become rigid (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Instead, he found a way to keep the story going by offering a way for me, his audience, to delineate one from the other. Wohlwend (2013) wrote about a similar situation that occurred during her study on play literacies:

Children strategically choose materials that best fit their intended design, in other words, children design to get things done so their designs and play text are motivated not only by the properties of the available materials but also by children's intended message. (p.6)

Wohlwend gives us insight into how play is intellectual work. Zack had an intended message when he handed me the rocks proclaiming them to be diamonds. When I found that message unclear, he rewrote the story, adding elaborate details through bodies within the assemblage on the playground. By using glitter glue, Zack theorized what might be possible if he were to give me a deeper context, providing me with elaborate details. Zack did what literacy researcher Dyson (2003) theorizes as "remixing" or assembling pieces of many different cultural texts available to create a

story. Zack used all of the resources, discursive *and* material, made available to him in order to further the line of flight so that both he and I might experience muchness while engaged with the diamond plot line. Now, not only were our bodies enacting the literacies, but the material objects (both natural and synthetic) that surrounded us were as well. Another example of this work is illustrated in the next section when Zack and his peers take on the role of cartographers and create a map to symbolize their geographical renaming of areas on the playground.

The Metropolis of New York South

When Zack and his superhero friends signaled for my help in locating Bumblebee, and I accepted the mission, I began to offer suggestions as to where they might find Bumblebee. It is important to note that the role of Bumblebee was never enacted by an actual human figure, but always an entity created and seen only in the imagination of those of us at play. Yet, we followed Bumblebee's movements on the playground.

Being that my character had recently been written into their story, I was still in that liminal space where I was clinging to what I knew of the playground, while trying to fold into the vivid world they had created. During my first attempt to pinpoint Bumblebee on the location communicator that had been given to me by Zack, I confidently told the crew they could find Bumblebee near the air-conditioner unit located near the rear entrance of the Clubhouse on the far side of the playground. Putting his hand on my shoulder, Zack moved in closer, so our faces were inches apart. With a let-me-help-you-understand look on his face, Zack briefly pursed his lips together while nodding in agreement and gently said, "Oh, you mean New York South."

What followed was a short geography lesson where Zack explained to me that the playground had been divided into territories. With vivid hand motions, he pointed in different areas of the playground proclaiming them as now having the following names: New York East, New York South, Mexico, China, and Africa. After this lesson, I was expected to guide the superheroes by using this new geographical terminology. However, as the children continued to build what literacy researcher Wohlgend (2013) calls action text or using movement to convey meaning during play, the territories would often shift and change (as maps often do) and the lines demarcating the territories became unclear to me. It was at this time the group decided I needed a map. Once again, objects that were part of the assemblage that day became the catalyst for extending play. Using paper, pencils, and glitter glue from the art supplies, the children created a map so that I would be able to remember where the new locations were. It was during this cartography that Alaska was added as a territory on the map and New York East changed to New York. The territory of New York South was left off the map in order to keep its location secret, in case, as Zack put it, “the map fell into the wrong hands.”

The map-making event is a telling point in how these children were developing and using their embodied literacies to create a collaborative, symbolic representation of the setting they had created for their action text. The children used their bodies as an orienteering tool to chart the territories. Before a mark was made, a body would move backwards, forwards, and left or right to show where the drawing should be made on the paper. Only after this movement, would the group look at the physical playground space for verification before putting pencil to paper. This movement suggests that there is indeed something remembered in the body that guides their intellectual work. In addition,

these movements, coupled with exaggerated movements during storytelling, offer some insight into bodies in muchness. These full-bodied, uninhibited actions can be read as visceral indicators of potential meaning-making through multi-modal engagement and the anticipation of “something” to come.

Liz Jones (2013), a scholar who studies the social constructions of early childhood, reminds us that things hold much more than their function suggests. Material objects, such as this child-created map, have the capacity to render affects that can set into motion a series of interactions that are much more complex and powerful than function alone would lead us to believe. The children could have used the table top, rocks, sticks and/or mud to create a map that could have easily been changed, altered, and erased. Instead, they chose a more traditional mapmaking approach and used paper and pencils, which made the map and the territories it represented a more permanent fixture in the storied world. Thus, having been pulled into the line of flight the paper was given an authoritative power once marks had been made upon it. In this way, drawing the map on paper can be seen as a embodied performativity that made the lines and demarcation of territories echo longevity that the discursive alone could not.

Although no one was actively taking on the persona, we all believed Bumblebee to exist on the playground that day. This felt reality legitimized our actions and anticipated fear that Bumblebee was in danger and indeed in need of our assistance. Our suspension of disbelief was key in the igniting of muchness (see first encounter for an exploration of muchness). If at any point someone had conceded that Bumblebee was an imaginary character, the storyline could have potentially come undone, and therefore disrupted the intellectual and physical engagement to which we were committed. After

all, it was the mission to rescue Bumblebee that enlisted our bodies to action. Admittedly, I became so lost in my own muchness in our pursuit of saving Bumblebee and possibly the world that it wasn't until retrospectively that I realized that Bumblebee was an imaginary persona that we had brought to life. Our play had ushered the imaginary character from the virtual to the actual. We had made Bumblebee "really there" and thus he was.

Lasso(ing) of Possible Truths: Implications

Literacy is not bound up in manuscripts, coiled up in composition notebooks, and encased in mark making utensils, nor is literacy merely a communication tool. Literacies are leaky, seeping deep into our bodies and unfurled through our movements, perceptions, and reactions to other bodies. In this encounter, I have shown that superhero play, like the play illustrated in this encounter, is one of the ways children actively engage in and perform complex embodied, literacy work. I've spent many years in classrooms engaged in progressive teaching practices (hands-on, cooperative learning projects, community service) where I have chosen to be both supple and rigid from time to time. The hours I spent as a superhero at the clubhouse leave me wondering what paying attention to these embodied literacies and moments of muchness might look like for children in more traditional educational settings and how schools could change as a result. Paying attention to these embodied literacy engagements offers strong implications for the way language arts pedagogy might be reconceptualized in classrooms.

How then might educators draw attention to and gaze upon play as the site where literacy learning happens? Perhaps one way is through being responsive and accepting of

a wider repertoire of literacy practices in classrooms and after school spaces. As the children crafted the story, I listened, paid attention, and was attuned to their movements to compose a more powerful body of text than might have been possible had I not engaged with their embodied literacies. I encouraged their literacy learning not by demanding they stop and write the script on paper or journals, but by seeing the playground as the notebook on which they were creating and building strong, embodied literacies with rich composition. Teachers might engage in similar practices by giving the option for children to participate in improvisational play as part of writing workshop or offer students the opportunity to retell or reconstruct text through movement rather than verbal responses. At the very least, teachers might join in with children as they play on the playground to gain insights on which literacy practices children are actively evoking during play (elaboration, character development, etc.) and use those as entry points during traditional classroom workshops and instructional conferences.

Early childhood literacy researcher Karen Wohlwend (2013) explains, “we tend to look for some print on page when we consider children’s literacy products and to discount and overlook the action texts that children play” (p. 6). This is especially true of working-class and working-poor children, who are often required to spend more time in traditional academic literacies than in playful composition (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Rose, 2005, 2009). Yet as this analysis illustrates the children living in the low-income community surrounding the clubhouse are engaged in brilliant literacy work through superhero play. Therefore, another implication this work has for classrooms is through social class-sensitive teaching practices, where “thoughts and actions [are] grounded in the goal of eliminating classism and class bias of all kinds, ensuring access to dignified

education and meaningful educational opportunities for working-class and poor children and youth of all races and ethnicities” (Jones & Vagle, 2013, p. 128).

Social-class sensitive teaching calls educators to pay attention to the ways they perceive the bodies of students and families in everyday relations. Using this class-sensitive lens, children may be perceived as curious, competent, and knowledgeable during play rather than dismissed as trivial, unimportant, or in need of remediation. Embracing a vast repertoire of literacies (such as those involving super heroes) has the opportunity to reposition children who are typically marginalized in classroom. Students who enter schools performing these less traditional forms of literacies have an opportunity to shine when teachers accept play as part of the language arts curriculum. For example, I am more familiar with “traditional conventions” of rocks, playground geography, and superhero work. Pulling from what the children knew about language, costumes, and the natural world, positioned them as the expert of our superhero improvisation. In this sense, the binaries and hierarchies between adult and child were complicated and disrupted. Their intellectual work and play theorizing were valued, respected, and dignified and this particular assemblage of knowledge afforded unique forms of social advantages or what sociologist Bourdieu (1986) calls cultural capital among peers that might be rejected as “off task behavior” in traditional educational settings. A dismissing that I have been guilty of in various teaching roles and may have passively ignored in this instance had Zack not been so persistent that I become part of his “clump soul.”

This analysis also has implications for the kinds of materials children are allowed to have access to in the classroom. In many of the traditional school and out of school

settings I have worked with in the past, superhero costumes were not only forbidden but superhero play was all together banned, seen as a rough-and-tumble activity that led to pretend fighting and possible make-shift weaponry. In these traditional spaces, costumes would not have been allowed and may have even resulted in bodily removal for a day or at least until clothing deemed more “appropriate” had been obtained. I noticed this pattern particularly in my experiences with institutional spaces that serve working class and working poor families despite the fact that many early childhood researchers have shown the impact and importance of popular culture to young children’s literacy learning (Dyson 1997, 2003, 2013; Evans, 2005; Genishi, & Dyson 2009; Wohlwend, 2011; Vasquez, 2004, 2012). Setting up conditions where children are given opportunities to explore and have access to a wide-range of materials, including materials children bring from home (such as super hero costumes), provides wider possibilities for children to become deeply engrossed in language arts activities. A child is much more likely to participate in sustained instruction when that instruction includes experimenting with her/his own personal interests and expertise.

Using the philosophies of Deleuze & Guattari (1987) play can be seen as expanding literacies beyond printed text. Moments of embodied play and intellectual fullness can be perceived as critical literacies (Jones, 2009; Kuby, 2013; Vasquez, 2004, 2012). Critical in the sense that children are deconstructing and reconstructing the world during lines of flight while engaged in imaginative play but also critical in the sense that they are important to the development of literacies and literacy practices that are embodied and performed later in life. Allowing children to engage in the literary practices they deem important, such a super hero play, provides an opportunity for

teachers to not only learn from and about children but to also teach these children how to be critical consumers of everyday texts so that they might be able to recognize and challenge inequities.

I have argued throughout this encounter that children's play can be read as literacy practices. While engaging with the children as a superhero I found significance in their vast repertoire of superhero literacies. I also provided a scaffold for the suppleness that Deleuze and Guattari write about when referring to lines reacting to each other (p. 196) by valuing the embodied literacies of popular culture that Zack brought with him to the clubhouse and by disrupting hierarchies that may exist in other institutional settings Zack and his peers typically experience. However, literacy researchers must explore these embodied performances in the context of typical classroom settings in order to gain a better understanding of how educators can support these pedagogies in a language arts classroom. Admittedly, one of the most perplexing things for me while working with these children at the clubhouse was to find entry points to discuss inequities without shutting down the activities they were engaged with at the time. This is certainly a challenge that poses possibilities for future research regarding embodied literacies and critical literacy practices. Last, it is important for teachers and researcher to engage critically with the ways these literacy events are taken up and read by educators who often happen to find themselves and their personal beliefs, ideas, and conceptions of the world entangled with these childhood assemblages where bodies are constructed and reconstructed, allowed and disallowed to experience muchness in things like rocks and glitter glue and superhero costumes and map-making.

There is one thing I know with certainty, as an educator (and superhero), I find muchness with these children—in fact they insist that I find it. To this end, how might teachers embody muchness if they too were to chase lines of flight, make room for play, and welcome embodied literacies in the language arts classroom? Imagine what might be possible if educators, like the children, demand that schools become much more muchier places of learning and experimentation.

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Figure 7: Wear Me: Multimodal Experience Two



—Encounter Three—
**Finding Muchness in the Vibrant Matter of Fabric: An Intra-
 active Look at Literacies**



Figure 8: Kids and Fabric Intra-act

“If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated. All bodies become more than mere objects, as the thing-powers of resistance and protean agency are brought into sharper relief” (Bennett, 2010, p. 13).

—ABSTRACT—

Drawing from the theories of feminist new materialism, this encounter looks closely at the ways children and things, particularly fabric remnants, work together to co-construct stories. The data presented in this encounter is part of an ethnographic study in the play work of three early childhood aged, children from working poor families during a summer enrichment and an after school program at a community center in the Southeastern US located in the children’s neighborhood. Findings argue that children are more deeply and intellectually engaged when given access to a broader range of materials and opportunities to perform and participate in literacy practices.

Finding Muchness in the Vibrant Matter of Fabric:

An Intra-active Look at Literacies

“Thing-Power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett, 2010, p. 6).

Cedric’s mix-matched-socked, shoeless feet slide down the hallway back into the front room where the group waits patiently to make choices about the work they will engage in at the community center on this Monday afternoon. Visibly animated, Cedric is grinning from ear to ear, his tiny first-grade frame shaking from head-to-toe while he uncontrollably bounces up and down and giggles with excitement. In his attempt to sneak to the back workrooms before exploration begins in our after-school Clubhouse, Cedric has made a discovery—a tailor’s and designer’s bodice on which to work with fabric and design.

In the weeks prior to this afternoon, Cedric had spent many hours with a basket full of cloth remnants to create fashion designs for him and his friends. While discussing this fabric work together, he had expressed to me that it was a bit difficult to create designs on ones’ self. I agreed and told him how my mother often used a bodice dress form when she sewed. This intrigued Cedric and not only did he want me to show him what one looked like on my iPhone but he also wanted me to find a way to get one so that he might have a chance to design with one as well. Today was the day I revealed the surprise—that my mom had in fact had a spare dress form that she was willing to donate to Cedric so that he could design more freely—a surprise that Cedric had found on his own after a quick trip to the restroom that sat adjacent to what we all called the building room. Now Cedric was so full, that his body was bubbling over and I couldn’t help but

laugh with him as we both tried to wait patiently for the afternoon meeting so that we could begin working together.

Encountering Objects

This vignette is from a larger set of data collected as part of an ethnographic study of young children's play literacies in an informal community space in the southeastern part of the United States. The purpose of this encounter is to explore the role fabric and accessibility to materials played in the children's composition of costumes and fashion designs and how this can be seen as a literacy practice. As part of this encounter, I will revisit specific examples of children intra-acting with fabric during their play during my research observations. As a daughter of a seamstress, I am well aware of the ways fabric can transform and be transformed. My mother spent hours hunting for the perfect fabrics and then through the careful deconstruction of several yards of cloth, she would reconstruct each textile piece into slipcovers, and curtains, and prom dresses. I am also aware of how a particular fabric jutting out from a stack of other fabrics can call to a person saying, "Psst! I am the perfect blend for that dress or bedspread or the unknown project that you haven't quite discovered yet." But as a participant researcher and early childhood educator, I had never really spent much time thinking about how fabric might evoke and invoke specific embodied literacies and action narratives during young people's play.

Using what physicist Karen Barad (2007) calls intra-actions and the work of literacy education and early childhood researchers (Dyson, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014; Vossoughi, et al., 2013; Wohlwend, 2013), I will argue that children's engagement with objects can be read as a literacy practice. I will begin by introducing

theories of new materialism and the context and methods of this encounter. Next, I will look closely at and analyze the actions of young children using fabric during creative play over several months in our summer program and after school community space. And finally I will offer implications for classroom and afterschool spaces.

New materialism at “play”

New materialism is the philosophy and theory that all things in the world, including humans, are matter and that phenomenon and knowledge occur through continuous and varied material exchanges of both living and nonliving entities. The scholarly feminist movement led by physicists (Barad, 2007), political scientists (Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, 2010) and culture and gender studies scholars (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012) calls us to pay attention to the ways bodies, both human and nonhuman, collide, focusing on the intersections of materiality, embodiment, and subjectivity. Three particular concepts I draw attention to in this encounter are (1) materials as actants explaining how materials become important in the creation of action text (Bennett, 2010), (2) intra-action between object and subject explaining how two things can experiment with one another to co-construct stories during play, (Barad, 2007), and (3) the concept of muchness (see first encounter of an exploration of muchness) explaining the ways bodies react, respond, and engage intellectually when given access to materials.

Jane Bennett, a scholar of political science, (2010) draws our attention to the way objects become “vibrant matter” or “actants,” resonating with potential to incite and entice us to *do something*. She goes on to explain that there are moments when “the us and the it slip-slide into each other (p. 4)” creating powerful affects that can boost or

dwindle the power of others (p 3). These affects are entangled in thing and human, a space where both are vital to the production of the *something* created. For children, this something created could be a drawing, a sculpture, folding paper into a spinner, or creating costumes and fashion designs with fabric. For example, in the opening vignette, Cedric was moved by the excitement manifested through his physical body when he saw the tailor's bodice in the building room. He was jumping, shaking, laughing, and smiling. In other words, the dress form caused Cedric's body to respond. This response can be read as the moment that Bennett (2010) refers to when she talks about matter as being vibrant. This vibrancy is not of Cedric's own volition but doesn't solely belong to the dress form either. Both are constituents of each other. They rely on one another to create a more powerful moment where both become crucial in the storytelling that takes place once united at the clubhouse.

This entanglement might be thought of as a moment of muchness (see first encounter for an exploration of muchness) where, thing-power, "a not-quite-human force...addl(es) and alter(s) human and other bodies" (Bennett, 2010, p. 2). Muchness emerges as an affective moment of embodied, intellectual fullness. Intellectual fullness can manifest in different ways, such as affect, materiality, and composition. For me, as a writer, this fullness often occurs during my acts of writing. This intellectual engagement bursts forth while I struggle with the words and while I am pressing my fingers into the keys of the computer and in the way my body "hunkers down" near the screen to bring the stories I tell to life. There is a great energy that ignites this process. I call this energy *affective energy* and it is the energy that spills out on the pages of my word documents and scribbled in note form on the pages of a notebook that sits beside me. Another

example of muchness is in the opening vignette, Cedric's excitement cannot be contained. Just as my energy spills onto written pages, his energy spills out of his body and into the Clubhouse space provoked by the presence of the dress form. It is this spilling of affective energy that ignites muchness.

One way a person might experience muchness is through the entanglement of thing and human or what physicist and feminist scholar Karen Barad (2007) terms as a "*mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (p. 33). An example of this entanglement can be illustrated through a moment I recently experienced while attending the orchestra. It was at this concert that I noticed something I had not paid attention to at concerts in the past: the bodies of musicians during play. As the musicians worked, their bodies moved in tandem yet not exactly the same, leaning deeply into and extending from the instruments held passionately in their hands and arms. The instruments seemed to lead the musicians, becoming extensions of their bodies rather than foreign objects being held and manipulated. This intra-action (Barad, 2007) between instrument and musician becomes a place where the human and the instrument are no longer the same thing they were when they were alone. They have become something different when fused together, a musical ensemble that can be seen as what literacy education scholar Wohlwend (2013) calls an action text, or a shared narrative created through particular movements among a group (p.106).

Just like the musicians created musical narratives with their instruments, children often create narratives through their interactions with the materials that surround their environments. It is within these entanglements that both the child and the object become something different. For example, a child playing superhero might use a piece of fabric as

a cape that allows the child to fly across the playground. Or a child might invoke rocks to become diamonds in a quest to save the world (see second encounter in this issue). In both of these scenarios the thing and the child are no longer seen as separate, but as entities that constitute a mutually new construct of what is possible to do and be.

The Awesome Clubhouse: A not-school space

A rental community in a southeastern context, the neighborhood of Ruby Crest is located on the western outskirts of town, close to the border of an adjacent county line. The city in which Ruby Crest is located ranks as one of the highest poverty-stricken areas in the nation. Small in size, the county predominantly hosts college-aged students who attend the local university, which owns more than 50% of the tax-exempt property and also is one of the main sources of waged-work employment. There is a great divide among the wealth in the county and many of the permanent residents live at or below the poverty line. This is certainly true of the residents at Ruby Crest. Predominantly, the community is home to both a high number of Latin@ and African American families, most working in the industrial and service industry which includes local restaurants, a chicken processing plant, and construction. It is not uncommon to see multi-generational homes in Ruby Crest and extended families living within walking distance of one another.

The Awesome Clubhouse is a community center crafted through a three-way partnership between the university, the regional Foodbank, and a local nature connection program to provide free resources for children and their families in the community. Primarily, the center offers community members opportunities for their children to explore intellectual interests through meaningful play. It is not intended to mimic school

but rather the space demands something quite opposite of the traditional after-school care or extended day learning model.

During my year as a researcher in this community space, I have served both as a participant-observer and co-director. This role has provided me with the opportunity to develop our learning space and to interact and engage with families and their children in multiple ways. Based on the philosophy of Reggio Emilia schools, class-sensitive pedagogies, and theories of social critique and justice, the children are encouraged to explore and negotiate their interests to build their own theories about the world through discovery and play (Malaguzzi, 1993; Vecchi, 2010). Rather than focusing on direct instruction, we provide a space and materials with opportunities for the children to intellectually engage in and build knowledge about their selves, community, and express that learning in any mode they see fit.

Entangled in Data and Method

The data in this article is part of a larger qualitative research project that is interested in the ways children learn outside of school. The children in this study are all residents of the Ruby Crest community. Families were given the option to be part of the project and no one was turned away from the community center regardless of their decision to participate. This encounter includes data from one five-year old, one six-year old, and one eight-year old who were specifically drawn to working with fabric during play through the summer and early fall.

Recently, there has been a movement among philosophers, theorists, and qualitative researchers to consider the object and its role in research, theory, and practice (Ahmed, 2004; Appadurai, 1986; Bennett, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg, 1981;

Daston, 2004; Henare, 2006; Hoskins, 1998). Seeing objects charged with significance, this new materialist turn attempts to explore the stories of objects and the social, cultural, and political role they play in the world. Entangled with these theories of new materialism, this encounter is specifically concerned with the relationship between children and things. Data sources include the materials used by children to create stories, video, photographs, field notes, and observations during fabric play. All of these artifacts were collected during my time with children at the clubhouse, where I spent every day in the summer and two afternoons a week during the school year. Visits typically lasted 3-4 hours during each interaction, where I would situate myself as an active participant while children engaged with particular materials over time. Fabric was one of these materials.

A Month Before Cedric's Encounter With The Dressmaker's Form

The children had spent a good portion of their summer creating. They created books. They created paintings. They created clay sculptures. And they created superheroes. In order to elaborate their superhero work, the children found themselves particularly drawn to a box of fabric that I had brought to The Awesome Clubhouse earlier in July to use in a weaving project. However, like most of the materials at the center, the kids found new ways to breathe life into the fabrics and soon these large fabric remnants were being used to create masks and capes, and clothing for warriors.

Cedric was one of a large group of boys who liked to spend hours creating with fabric. Using scissors, tape, and sometimes pipe cleaners, the children would spend time crafting pieces they could use to extend their playground stories by becoming fantasy characters. One day, I walked to the back of the Clubhouse to join children in our library. It was here I found Cedric, Ramone, and Zach hard at work. All three boys had chosen

different pieces of fabric and with keen focus, each were in the process of trying to make the fabric *do* what it was they wanted it to do in order to tell the stories they wanted to tell.

Zach was slowly struggling to make a pair of children's scissors cut through a thick piece of yellow corduroy. The corduroy would soon become a mask for Zach to wear as he pretended to keep the universe safe on the playground that day. After making what represented a circle, he carefully planned to cut holes for the eyes. Laying the piece of fabric directly on his face, Zack reached up and put his fingers on the fabric where his eyes hid underneath. Being careful to keep his fingers on the fabric where his eyes were, he flipped the fabric off of his face and started the difficult process of trying to cut the holes for the eyes. He repeated this process several times, once more for the eyes and again for the mouth and the nose. Once he was satisfied with the placement of the holes, he then began the process of trying to tie a striped white and brown strip of fabric to each side of the mask so that he could tie it in place behind his head (see figure1).

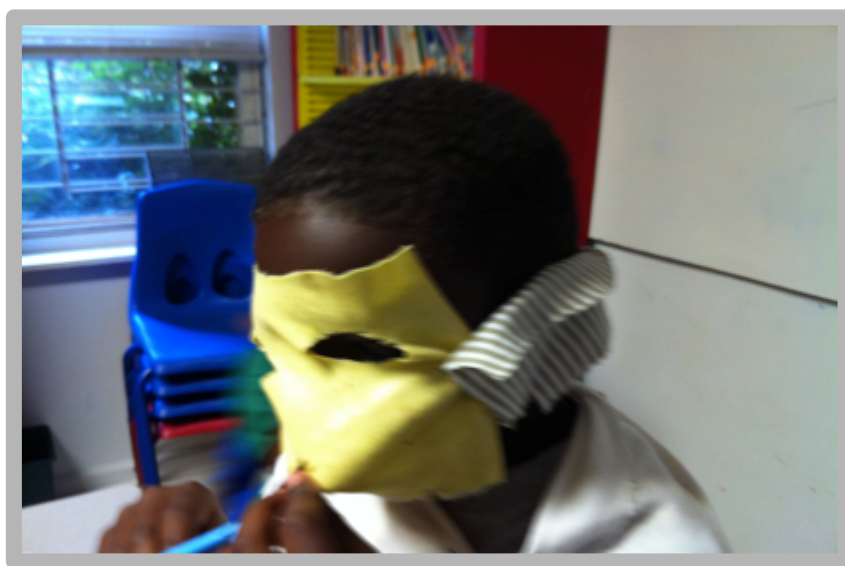


Figure 1: Zach's Mask

Ramone was experimenting with different materials to try and wrap a white cape around himself. First, he used tape, then staples. But the staples kept popping out each time he tried to “take off in flight” (see figure 2). Eventually, he decided to get pipe cleaners to hold the two sides of white stretchy cotton fabric together, weaving the pipe cleaners through precut holes at the neck of his cape, looping the pipe cleaners, and twisting them tightly to hold the cape in place.



Figure 2: Cape stapling

Cedric, who had worn shorts, a t-shirt, and cowboy boots to the clubhouse that day, sat with the largest pieces of fabric in the basket. He had chosen pieces that were about a yard or two in length, one white and one green, to work with. I watched as Cedric spent approximately twenty minutes getting the green fabric to wrap around his waist “just-right” so that it didn’t fall off. This proved to be a difficult task, as the fabric was made of cotton knit and stretched. So, every time Cedric pulled the fabric and stapled it

shut, it would give a little, pop open, and/or fall down around his ankles. However, Cedric never lost patience. Instead, he persisted in getting the toga-like apparatus to stay put on his tiny five-year old frame. Once he had that accomplished, he then took the white fabric and twisted it to create a covering for his head. To hold the white fabric in place, he gathered some yarn and asked his older sister to tie it on so that his creation would stay atop his head. Seemingly satisfied with his design, Cedric went to join the others on the playground in their imaginary superhero play. But before leaving the room, he stopped, earnestly looked at me and asked, “Does this outfit go with my boots?” (see figure 3)



Figure 2: Does This Go With My Boots?

In this one afternoon, the work these children engaged in illustrates 1) fabric as an actant in the narrative play work of children, 2) the intra-action of fabric and child in

which both are transformed, and 3) embodied intellectual engagement with objects to create stories through play. In the following paragraphs, I will unpack each of these points.

Fabric As Actants

For each of these children, the fabric served as the actant that propelled their work at the Clubhouse that day. Before the presence of fabric, the children had either imagined their costumes or had used store bought costumes to perform the role of superheroes on the playground. While both of these afforded opportunity to construct and negotiate superhero identities, the fabric provided an opportunity for their imagined or potential costumes to become a reality during the construction phase of their play, moving the experience from what social theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi (2002) calls the virtual to the actual or moving something from the abstract to the concrete. Furthermore, since the fabric was raw (uncut and unsewn), the children's superhero attire was not bound by the predetermined limits that come in prepackaged, store bought costumes. Instead, the boys were able to listen to and experience the vitality of the fabric through their own intellectual lenses and creative theories.

Fabric and child intra-act

Physicist Karen Barad (2003) explains that the world is not out there waiting to be discovered by scientists but rather becomes lively through intra-actions—a communal engagement between persons, places, and things—and it is this interconnectedness or the in-between space where reconfiguring and agency take place (p. 140). Here, agency is understood as being enacted through relationships rather than an innate characteristic uniquely possessed by individuals alone (Barad, 2007, p. 178). Therefore, the children

and the fabric can be seen as performative agents working together to produce a “more powerful” costume than might be available to them otherwise. This performative action of reconfiguring elements is similar to early childhood literacy researcher Anne Haas Dyson’s (2003) research exploring how children appropriate cultural text to remix—or invent—something new in their everyday literacy practices (p. 25) out of their repertoire of communicative practices.

Dyson’s (2003) work shows that children use all available discourses (language, values, beliefs, relationships, popular culture/media, etc.) to construct meaning and make sense of the world. Here, I would add that children also use what they know *and discover* about bodies, space, and materials as they theorize, conceptualize, and craft intra-actively. On this occasion, the available materials, the clubhouse, the children’s bodies and their knowledge of superheroes are all put in dialogue with each other. As Cedric, Zack, and Ramone draw on their own superhero literacies to tell stories through their fabric creations they reconfigure what is possible to *do* as superheroes. The children know that superhero costumes are important to a superhero’s performance. Certain elements in a costume allow superheroes different abilities. For example, a mask allows a superhero to have an alternate identity, a cape gives the hero the ability to fly, and in Cedric’s case, the costume allowed him to create a warrior design that had not been performed in their collective play up until this point.

In this regard, the fabric is no longer seen as *just* fabric and the children are no longer *just* children—both have been reconfigured through the process of intra-acting together, one becoming costume and the other becoming superhero or warrior. Similar to education scholar Lenz-Taguchi (2010) study on intra-active pedagogy in preschool, the

fabric is no longer passive and collaborates with the children and their super hero expertise interdependently, allowing new possibilities for fabric, superhero play, and action literacies—the narrative work being performed by the children (p. 4). In turn, the fabric becomes one of the discourses made available to children, allowing them to socially-construct a new reality for what is possible during their play work.

Fabric and intellectual engagement

Co-authors and literacy education scholars Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell (2008, 2010, 2011, 2014) suggest that home literacy practices are infused in family artifacts or objects, representing powerful memories and generational stories that can be seen as artifactual literacies:

A sensory response to artifacts is important when working with material culture....Artifacts smell, they can be felt, heard, listened to and looked at. Objects carry emotional resonance and they infuse stories. Paying attention to meaning through artifacts involves recognizing embodied understandings as responses....Objects uncover people and epistemologies. Not having respect for an object undermines a way of understanding the world, cutting off an important line of inquiry. (2010, p. 10)

These scholars go on to explain that affective and emotional connections to objects “enable educators to create listening spaces for students...that can shift understandings of communities, identities, and neighborhoods and can involve young people in storytelling opportunities” (p. 11).

Just as Pahl and Rowsell (2010) suggest that artifactual literacies (objects and their accompanying stories) are connected to the understanding of social and cultural

contexts; object exploration (or tinkering) offers an opportunity to develop theories and concepts about those contexts. Scholars and educational researchers from the After-School Tinkering Project and the San Francisco Exploratorium at Stanford University describe tinkering as,

A playful and subjunctive modality—one often replete with the utterances and practice of *what if, could be, maybe, perhaps, let's try it out, etc.* These phrases and ways of approaching materials may be seen as the sensibilities modeled and encouraged by educators in a tinkering setting, grounded in an effort to recognize and deepen the educational potential of the fantastical. (Vossoughi, et al., 2013, p. 4)

Subsequently, tinkering can be read as a type of textual play where objects and bodies in serve as text and the act of tinkering serves as playful exploration. Engaging in this type of action-oriented textual play is important to the intellectual work of Zach, Ramone, and Cedric. For example, the children's costume designing at the clubhouse is performed through the inquiry of objects, more specifically by handling, maneuvering, and controlling fabric, where the children come to know by doing. Zack, Ramone, and Cedric were compelled to engage in costume design, blurring the boundaries between what they know about superheroes, what they imagine through their superhero play, and what the fabric remnants were able to perform. In this way, tinkering or action-oriented textual play (Wohlwend, 2013) can be seen as part of the process that allows children to find intellectual fullness, spilling out through their fabric work. In the next section, I will provide a second example of this intellectual work by revisiting the opening vignette and Cedric's individual design work.

Back to the Bodice: Cedric the Designer

Cedric continued to engage with the fabric long after it had lost its luster for other children. He would spend hours manipulating the basket of fabrics and would often take the fabric outside so that he could create atop the crow's nest play equipment, treating it like a stage. Eventually, Cedric let go of the superhero and warrior storylines and began to perform more as a fashion designer crafting dresses rather than warrior costumes. The bodice dress form in the opening vignette was a key actant in this agential shift. On his first day with the dress form, Cedric fully embraced the designer role. He spent the entire day wrapping and cutting fabric to create his fashion design. Through observations, I noticed that Cedric took great care in his design choices. He would carefully look at a piece of fabric, hold it near the dress form, and manipulate it in different ways.

Sometimes he would discard the piece because, in his words, "it didn't work" for the design he had in mind. Other times he would keep the fabric he had chosen, folding and turning the remnants until they resembled a fashion design that met his satisfaction (See figure 4).

In addition, once Cedric had designed his basic concept, he began to add other materials to his project to accessorize the outfit. First, he created a necklace from paperclips to hang around the neck of the bodice. He did this by carefully looping the paperclips together to make a chain. After hanging his paperclip necklace on the dress form, Cedric stood back and admired his work. He put his hand on his chin and started talking to himself out loud. "It needs something else," he would say and would go to look through the other art supplies stored in small containers in the clubhouse for the "something else" it needed.



Figure 4: Cedric choosing fabric

He emerged with colored popsicles sticks and craft gems. Where he wanted to affix the sticks and gems was a relatively easy decision for him. These items had spoken to him before he had even put them on his design. He knew where they were to go. But trying to figure out how to attached the objects wasn't as easy. Cedric tried glue. But he found that Elmer's craft glue doesn't hold adhere to fabric and in vertical positions. Once this attempt failed, Cedric ran out of the room exclaiming he would be "right back." He reentered carrying clear tape. Using the tape, he was able to hold all of the accessories on the fabric until he was satisfied with the design (See figure 5).



Figure 5: Cedric accessorizes

Cedric's continuous and capricious engagement with fabric and other materials during the making process demonstrates his intellectual engagement while producing complex and ornate work. In the above intra-action, fabric serves as a powerful actant in Cedric's textual play. Cedric's discoveries are articulated through his fabric and accessory choice, the layout of the design, where and how he would elaborate that work, and what medium he would use to affix those choices to his product. The potential uses of the fabric and the craft materials that Cedric chose were many and varied. However, the relationship between the dress form and the fabric provided an opening for Cedric to elaborate his work in ways he was unable to do in the past. The bodice provided a 360-degree range of visibility. He was now able to step back and look at what he was making

and test out his theories without the constraints he experienced while designing on his own body.

With this new affordance, Cedric vigorously altered the materials in a way that was similar to rapid prototyping—a development process where something is implemented, tested, and adjusted quickly in order to see what works best. Since the clubhouse was designed to provide children with open access to materials, Cedric was able to freely move about the rooms and explore different materials to create the dress. In this way, the clubhouse also serves as an actant in Cedric’s ability to reconnoiter the space to figure out what he wants to use next, an opportunity that might not be made available to him otherwise had the context of this space been different. As Vossoughi et al. (2013) write about the practice of tinkering,

Rather than a linear or step-by-step process, the process of making is...organized in ways that support the pursuit of new possibilities and the invention of alternative forms. These practices also open the field of activity to novel goals and unanticipated problems. (p.3)

Since the clubhouse was organized to provide children with access to different types of materials and are encouraged to tinker with these materials, Cedric is able to compose and test theories about what fabric can do when put in dialog with other objects and how he can engage with both (See Figure 6). If something didn’t work, material accessibility and availability permitted Cedric to try a new approach until he found a solution that was satisfactory.

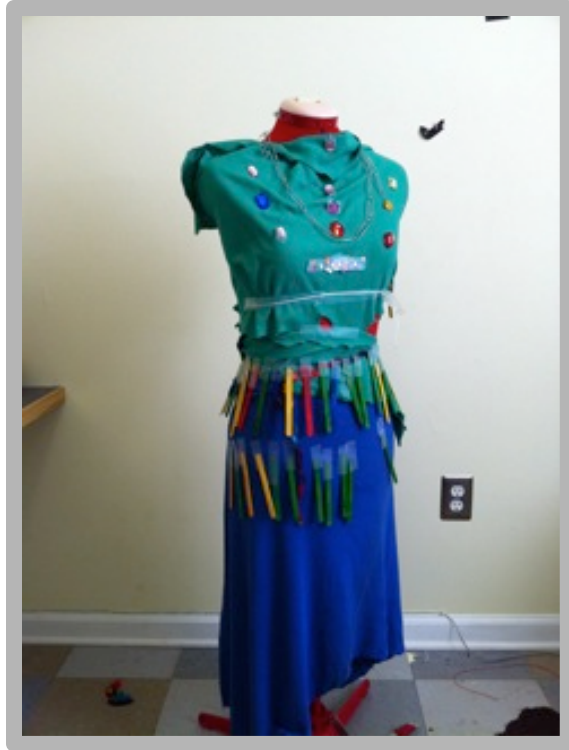


Figure 6: The finished design

Implications: Entangled in the Fabric of Literacies

...human power is itself a kind of thing-power (Bennett, 2010, p. 10).

In this encounter, I consider the intra-action between Cedric, fabric, materials, and space and argue that these intra-actions can be read as a literacy practice. In her research on play and literacies Wohlwend (2013) gives us some insight on how work such as Cedric's can be seen as literacy engagement. She writes, "these wordless designs directly link to children's developing literacies as they make decisions about meaning and audience...(to) represent their ideas" (p. 112). Likewise, Pahl & Rowsell (2011) explain that "writing in the home is inscribed not only within toys and books but also on images, and it can be found in visual and linguistic formats on video games and digital equipment" (p. 130) adding that "literacy itself is artifactual" (p.133). Therefore, Cedric's

work with the bodice, the cloth, and the other materials is a form of literacy and has implications for theory and practice.

In the words of Reggio Emilia atelierista Veia Vecchi (2010), schools often privilege only two types of expression: reading and writing. These expressions are complicated by the social and political privilege given to particular ways these reading and writing literacies are produced, which are often middle-class renditions of what it means to perform and be literate. Therefore, one implication of this analysis is to broaden the scope of recognized and accepted expressive practices used in the typical classroom. Cedric's composition was performed through and with fabric. There were no words written on pages. He wasn't given a prompt in order to offer response. In fact, most of Cedric's work was done quietly, until he had an idea for elaboration. Then, Cedric's voice would boom with great volume long enough to announce his ideas and then he would quietly go back to work. By working with fabric, Cedric was not only able to engage in an activity he enjoyed, but this experience also offered him an intellectually stimulating and challenging way to build literacy skills through action-oriented textual play (Wohlwend, 2013). In this way, Cedric's intellectual engagement can be read through his bodily actions (planning, elaboration, revisions) during composition rather than through written assessments—bringing with it the promise of change to educational practices that have become steeped in testing culture (Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011; Sacks, 2001).

Collectively analyzing the work of Cedric, Ramone, and Zack also implies that acknowledging fabric play as a literacy practice affords a broader narrative of what it means to grow up in a working-class community. In this context, these children are seen

as creative, intellectuals at work rather than being reduced to deficit interpretations of what it means to grow up in poverty. Literacy education scholar Jones (2012) explains, “we must work against mainstream ways of responding to children that are saturated with deficit view of class marginalization” (p. 29). And Vossoughi et al. (2013) suggests that pedagogical practices associated with tinkering,

take on new meaning in the context of working with young people whose resources and capacities are often overlooked by narrow notions of intelligence and dominant representations of science, and whose schooling is characterized by the kinds of test-centric and regimented curriculum that disproportionately effects working-class students and students of color. (p. 4)

This quote offers insight on how classrooms might become more equitable for children whose proclivities are sparked through broader, less traditional notions of literacies. Possibly through being more attentive to ways things serve as actants in the lives of children and attending to the vibrant matter that *matters* to children. According to Bennett (2010),

vital materialism...set(s) up a kind of safety net for those humans who are...routinely made to suffer because they do not conform to a particular (Euro-American, bourgeois, theocentric, or other) model of personhood. The ethical aim becomes to distribute value more generously, to bodies and such. (p. 13)

By seeing children as exercising power through *and with* things, and by considering these engagements valuable, a more equitable language arts classroom can be cultivated.

This encounter also denotes that using new materialism as a tool in studying the literacies of children offers new possibilities and insights for research and practice.

According to Barad (2012), “responsibility is not about right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other” (p.81). Practices that regulate and regiment learning to a limited set of activities constrain what is possible in a language arts classroom and privileges particular ways of knowing. Conversely, listening to the ways children intra-act with their material surroundings reconfigures pedagogical efforts to invite and welcome new ways of knowing and engaging with literacies—one that can be seen as an “in addition to” rather than an “in lieu of” approach. Furthermore, providing open access to materials situates learning in a context where children are able to tinker with and make decisions regarding composition on their own terms.

As a researcher at the clubhouse, I have learned that materials provide new reference points for teachers and children alike. As children are discovering new ways of knowing through their engagements with materials such as fabric, I am learning to discover new ways to approach teaching, engaging, and listening to children and the materials they use. Further research might explore the ways children, teachers, and materials intra-act in typical classrooms, how classroom spaces might set up conditions that give children access to a variety of materials chosen by teachers and children, and how these intra-actions contribute to a diverse set of literacy practices in the language arts classroom.

The theories children make about the world are entangled in the conditions, discourses, *and* materials that are made available to them. Just as the philosophy of Reggio Emilia (Wurm, 2005) reminds us that there are many teachers in a child’s life including families, teachers, and the environment, the work of children at the clubhouse reminds us that the materials a child is given access to and how they use and think about

materials plays an important role in the learning environment. When given the opportunity to use and experiment with different expressive languages (Rinaldi, 2006), what is produced is nothing short of extraordinary.

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Figure 9: Cut Me: Multimodal Experience Three



— Encounter Four —
**Writing Differently: Using Theories of New Materialism to
 (De/re)territorialize Multimodal Literacies**

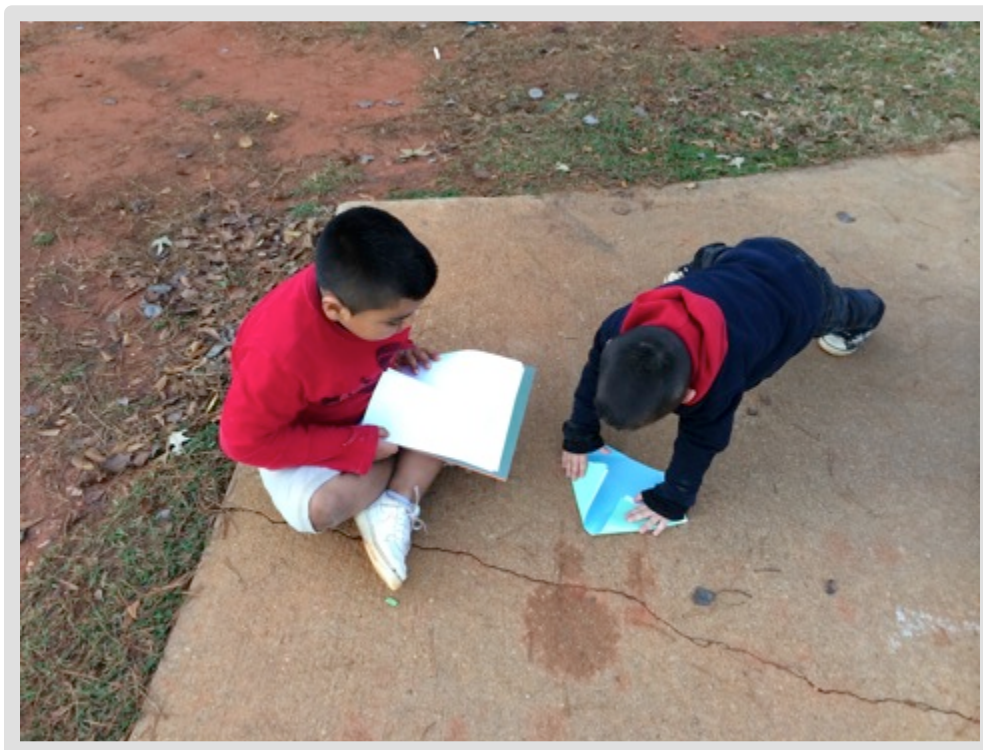


Figure 10: La Montanas

“The desire of the craftsperson to see what a metal can do, rather than the desire of the scientist to know what a metal is, enabled the former to discern a life in metal and thus, eventually, to collaborate more productively with it” (Bennett, 2010, p.60).

— ABSTRACT —

Using Deleuze & Guattari’s concept of de/reterritorialization, this encounter presents data illustrating how children’s experiences with making things can be read as composition. I will argue that by reimagining what is meant by composition, educators can create alternative ways of engaging in literacy pedagogies.

**Writing Differently: Using Theories of New Materialism to (De/re)territorialize
Multimodal Literacies**

"Becoming is creation." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p 106)

"Ms. Jaye! Look my Mohawk! Look my pee pee! Look my belly!" Diego chants as he holds a folded and rolled up piece of paper to his head, down to his crotch, and then back up to his stomach region.

"No! No! No! Su es montañas!" clarified Mateo as he took his own pieces of folded paper and sat them fanned out on the driveway at his feet. Mateo puts his hands on his hips, pokes out his chest, and begins to stomp on the paper-made mountains as he roars loudly. Diego joins in and they both laugh gleefully before leaping back down to sit on the pavement and fiddle with the paper again.

Mateo and Diego were kindergarteners and cousins who could often be found creating things out of the materials and objects given to them from the community center (affectionately called the clubhouse) that is located across the street from Mateo's house. I looked forward to this time before dusk, my last glimpse of children making things in the working-class residential community I call Ruby Crest before I left for the evening. It was not uncommon to see children sitting cross-legged in driveways, riding their bikes in the streets, and cobble squatting to dig in the dirt in yards between the time they left the clubhouse and the streetlights flickered brightly. In these moments, I am often reminded of my own childhood where I would spend time saving the universe in my front yard as a super hero, plant elaborate stick and weed gardens for my Fisher Price toys in the mud, and choreograph dances on top of a dilapidated house roof that had long since fallen to the ground, serving as the perfect stage.

Both five year olds quickly grab their paper to follow me as I walk back toward my car to go home.

“Ms. Jaye! It looks like the circus.” Mateo explained as he points up to a billowy pink and blue cotton-candy sky.

“So it does.” I say as I nod my head yes in agreement before saying my goodbyes and getting in my car to go home.

On the way home I consider all the ways these children teach me what they know through their multimodal ways of engaging with the world—none of which involve sitting in desks to perform multiple-choice tests, five-paragraph essays, or comprehension workbooks. I also consider all the ways I do the same—making sense of my world through music, visual media, and folk art. Seeing these multimodal engagements as literacy work, this encounter concerns itself with the ways these experiences can be seen as an authentic language medium in the many ways children express themselves.

In the rest of this encounter, I will introduce the children who were the focus of this study, provide a brief context of the clubhouse, and the theoretical tools I use to make sense of the literacy events like the one in Mateo’s driveway. Through the analysis of these multimodal literacy events, I will demonstrate how Reggio Emilia, multimodal literacies, and new materialisms are tied together. Last, I am going to argue that by using these three concepts in conjunction rather than the way they are typically taken up in theory and practice, educators can leverage a different kind of writing workshop, reimagining what is meant by composition in the literacy classroom, and can create alternative ways of engaging in literacy pedagogies.

Inventors and Invention Studio at the Clubhouse

Mateo (5), Ramone (5) and Adelina (10) are all children who joined me every Tuesday during the winter semester of 2014 for Invention Studio at the clubhouse (affectionately named The Awesome Clubhouse at Le Escuelita) that is located in their neighborhood. An after school special interest class, Invention Studio was intended as a design-build-play space where children were given the opportunity to engage in play and design literacies using everyday materials (paper, fabric, cardboard, tape, scissors, found objects) and their imagination. I decided to develop Invention Studio based on months of being a participant-observer with the children at Ruby Crest where I saw many children engaged in spontaneous multimodal literacies (building paper spinners, fabric and costume design, sculpting with clay) on a daily basis. Diego (5), Adelina and Mateo's cousin, chose a Drawing Class as his special interest class but would often sneak over to the room where we were working in Invention Studio to peer in through the crack in the doorway grinning.

The residents of Ruby Crest predominantly identify themselves as Latin@ (about 70%) and African-American (about 30%). Adelina and Mateo (sister and brother) and Ramone proudly self identify as Mexican-Americans and often discuss their extended families that live in Mexico and the traditions their families brought with them to the United States, such as piñatas and Chicharrónes (deep fried pork rinds often served with hot sauce) a homemade snack that the kids often purchase in large bags from community members seeking to supplement their income. I once experienced a similar economic reality—getting up early on Saturday mornings to help sell homegrown watermelons from the back of a pickup truck. But now I live a very different life than the families in

the neighborhood, one where I no longer need to pawn or sell items at pawnshops and local flea markets so that I might be able to pay the light bill—although I continue to enjoy visiting both of these spaces as a middle-class woman as much as I did as a working-class one.

Despite our current economic situations, it is often the language difference that I feel divides me from the kids the most. All four of the children in this encounter spoke Spanish and would often move between Spanish and English in their conversations with each other, particularly when I was part of the discussion. I am certain the English was for my benefit—a gesture they extended to me, a non-Spanish speaker, in kindness; as I had observed all four of these children strictly use Spanish when engaged in play with Spanish speaking peers. However, even when I didn't understand what was being said linguistically, I was able to observe how much all of these children enjoyed creating, designing, and inventing with the materials at the clubhouse and it often triggered memories of my younger self tinkering in my grandfather's basement where I was given full reign to solder together make-believe worlds with items found in boxes of old motherboards, circuits, and other barebone parts. The basement served as my multimodal workshop and it was this same studio-approach to inquiry that I hoped to cultivate in Invention Studio.

Charting New Pedagogical Territory with Deleuze and Guattari

“A circus,” I think to myself, “How appropriate that Mateo described the sky as a circus with its pinks and blues billowing in the almost-night sky.” It was also how I found myself feeling about the clubhouse in the beginning—sometimes that place seemed like a circus with its many rooms of performers manipulating objects and attempting

spontaneous feats of theatrics that often leave me in awe and admittedly sometimes leave me a bit nervous for their safety as well—especially as they jump from swings or decide they need to use the glue guns. But midst all the seemingly chaotic movement there seems to be something very generative being cultivated in the work of tiny hands and fingers and bodies at play, something worthy of a Big Top. And it was this *something* being cultivated that helped keep my body in check when I wanted more control, more order, more power over the younger and smaller bodies that surrounded me.

When I agreed to help reopen the clubhouse in Ruby Crest, I knew I was charting into new pedagogical territory. For years the center had operated as a Boys and Girls Club. With that affiliation came many of the restrictions that are found within similarly funded institutional afterschool facilities for children. Check in systems, strict schedules, locked gates, and one annual fee of ten dollars were just a few of the “norms” put in place, many of which were directives associated with funding guidelines. The building was sectioned off in ways that garnered control over the supplies and the bodies in it, including an office and monitored computer lab. Overall, students had little choice of activities and spent most of their time in teacher-directed events. We aimed to change that.

But with this newfound openness of allowing children to have much say over what they do and how they do it, came considerable adjustment and many of those adjustments were ones I had to make as I found myself in discomfort for the first few months. Loud, exaggerated, demanding and high-paced movements exploded from the children who visited the center weekly and often exhausted me as I worked to be both an adult leader and a researcher in this space. The kids used supplies quicker than I could

replenish them most weeks as glue, crayons, paper, scissors, fabric, and other found objects flew off the shelves to be used in the many projects and works in progress. Other supplies (tape, scissors, sticky notes) often found their way into pockets to continue creating at home.

Although I considered myself a progressive pedagogue (someone who encouraged collaborate group assignments and community action projects), it became clear I had embodied certain pedagogical moves that were often hard to ignore. I felt a need to manage the bodies as they flitted through the five rooms in the house. I believed it necessary to attend to every question asked, every demand, and every child—even if this meant I had to leave what I was doing with another child to tend to it. I soon realized I had to unlearn what it meant to guide a group of children in this new context, including hierarchy, power, and the binary of adult and child.

As much as I hate to admit it, my body had been “schooled” or what philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would call “territorialized” to do and be certain things for children in my presence. Seen as a constant flow of energy that varies in intensity, territorialization can be conceptualized as thoughts, ideas, customs, actions, and/or norms—attributes that become habitual and thus an everyday element of a person, place, or object within a social, cultural, and/or political context. This might be reflected in pedagogical actions—such as my urge to “keep tabs” on all the children at the clubhouse—or it might reflect itself in classroom practices such as weekly spelling tests. Territorialization can even apply to commonplace things. For example, the habits and attributes that sanction a tree to be defined as a tree (a spoon as a spoon, a rope as a rope, etc.) would be a result of the territorialization of that object.

But what happens when a tree is cut down and made into a table, a house, a boat, or firewood? What happens when a person is taken out of their context and put into a new context where they become aware of how their body feels different? How do their habits (pedagogical or otherwise) need to shift and change? When does the sky become the circus?

This process is referred to as deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In the *Deleuzian Dictionary*, philosopher and Deleuzian scholar Adrian Parr (2011) writes that, “derritorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change...creative potential...to free up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organisations” (p. 69). Deleuze and Guattari believe that the world works in rhizomatic flows, with subjects and objects flowing in and out of each other in chaotic, rather than a linear fashion. However, just as a river might be dammed or split into two streams, these flows can be interrupted and rerouted to different contexts in different ways. This rerouting process is the deterritorialization and can be illustrated in this encounter by our efforts to change the clubhouse into a space where children have much more control than had been present in the past and is reflected in my pedagogical discomfort.

Of course, as we begin to adjust, shift, reinvent these territories via deterritorialization, these spaces, things, ideas all become reterritorialized (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Reterritorialization occurs when the traditional structures of an entity no longer resemble the ones before and hence are replaced by new habits and routines, such as this community-based space during its transformation to The Awesome Clubhouse. This (de/re)territorialization started gradually during our summer program and abruptly

shifted once we were given full access to redesign the space. Guided by the Reggio Emilia philosophy as well as critical and poststructural theories of place, subjectivity, power, and pedagogy, we spent hours upon hours for several weeks, transforming the front room of the building into a space that looked more like an atelier—a studio where children can work and meet with the smaller rooms serving as what Reggio-Emilia educator Wurm (2005) calls “mini-atelier(s)” (art room, building room, library)—with specific materials for children to “work on particular projects with or without a teacher” (p.8).

In the Reggio approach, the environment is of utmost importance, serving as one of the teachers in a child’s education (Wurm, 2005). Our goal was to set up the conditions where children and teachers could create, discover, learn and explore in a space with fewer boundaries and more possibilities; a space that encouraged intellectual engagements with the world on the participants creative terms in relation to both human and nonhuman others.

In an interview about the genesis of creativity from everyday experiences, Loris Malaguzzi, grandfather of the Reggio Emilia approach, reminds us that,

Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known. Creativity seems to express itself through cognitive, affective, imaginative processes. These come together and support the skills for predicting and arriving at unexpected solutions. (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011, p. 51)

It was this creativity that we hoped to cultivate in the newly (de/re)territorialized clubhouse. In part, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) believe these creative expressions are articulated through the process of becoming (or a movement towards difference). They would argue that becoming is more interested in the process of changing rather than the change itself. It is the *doing* rather than the done. In this sense, becoming can be seen as the intellectual work that allows for (de/re)territorialized to occur.

Becoming Intimate with the Ways Children Compose

Once the “circus” had scattered out from under the “big top” that is the clubhouse at the end of the day, I was often left with the remnants of amazing constructions made from things such as paper, sticks, fabric, and pipe cleaners—like the sticky, popcorn and confetti littered floors of a circus tent. It was in these moments after the children’s daily exodus that I began to see the importance of embracing these seemingly chaotic practices as ones that are inextricably linked to the ways children articulate everyday experiences and become intimate with objects.

In her philosophical writings, political scientist Jane Bennett (2010) echoes this process of becoming or “changes in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8), by conceptualizing the way subject and object engage with each other intimately and the disrupting of the subject and object binary. Bennett believes it is through intimacy with materials that we learn new things and as a result both the object and subject are different and more powerful than they were before the relationship between the two existed. She goes on to explain that we learn more deeply by actually engaging, manipulating, and experimenting with an object than we can by simply studying the object. For example, if I observe a piece of paper, I can tell you many things

about it. I know it is flat, I can tell you what color it is, what direction it is laying. But if I pick that paper up and fold it or crumple it or roll it, I can find new ways to use that paper, think about that paper, new things for that paper to become. The manifestation of change that happens as we engage, manipulate, and experiment is the process of becoming—a process that is always, already in motion—the intellectual power that is generated during playful composition achieved through a relationship between entities such as Mateo and Diego with paper in the beginning of this encounter.

Bennett's (2010) focus on intimacy between subject and object and Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming can both be applied to writing and writing instruction. Although in recent years literacies have been conceptualized by educational literacy researchers in broad multimodal terms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; Leander & Sheehy, 2004; New London Group, 1996) by "encompassing linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial forms" (Hill, 2007, p. 56) the concept of writing and writing instruction in typical classrooms has been relatively stagnant and regimented to traditional ideas of what it means to compose (Vecchi, 2010). Conversely, a careful reading of the definition of writing and composition might suggest that educators are missing something.

Writing is defined as "the act or practice of composition" (Merriam-Webster), "the act of a person of thing that writes" (dictionary.com), and "a medium of communication that represents language through the inscription of signs and symbols" (Wikipedia). As I watched the children at the clubhouse create, tell stories about those creations, and make theories about how the objects they were manipulating could be

shaped and molded in order to tell their stories, I was struck by this notion of practicing composition. Merriam and Webster define composition as:

- The way in which something is put together or arranged; the combination of parts or elements that make up something
- A product of mixing and combining various elements and ingredients
- An intellectual creation

The children were always combining parts, mixing elements, and creating intellectually—all of which are seen as composition. This was illustrated through the children's engagements with materials at the clubhouse, the work they showed off proudly to me as they left with new constructions, and the remnants they left behind on shelves and floors and walls.

In these ways, composition and writing can be seen as becoming via the process of dimensional storytelling/composition and as a result, writing is deterritorialized by the intimate relationships children have with the materials they use while participating in multimodal literacy practices at the clubhouse. In the remainder of this section, I will provide examples of the ways I observed the children in intimate relationships with materials during our Invention Studio class and as a result deterritorialize both the objects and the traditional conception of composition.

Becoming with Pipe Cleaners

One of the most popular materials used at the clubhouse were pipe cleaners. Once a tool to clean residue from the small bore of a smoking pipe, these fuzzy, malleable wires have since been (de/re)territorialized as a commonly used arts and crafts tool. Kids at the clubhouse would sit for hours making things from pipe cleaners. Ramone was one

of the children who used pipe cleaners the most and would spend hours becoming with the pipe cleaner, deterritorializing it over and over again. I once saw him turn the pipe cleaner into an over the ear communication devise that resembled a headset when we has playing super heroes on the playground with his friends. I watched as he created bracelets and rings and faux glasses one day with his sister. And he amazed me on another day when he fashioned fasteners for his superhero cape using pipe cleaners when he realized that the staples wouldn't hold the fabric together well enough.

One afternoon, Ramone asked me to join him in becoming with the pipe cleaner, an invitation I gladly accepted. On this particular day, Ramone decided to make a bee and bird with his pipe cleaners. I watched as he twisted and turned the colored wires together until the pipe cleaner no longer resembled itself, but had been transformed into an amazing creature (see figure 1& 2). Quietly, Ramone handed me the bird while he held the bee uttering three little words, "Video tape this."

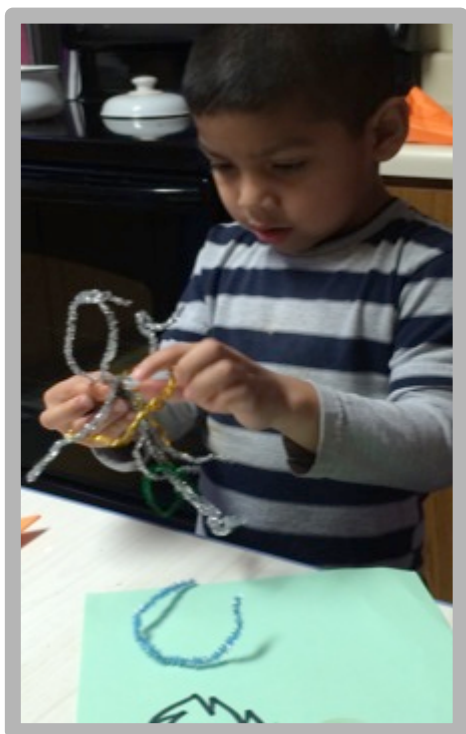


Figure 4: Making Birds and Bees

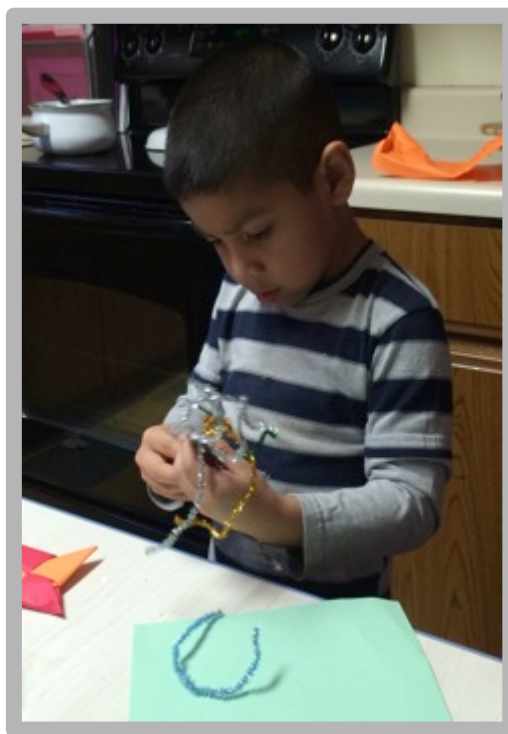


Figure 3: Becoming with Pipecleaners

I complied with Ramone's request and followed his lead. Without hesitation, he began to fly the bee around in front of my camera, buzzing wildly as his bee chased my bird around in the air (see figure 3).

Ramone stopped buzzing long enough to say, "Now you are chasing me!"

I begin the chase with my bird and immediately start buzzing in chorus with Ramone. But in mid flight, I realized I was a bird and felt compelled to acknowledge the fact that I was "making the wrong sound" by buzzing.



Figure 5: Birds and Bees in Flight

"I wouldn't say zzzz—what would I say?"

Without missing a beat or saying a word, Ramone starts to make a cawing sound and I cawed as he buzzed for the rest of our video.

During this afternoon, Ramone can be seen as becoming bee and bird through composition with pipecleaners. By engaging with the pipe cleaners in this way, he learns more about what the material can do, resulting in a deeper collaboration. Rather than follow instructions or have someone show him how to make the bird and bee, Ramone

spent time becoming intimate with the object by bending and manipulating the pipecleaners until they became the animals he wanted. He deterritorializes the materials into birds and bees and extends that work to create what Karen Wohlwend (2013) calls action text (conveying meaning through movements)—which in this case was the flying of the bee and bird and documented through the production of the video. Ultimately, Ramone becomes with the pipecleaners through playful manipulative exploration, bringing both Ramone and the pipecleaners to life. Similar to the literacy work by educational researchers Vasudevan et al. (2010) where they explore the production of multimodal text and literacy identity, Ramone mixes various elements while designing, combining his knowledge of animals in flight, video as text, and pipe cleaner maneuvering. This combining of elements, where the territory of one thing is drawn into another, is the assemblage where becoming is made possible—he and the pipecleaners are different. This collective becomes a medium of communication that can be seen as writing/composition through the collaboration of bodies and things in action-oriented textual play.

I am the one who reterritorialized our action text when I broke character in the middle of the video to “correct” the sound I was making rather than going with Ramone’s material-discursive production through his playful composition. Physicist Karen Barad (2007) defines material-discursive as “where matter and meaning are mutually articulated” (p. 152). This is especially important for educators because the social worlds of adults and children, although often shared, can be very different from one another and these differences can be perpetuated by practices that are assumed to be “good” or “best” ways to be productive and/or pedagogical. Literacy and early childhood researchers Anne

Haas Dyson (1997, 2003, 2013) and Vivian Paley (2004) remind us that children often engage in practices that adults do not. These practices give children a literacy expertise that many adults are unaware of or invest very little of their time engaged with. My embodied pedagogical response in this moment was to make the situation mirror “real-life” – even while Ramone seemed to accept that I made a buzzing sound for my bird in flight, I was compelled to acknowledge the “wrongness” of this sound and interrupt our composing work to correct it. But perhaps reflecting years of my body/mind being territorialized by discourses of what it means to be a teacher in the presence of a child, I felt like I had to “teach something” rather than letting Ramone lead me. In so doing, I disrupted the flow of composition to ask Ramone what kind of noise a bird should make (even though it was clear that Ramone did not have any trouble producing sounds of various animals and the question was an empty one, perhaps one to cover for my own shortcomings in being able to compose appropriately during our engagement).

My “pedagogical” response was to make the situation mirror real-life. I felt like I had to “teach something” rather than letting Ramone lead me. However, my response restricted what was possible in our play and might have been more authentic had I not stopped to acknowledge such a small thing. Malaguzzi explains, “creativity seems to find its power when adults are less tied to prescriptive methods...(and) when adults try to become more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman 2011, p. 51). This is similar to becoming in that becoming requires real engagement, not peripheral engagement that is halfway informed by something other than the act of becoming—such as teacher education discourses and practices.

I could have kept buzzing and listened for Ramone's cue rather than try and engage in an academic-like experience of questioning whether he knew what a bird says or not. (Of course he did!) By interjecting during the filming, it was clear that the video was at once being driven by my experiences and wasn't relevant to Ramone's composition work. And although I can not be certain, this might have been the catalyst that shut down this activity, as Ramone moved on to outside play after he signaled for our video to stop. Rather than providing a possibility for "learning to take place" my teacher education discourses and practices got in the way, interrupt the process of becoming by asking an empty question that had no relevance to our composition.

Becoming With Sticks

Weeks later Ramone, Mateo, Adelina, and I were all outside working. It was our last day in Invention Studio and after one of the coldest winters we have had on record in the south, including two snowfalls—unheard of for our area—the weather was warm and spring-like and perfect for being outside at the picnic tables to make stuff. I gathered several supplies: paper, scissors, yarn, glue, and writing utensils and I assured the group if they thought of things they wanted to work with, one of us would go back inside to get the materials.

Mateo had come into the clubhouse that day carrying a Y-shaped stick and I watched as he sat at the table turning the stick over and over and over again in his hands.

"It is a slingshot!" he announced firmly. Quietly Mateo started to tie a remnant of fabric around both ends of the stick. Once tied, he rears the fabric back, closes one eye, and pretends to aims the slingshot (see figure 4).



Figure 6: Becoming Slingshot

Mateo continued to pretend to shoot the slingshot several times before laying it down on the table by his side. Seemingly forgotten, the slingshot was pushed out of the way while Mateo grabbed a white sheet of paper and began to carefully cut a white strip and I thought he had moved on to another activity, one that didn't involve the stick. I was wrong. Quickly, he grabbed the slingshot and wrapped the white paper around the base, taping it in place and replacing the white fabric with an old shoestring he found on the playground.

"Guitarra! Guitarra!" he squealed as he pretended to play his newly created instrument (see figure 5).



Figure 5: Guitarra! Guitarra!

I was intrigued by the way Mateo had shifted his work from one thing so quickly to the other. There was no time for conversation as Mateo rapidly converted the guitar into something new. Instead, he worked quietly until he was ready to share what he had made. Literacy researcher Siegel et al. (2008) reminds us that silence can be read differently in these multimodal practices. While under conventional writing workshop or literacy practices Mateo's silence might be met with labels such as "struggling" or "off task" or even "insubordinate" behaviors. Reading Mateo's work as a multimodal composition, Mateo can be seen as making meaning through his continuous deterritorialization of the stick. Perhaps this gives us insight about the work of composition and the ways in which teachers are positioned as collaborators, interrupters, supporters, observers, and all of the other ways teachers perform in the language arts classroom. In a verbal-centric pedagogical space where the teacher asked for explanations or stops the material-discursive process of becoming to interject a question,

the process of becoming can be interrupted, as illustrated earlier with Ramone and his bee-bird video.

Mateo moved so quickly and quietly it was hard to keep up with all of his creations. Sitting down the stick once more, He carefully designed a small figure out of the white paper and placed the person hanging in the corner of the Y-shape explaining, “Jaye. It’s tree of the jungle” (see figure 6).

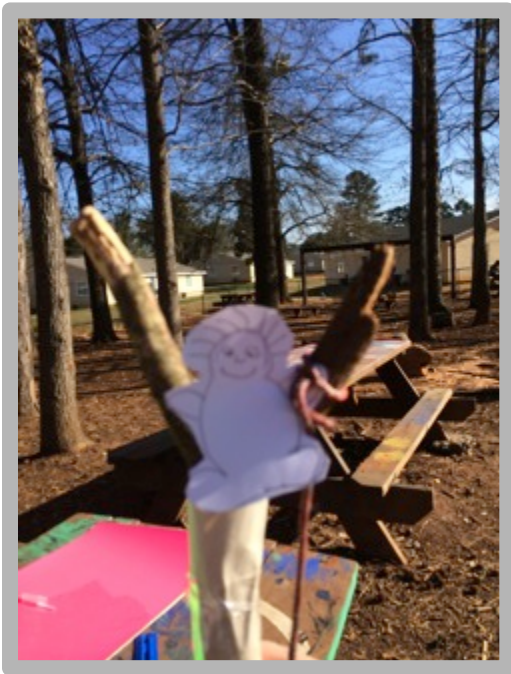


Figure 6: Becoming Jungle Tree

But as soon as he announced the becoming of the jungle tree, he moved on to the next becoming. Mateo began to look around for more sticks to add to his project and over the course of thirty-minutes he turned the stick into an ax, a bow and arrow, and a string of telephone poles (see figure 7), all becomings that may not have been possible if I had interrupted him during his work. Instead, I watched and waited for guidance. When Mateo needed my help, he asked for it. He would ask me to hold a stick for him while he tied on a string or help him pull the knots tight so they would not come undone.

Sometimes he would ask me to put tape on parts of his projects while he held the pieces in place. Rather than swooping in to “give him ideas” or suggest “better, more efficient” ways to build his designs, I waited quietly and my silence made room for the becoming.

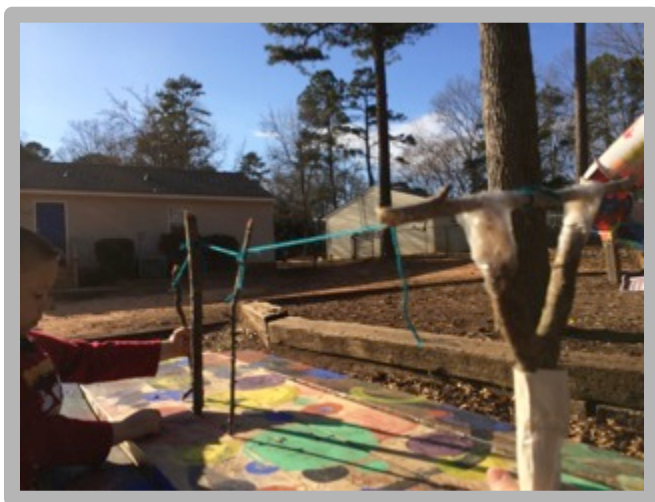


Figure 7: Becoming Telephone Poles

Mateo's body and the stick danced together until he recognized the possibilities. As he stared at and fingered the y-shaped branch, it was as if he was listening to what the stick wanted to become. Jumping from one idea to the next, Mateo was in textual play—reading and experimenting with an object—seeing what the stick could do and what he could do with the stick through deterritorialization. While thinking through the material, these deterritorializations can be seen as theory building experiences for Mateo and are important in how children come to understand the world:

How children make theories is fascinating. The presence of rationality and imagination and such close intertwining between them is found only in the theories of great thinkers: in children's theories there is also that highly empathetic approach to things which is highly developed in children and a sensitive filter for understanding and connecting things (Vecchi, 2010, p. 29).

As an atelierista and early childhood researcher, Vecchi's words offer insight into how Mateo's work can be seen as intellectual engagements through play with material. Where traditional forms of writing (narrative, informative, persuasive, etc.) are a way to represent theories about the world through written text (such as this dissertation), they are but one way. For children, theories about the world often come through playful composition such as Mateo's adventures with the stick. This experiential theory building approach is important to the work of composition and might be understood as Mateo crafting a multigenre project with the stick and what they might become together. Literacy educator Tom Romano (2000) defines a multigenre project as a multi-voiced composition that hangs together through a common theme. Seeing this practice as a multimodal engagement, literacy researcher Teri Holbrook (2014) explains this assemblage or bricolage as one "that requires images and artifact as well as words" (p. 179) to produce understanding. Most often, multigenre projects are primarily compromised of written text. When thinking about composition through the lens of becoming, Mateo's multiple deterritorializations perform as many genres of the stick.

Mateo's multimodal work can also be read as an opportunity for him to make sense of the way he produces himself in relationship to the world, provides insight in how his becoming with the stick relates to his socio-cultural context of being a Mexican American from a working-class family, and offer up useful knowledge regarding the connections Mateo makes with his surroundings and what he knows about how these things operate. For example, after much experimentation, Mateo eventually went back to designing a more elaborate version of the guitarra. Using blue yarn, a dull pair of scissors, and a roll of tape, Mateo spent almost an hour pulling each piece of yarn "just-

right” so that it created the taught strings of the guitarra. At first, the tape didn’t hold the yarn in place but Mateo rectified that by wrapping the tape tightly over and over again, making sure the edges of the yarn were securely fastened to the stick (see figure 8).



Figure 8: Back to the Guitarra

Once he finished, he played his guitarra with great gusto for the rest of us at the table. Stopping Mateo’s smiling face suddenly became very serious.

“My daddy plays guitarra but he was sent back to Mexico. I want to learn how to play guitarra, too.”

By working through many deterritorializations of the stick (different genres), eventually Mateo decided to spend time expanding on one idea that connected to his own personal experiences, sharing important aspects of his own experience. Here the guitarra can be seen as personal narrative work that indicates the significance of this instrument to Mateo and his familial context. Furthermore, Mateo engages in the process of revisions

and elaboration when he creates several renditions of the guitarra and then embellishing his work by using several pieces of yarn rather than just the one shoestring he had used before. Since both revisions and elaborations are taught as part of the traditional composition writing process, Mateo's dimensional storytelling can be seen as an alternative way to consider the composition process—one that involves deterritorialization and becoming with the objects one works with.

Becoming with Paper and Glue

As Mateo worked with his stick, Ramone was busy manipulating, cutting, and folding paper. Ramone worked rather quietly experimenting with different colors of paper, often holding two pieces side-by-side to see if they indeed fit into his imaginative design. Knowing that he liked to sit and steep in his becomings, I left Ramone to his own devices. As time passed, I realized I had gotten so caught up in my own becoming-researcher as I watched Mateo deterritorializing the stick that I had forgotten to go back and check on Ramone. That is when I noticed the glue.

When I glanced over, I observed that while I had focused elsewhere, Ramone had decided to squat beside the picnic table bench and was squirting massive amounts of Elmer's glue onto what looked like a mound of red and black crumbled construction paper (see figure 9). My first instinct was to listen to the teacher education discourses that propelled me to intervene but I fought that urge in my ongoing efforts to deterritorialize my "teacher" body/mind and started up a conversation with him about what it was he was doing.

Jaye: *Ramone, what are you making there?*

Ramone: *It is a volcano that is erupting.*

Jaye: *And the glue is the volcano?*

Ramone: *Yes, it is falling all the way to the ground where it will burn the leaves.*

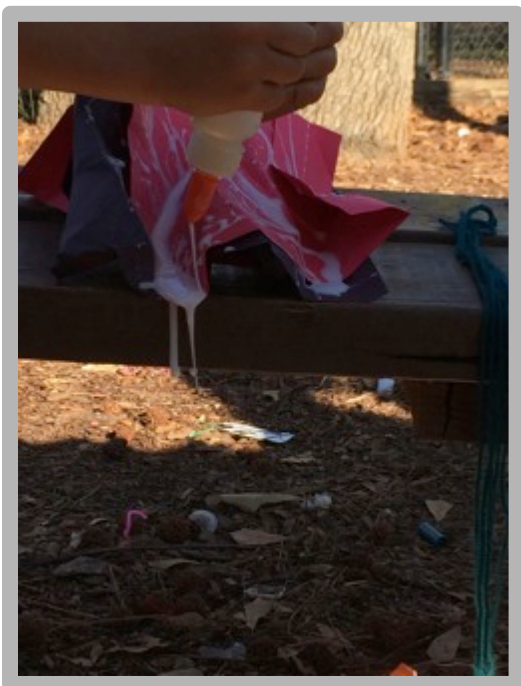


Figure 9: Glue Volcano Erupts

Seconds later, Adelina, who had been busy working on a poster she decided to make to teach the rest of the children about her time creating during Invention Studio, joined us.

Adelina: *Hello, this is Adelina with a breaking update. There seems to have been a volcanic explosion at the clubhouse. We are trying to figure out if the eruption is glue or goo? To find out, we send our reporter Jaye to risk her life.*

Jaye: (leaning in close to Ramone's volcano) *It looks like glue to me.*

Ramone: (smiling) *It is—lava glue.*

Jaye: *There you have it. Lava glue. Back to you, Adelina.*

Adelina: *It seems it is lava glue. We will keep you updated as this catastrophe unfolds.*

At first, it was difficult for me to allow myself to “be okay” with the glue pouring out all over the paper and the ground. My teacher-adult assemblage self had been territorialized to believe that glue was to be used in small quantities and to adhere things together—not to be squandered in massive white puddles on crumbled paper and on the ground. But by accepting this as a creative process for Ramone and by asking him what he was making rather than why he was using all that glue, I was able to get better insight into what it was Ramone was conveying through his work. In addition, this approach allowed Adelina to step in and collaborate (or provide peer feedback) on the story, providing an opening for both of us to be part of the deterritorialization of the paper and the glue.

Ramone spent the remainder of class time and the remainder of the glue finishing his volcano. I watched as Ramone added the final details, bringing closure to his work on the volcano. Ramone carefully lifted the glue structure and asked that I slide a blue piece of construction paper underneath it so that it could be carried and put on display. He followed this by adding a pile of gumballs on one side of the volcano and topped it with red string and more glue (See figure 10). Satisfied with these final touches, Ramone left the structure to dry as he ran away to swing on the monkey bars close by.

Ramone’s finishing touches can be seen as the development of a conclusion to his dimensional storytelling. It is here that the deterritorializing process is complete for Ramone. Satisfied, the work has now become reterritorialized as a volcano that is exploding lava glue rather than merely Elmer’s craft glue and construction paper. This process is similar to traditional methods of writing conclusions during composition work where thoughts, experiences, and ideas are (de/re)territorialized in particular ways to

meet the needs of a writer's audience. In this sense, Ramone can be seen as crafting a conclusion to his volcano piece where he was ready to share it with fellow playmates at the clubhouse by putting it on display on a shelf as he left that day.

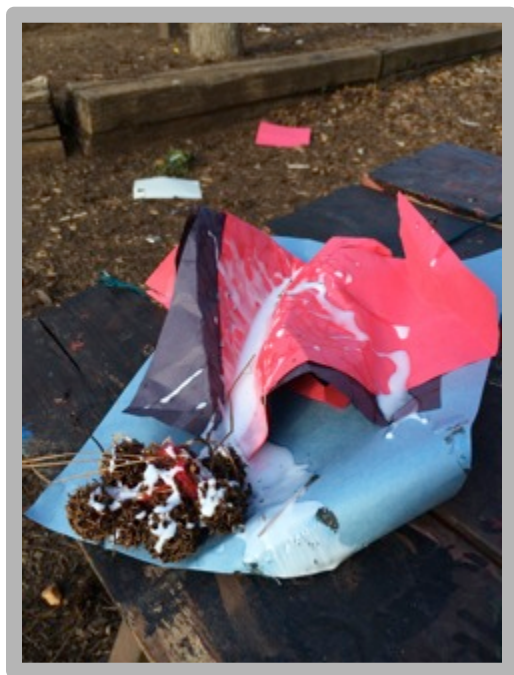


Figure 10: Volcano on Display

(De/re)territorializing the Classroom: Implications for Writer's Workshop

Through the analysis of these multimodal literacy events, I have made the argument that Reggio Emilia, multimodal literacies, and new materialisms are tied together. If as educators, we can tap into the creative ways children become with material and find ways to connect the work that children are doing every day to make sense of the world, we might find ways to (de/re)territorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) the ways we enact pedagogy and engage in writing instruction.

Writing workshop scholar and researcher, Ralph Fletcher (1996) wrote, "(A notebook) gives you a place to incubate very new ideas before they are strong and mature enough to face the harsh light of rational judgment, let alone public scrutiny" (p. 1-2).

Children's multimodal-becomings are a form of textual play where they are able to incubate their ideas in ways that make sense for the way they learn. Let me be clear that this is not an argument against traditional forms of composition. Writing is a powerful form expressing thought and has always been a very important part of my relationship with the world. But as the Reggio Emilia approach reminds us, we express ourselves in many different ways—sculpture, music, painting, photography—just to name a few. As illustrated in my analysis, the children at the clubhouse have an understanding of many of the processes that are scrutinized and labored over during traditional writing instruction. I can't count how many times I have overheard teachers exhaustedly exclaim, "They just can't seem to grasp...(insert concept)" while trying to figure out ways to explain certain writing techniques to children. Drafting, revisions, elaboration, conclusions, are all part of a composition process that can be cumbersome and tedious—even for the most advanced writer. Yet, the children at the clubhouse are doing these things—in their way and on their terms.

Taking up the commitments of Reggio Emilia and the theories of new materialism to emphasize the multiple ways that people have access to communicate, create, and express, sets up the conditions for a very different kind of writing workshop—one that might be called a composition workshop or a studio approach to writing. In a writer's studio children would have access to many different materials to create their stories—some chosen by teachers and others chosen by students. They would be encouraged to make things, to explore and experiment with a variety of ways to express themselves. Rather than a focus on timelines and set numbers of products, children would sit and

steep with their creations—revisiting, elaborating, and becoming as they deemed necessary.

Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) believed that to engage in becoming is to begin to create. With this in mind, educators might begin to find ways to (de/re)territorialize embodied pedagogies that restrict learning and garner control. For the children at the clubhouse (and I suspect for humans of all ages and contexts), the subjectivities performed through these multimodal events become embedded in their bodies and the way they perceive themselves as learners. This means the way a teacher responds to and engages with a child's repertoire of literacies has strong implications for the way these understandings are built and performed. Just as it was uncomfortable for me to relearn what it meant to be a teacher-leader at the clubhouse, classroom teachers need to wrestle with discomfort in order to fully embrace multimodal literacies as a valuable part of writing instruction. Learning to sit back and watch quietly without interrupting the becoming process is a good start.

By offering opportunities for children to engage with multimodal experiences, educators are broadening the conceptualization of what it means to compose; providing the tools for rich learning experiences that mirror today's broad expanse of literacies. At the very least, if we want creativity and innovation to be part of the literacy curriculum, teacher should engage with the multimodal literacies of children and make note of the marvelous things children know how to do when they are given time to explore and make theories about the world on their own intellectual terms. With this, I leave you with words from Adelina's poster she created on the last day of Invention Studio where she reminds us all to be creativity monsters (see figure 11),

Be Creative

Number one rule is be creative, being creative is fun. If you are creative you must make a lot of stuff.

The second rule is to have a lot of fun! And if you love creativity you must love celebrations and love creativity celebrations and that must mean you are a creativity monster!

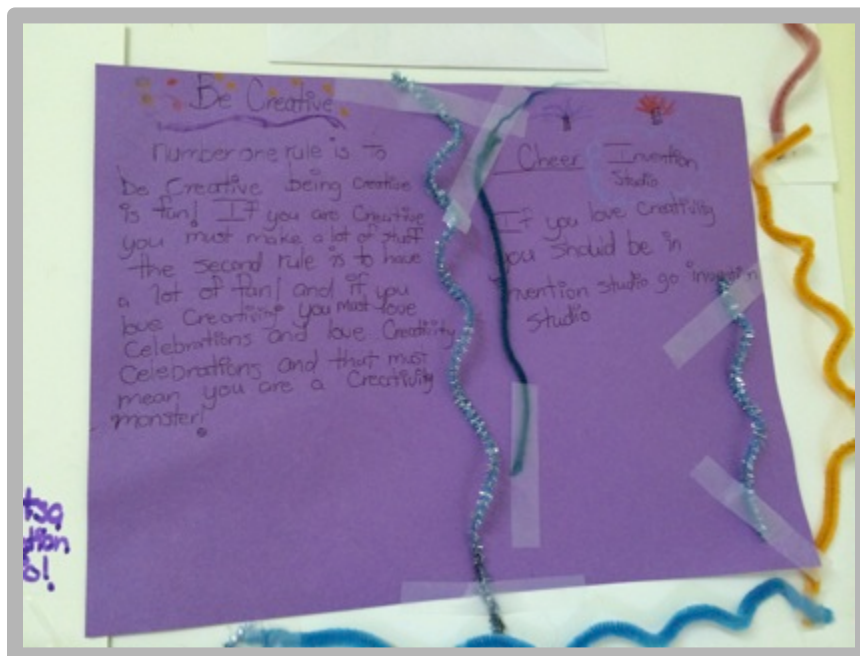


Figure 11: Creativity Monsters

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Figure 11: Bend Me: Multimodal Experience Four



—Encounter Five—
**Aesthetic Material Biography as Pedagogical Method:
 Muchness in Teacher Education Spaces**



Figure 12: Getting Reacquainted With the Material

“Importantly, intra-actions are not limited to human-based measurement practices. Indeed the issues at stake in exploring the vacuum are not merely questions of human exploratory practices in the quest for knowledge, but are thought to be ontologically poignant matters that go to the very nature of matter itself.” (Barad, 2012, p. 8)

—ABSTRACT—

This encounter explores Aesthetic Material Biography (A:M:B) as a pedagogical possibility in teacher education classroom. Incited by the work of collective biography, this inquiry process invites the exploration of an assemblage in which affects, bodies, and sensations move through visual and verbal creative processes evoking memories, embodiment, and stories. Employing Deleuzoguattarian and feminist new materialism perspectives in the envisioning of A:M:B as a flexible classroom practice, I will discuss four provocations exercised with emerging teachers: listening to materials/objects as memories, as visual art making, as diffractive practice, as well as listening to the materials/objects of others.

¹Aesthetic Material Biography as Pedagogical Method: Muchness in Teacher Education Spaces

“Maybe then, if we are to think and practise space differently, it will reverberate in these other realms too” (Massey, 2005, p. 58).

“Clank! Clank! Clank!”

The sound of blocks hitting against each other reverberates as I walk through the hallway to check out what is going on in the backrooms at the clubhouse where I conduct research with young children in a working-class residential community. Curious about how children experience muchness or intellectual fullness (for more on muchness see the first encounter) and the conditions that foster this type of richness, I began working as a researcher in the southeastern community the previous summer as part of a partnership between the College of Education, the local Foodbank, and a play-based, nature connection program. Now, late fall, the clubhouse seems to sit in a fine groove, albeit with bumps along the way, where children and adults were learning to take risks together.

Peering inside the building room, I see three small brown bodies crouched near the ground and one older child laying on his belly, torso stretched, as he tries to lodge a square block he has grasped between his thumb and forefinger into the a small opening formed between an arched block resting atop a long, wide rectangular one.

“There! We got it. Now let’s race,” says one of the kids.

All four of the children grab a matchbox car from a basket.

“3...2...1!”

¹ This method was created and explored with colleague and fellow teacher educator, Brooke Hofsess.

Each child pulls the car back as far as their arms will allow and let them go with force, wheels barely touching the long rectangle blocks apparently set up for launching from different angles. Black and brown skin-toned arms fly back and forth as fast as they can, releasing car after car, one after another. The goal seems to be to get the car through the small opening. Instead, the structure, unable to take so many forceful hits from being pummeled with cars, eventually falls, deconstructing itself.

“That didn’t work. Back to the drawing board for Plan C.”

The kids start to build the structure again, this time asking the adult in the room, an elementary education teacher candidate who is there as part of her field experience, for help in designing a stunt track that won’t fall when they make the course.

Not wanting to interrupt the construction, I walk back to the library and see another teacher candidate sitting with a child on the floor as he is adhering feathers, pompoms, and string from a plastic bin onto a large piece of white butcher paper. The child directs his adult companion:

“When I tell you to, hand me something from the box. It doesn’t matter which one it is as long as it isn’t the same color and that it makes the poster beautiful.”

The teacher candidate doesn’t ask the child to follow directives or instructions for making a poster. She doesn’t try to talk him into making specific patterns with the materials as he creates. Rather than taking over his work with her own vision, she watches and listens as he creates, allowing the materials and his discursivity to guide her. She asks:

“How do I know which one is beautiful?”

“Well...(he pauses) that doesn’t matter as long as it feels beautiful to you.”

She hands him a feather.

He accepts. Gluing it into place.

Making my way back to the front room of the building, I cross paths with another teacher candidate as she grabs supplies with a group of kids for an outdoors game. As I pass by she says to me, “Why can’t all my teaching experiences be like this?”

I nod and think to myself, Why can’t it, indeed.

It is the “*this-ness*” of the clubhouse, the conditions sparking these events of intellectual engagement that I had spent the year chasing. And now, here it was spilling over into the teacher’s candidate’s lives. She wasn’t the first candidate to share similar sentiments with me about time spent at the clubhouse, sentiments that led to discussions about how we might take what we were learning in this space into a typical classroom environment. Once I was left in the quiet of the clubhouse to lock up at the end of the day, these conversations about the “*this-ness*”—that we rarely had descriptive words for—often left me wondering how to create similar spaces for teacher candidates in their own classroom experiences.

It is the “*this*” the teacher candidate gives voice to that guides my work in this encounter. Building off of my experiences at the clubhouse, the encounter analyzes an attempt at new pedagogies (*aesthetic material biographies*) that explores engagement with art making materials as one way to practice space differently and for muchness to flourish in the teacher education classroom. First, I will explain the conception of aesthetic material biography (A:M:B), the underpinning theories behind this pedagogical approach, and introduce the study. Next, I will engage with findings during the pilot

study of this project. Last, I will provide implications for the use of *aesthetic material biography* in for future classroom practice.

Residual Conversations Collide

It had only been a few months before this event at the clubhouse since I had sat discussing Deleuzoguattarian (1987) and Baradian (2007) philosophies over coffee, with a colleague. During this conversation, we found ourselves curious of the ways in which the material/object locates and disrupts the production of others and self, particularly within the practice of teacher education. Having both worked in elementary school settings and as teacher educators, we knew the fatigue and exhilaration of teaching. More recently, in our work with preservice and inservice teachers, we noticed how hope and despair were enveloping into one another as students were faced with classroom practices and demands that seemed counterproductive and counterintuitive to fostering an atmosphere where children and teachers alike were given opportunities to see themselves as intellectuals. Going against the grain in the typical classroom seemed too risky—a risk that many of educators we worked with felt came at too high a price. This concerned us deeply as teacher after teacher (mostly women but an occasional man) confided that the practice of teaching seemed to be eating away at their creativity, lapping at the heels of their dignity, and ultimately, swallowing them whole.

The work at the clubhouse seemed a bit different. Certainly, many of the adults experienced a period of “unlearning” where we had to teach our bodies to control less, listen more, position ourselves as inquirers with children. Often, this was uncomfortable at the onset due to personal pedagogical experiences of how school spaces are typically produced. But in most instances, teacher candidates would nestle in and create alongside

children, relearning to explore the educational environment and the possibilities of pedagogical difference. Whether it was block construction, creating visual art, or working with fabric design, I often noticed teacher candidates as deeply involved with the exploration and experimenting with objects as the children were—the moments of “this-ness” that kept several candidates coming back to the clubhouse long after meeting course fieldwork requirements.

Allowing Space for This-ness

In recent years qualitative researchers have paid particular attention to the role material plays in education and educational practices (Jones, 2013; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Taguchi, 2010, Taylor, 2013). Often citing theories of philosophers Deleuze & Guattari (1987), physicist Karen Barad (2007), and political scientist Jane Bennett (2010), these scholars aspire to shift the gaze of educational research from the singular subject to a complex and complicated entanglement between objects, bodies (material and immaterial), and affective moments of understanding. After sharing stories of our experiences with teachers, my colleague and I wondered what role these complex entanglements, particularly objects associated with art making practices, played in the lived experiences of teachers and the significance of those material encounters within the spaces of classroom practice.

Professor of Geography, Doreen Massey (2005) has written extensively about the need to see the complex relationships that produce space. Her work calls us to recognize that space is produced through many interactions, has varied possibilities, and is constantly undergoing composition and shifts (p. 9). After spending a year at the clubhouse, I have come to see how this understanding of spatiality is vital to pedagogical

difference in classrooms, including those that serve preservice teachers. The muchness that is experienced as the clubhouse is in part made up of multiple intra-actions between child and objects (for more on child and object intra-action see encounter three and four). The access and availability of those objects offer varied possibilities for children to engage and there is a sense of constant and steady change, as children feel free to take risks while exploring the potential of objects—such as emptying an entire bottle of glue on folded paper in order to create a volcano (see encounter four).

Educational psychologists Sandsetter and Kennair (2011) and writer/journalist Hanna Rosin (2014) have explored the concept of risky play and its benefits for children. While these researchers are specifically speaking to a type of play that might result in physical injury such as playing with fire, being pushed down a hill in a cart, and climbing trees, I can't help but make the connection between risky play and risky teaching. If there is no room for risk in the classroom, what independent stories are being deprived emergence? Rosin writes, “A preoccupation with safety has stripped childhood of independence, risk taking, and discovery—without making it safer. A new kind of playground points to a better solution” (p. 74). Has a preoccupation with safety and surveillance in teaching (testing culture, scripted curriculums, strict standards-based instruction) stripped teachers of independence, risk taking, and discovery without significant change? I believe it has and I believe a new approach to teacher pedagogy points to a better solution. Seeing the aesthetic encounter (art making) as a site of risk and energy in this practice, I propose *aesthetic material biography* as one way to open a space for “this-ness” to unfold.

Becoming Method

Aesthetic material biography (or A:M:B) was incited by the work of collective biography, a feminist research methodology “that draws on participants’ stories of their early memories to analyze processes of gendered subjectification through girlhood and youth” (Gonick & Gannon, 2013, p. 7). Collective biography was developed by educational researchers Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2006) as a post structural response to Frigga Haug’s (1999) earlier social science research that used memory-work as method to examine and “speak-back-to” what they saw as Marxist, male-centered methods. Both memory-work and collective biography go beyond the conventional analysis of narratives, using the experience of telling, listening, and writing with a group of women to explore a burning question of social production of self. Where Haug (1999) and her colleagues were focused on therapeutic and political outcomes of memory-work, Davies and Gannon focus their work on post-structuralism and embodiment through the telling, listening, and writing of experiences with other women as collective researchers. Wanting to build on the methodological approach of Davies and Gannon, my colleague and I chose to situate aesthetic material biography within the philosophies and theories of Deleuze and feminist new materialism.

While collective biography is concerned with “making the ordinary objects and subjects of everyday life worthy of inspection” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4), as an educator I wondered what might happen if I were to push those methods by offering a particular reading of the material-discursive through object-focused art practices to shape a collective re-acquaintance with the material, shared teacher renewal and sustainability,

and mutual reimagining of pedagogical possibilities. In other words, taking pedagogical risks, not only in our teaching but also in our exploration of possibilities for teaching.

As a process, aesthetic material biography (A:M:B) invites the exploration of an assemblage in which affect, bodies, sensations are unearthed by considering the material or object as what political scientist Bennett (2010) calls an *actant*, or something that speaks to us and takes on an active role in the production of selfhood. This might be an instrument for the musician, a car engine for the mechanic, or the body for a dancer. Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain assemblages as that which comes together in any given moment to open specific opportunities of being within the world. This collision of bodies (people, objects, memories, discourses, beliefs, etc.) is situational, conditional, and unpredictable with endless possibilities of intersection. As these bodies collide, they become lively with one another, producing something new. Feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007) coins this “liveliness” as intra-actions (difference as a result of matter coming together).

When looking for “this-ness” and while chasing muchness at the clubhouse, it seemed there was a point where children, adults, things, and space meshed tightly, leaving little evidence of singularity, a blending and mingling that made it impossible to pull one apart from the experience of the other as they created. Might the sensuality of engaging with art making tools matter in educational terrain and matter more than we have previously attended to? By mapping the intra-actions between teacher and art materials, A:M:B aims to broaden the possibilities of collective biography as a method of inquiry for classroom practice and sees people-things-space as mutual constituents in the inquiry process.

Listening to Materials and Objects

As an educational researcher, I continually map connections between methodologies and pedagogies, as well as across disciplines. This plays an important role in my collaborative work as an early childhood teacher educator with my colleague who is an art teacher educator and a developer of this pedagogical method. As such, this exploratory inquiry process evokes new ways of thinking about teaching and learning. Just as Davies and Gannon (2006) saw participants as researchers, my fellow researcher and I see teachers as intellectuals offering great capacity and insight into the experience of theorizing educational practice. At the same time, this method unfolds through the understanding that ordinary objects found within educational spaces have much to tell us about pedagogy. It is through listening to these objects, that my colleague and I focused our work.

The approach to aesthetic material biography (A:M:B) as a pedagogy moves through visual and verbal creative processes, including writing, drawing, sculpting, and collage, to evoke memories, sensations, and stories through that of material/object encounters. Understanding that Deleuzian and feminist new materialism perspectives resists linear and sequential approaches this approach conceptualizes the inquiry process as interchangeable and movable provocations, rather than predetermined steps. In the envisioning of AMB as a flexible qualitative method of inquiry, I will discuss the four provocations that were exercised with emerging educators from art and elementary education programs. These four provocations are 1) listening to materials or objects as memories, 2) listening to materials/objects as visual art making, 3) listening to the material/objects of others, and 4) listening to the material/objects as diffractive practice.

In the two pilot studies, my colleague and I organized these provocations differently in order to keep the process open and fluid. This fluidity was a generative space, allowing us to pay attention to our pedagogical movements as well as the way this methodology was bodying forth from our inquiry experiences. The following discussion of the pilot will explore the ways we played in this interchangeable network of creative processes.

Piloting A:M:B

Walking through the College of Art Education atelier where my colleague and I piloted this pedagogy in two workshop settings, I snapped photos of hands diligently engaged with art making practices in order to document our experiences. The first workshop was held with a group of fifteen women art educators and took place early in the morning hours. However, the energetic art making practices of these fifteen women showed little signs of morning sluggishness other than the occasional yawns and sips of freshly brewed coffee. The second, a group of eight women elementary education teachers, met in the afternoon, huddling on and around couches and comfy chairs in an intimate hallway setting before setting out into the atelier to work. Invigorated, the second group of women eagerly shared their objects with one another between bites of packed lunches and snacks.

Each group engaged in aesthetic material biography as part of everyday classroom experiences in their education methods coursework. The pilot study unfolded in two different courses. One course was a methods course for preservice art educators and the other course was an introduction to art experiences in the elementary classroom. My colleague served as the instructor for both of these courses and I served as a guest lecturer

and facilitator while conducting the pilot study. I positioned myself as an active participant and observer, where I engaged in the practices of this classroom community through making my own art and took notes and photographs of the student as they worked through the aesthetic material biography workshop.

An explanation of the four provocations students were invited to engage in during the workshop will unfold in the remainder of this section. Although these provocations are discussed individually, we do not see them as separate from one another, rather building off of and mingling with each other.

Provocation: Listening to materials/objects as memories

Prior to the workshop, participants in both groups were asked to choose an object that held a deep salience to their childhood art experiences. Posed with the question: *What would the object or material remember or say about your experiences playing, exploring, creating with it?* Students were asked to create a one-page response that was written in their visual-verbal journals—a cumulative expressive journal that was an assigned semester project (see figures 1 & 2).



Figure 1: Mark making and making my mark



Figure 3: Fabric Compels Design

All of the women brought their response into the classroom to share and most brought the object they wrote about to share with the class as well. The collective sharing took place before visual art making practices in the art educator classroom and after visual art making practices in the elementary educator classroom for this pilot study, however the fluidity of the method allows for the process to take place at any point within the workshop.

By having students write from the perspective of the object, the women were able to begin locating the bodily sensations they experience while engaged with their object. For example, students often spoke of objects bringing them comfort, happiness, or intellectual curiosity. As these stories unfolded, we asked the women to then locate these emotions through sensations in the body (i.e.; stomach tightening, racing heart, etc.). One student disclosed that she kept a shoebox of crayons under her bed well into her late teens so that she could open it and smell the distinct scent associated with this mark-making

tool because it brought her excitement, comfort, and happiness as she thought about what she called the “unruliness” of the crayon (see figure 2). She coins crayons as “unruly” because the marks these tools make are harder to control. Something in that challenge excited her as an intellectual and artist. When asked to locate this as an embodied sensation, she articulated it as an energy that pulsed through her. In addition, the women were asked to highlight the words of action and emotion before they started the art making process, read those words aloud or to themselves, and discover what those words were compelling them to create and experience. These words were not shared but were meant to be integral to their art planning process and deepen their experience with the method.

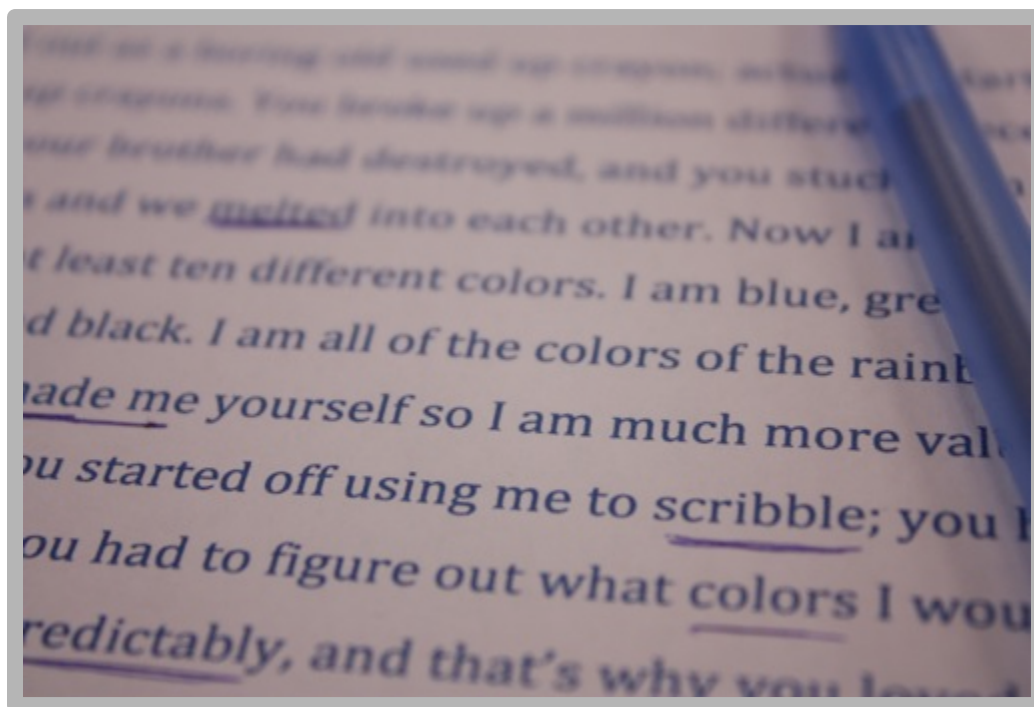


Figure 4: Words that Speak to Me

As illustrated earlier in this encounter, just as the children at the clubhouse built elaborate stories through the materials (blocks, feathers, outdoor equipment) and discourses (embodied or otherwise) they had access to, so do these teacher candidates

through the work in their visual-verbal journals. By exploring the embodied literacies these objects aroused (see encounter two for more on embodiment and literacies), the teachers were able to create collaborative narratives with their art making tools, first by giving the art making tool a voice, second by exploring embodied memories with self and others, and third by engaging with the art making too again playfully, which unfolds in the next provocation.

Provocation: Listening to materials/objects as visual art making

While engrossed in research at the clubhouse, I found that children were most engaged when given access to a wide variety of materials and allowed to use those materials at will to bring complex ideas to life. In part, it was the freedom to engage in the work as they felt inspired to do so that gave children the space to take risks as they intra-acted with materials (see encounter three for more on intra-active literacies), working through challenges and figuring out problems on their own. It was this freedom of choice that I wanted to bring into the preservice classroom and ultimately guides this provocation.

During the two workshops, students delved into visual art making practices and were encouraged to manipulate, share space, and create stories with art materials that were readily found on the classroom shelves, stuffed with items such as paints, papers, fabrics, glue, and cardboard. In the art education workshop, students were invited to use the object they chose to write about as a provocation for art making (see figure 5). In the elementary education workshop, students were invited to either use the object from their memory work, or they could opt to choose an object from a variety of materials commonly found in the elementary classroom: notebooks, scissors, tape, staplers, paper,

and writing/drawing utensils. Students were encouraged to take risks with their art making, approaching their objects without preconceived ideas about what the art should look like or what they should construct, but rather listening to the materials that drew them in, inviting them to create.

Some of the women positioned themselves in groups with materials sprawled across the tables and others moved to corners of the room, to engage with their art (see figure 6). Although there was a deep settling into the work, a vibrant movement continued throughout the space, as the women pulled in other objects to make their art, such as glue, needles, and/or paper. At any given moment and depending on where you were standing, the atelier smelled of paint, hot glue, crayons, pencils, and Playdough. At the same time, the sound of scissors and paper crinkling echoed within the conversations between students.



Figure 5: Cozy and reacquainted with crayons

These women worked in what I would consider “muchy” or embodied, intellectual ways (see first encounter for an exploration of muchness), crafting elaborate visual stories of lived experiences with and through their chosen materials. Students were intimate with their objects, handling them with care and with respect and curiosity. Bodies hunched over materials, squatted to get at “just-the-right-angle” and contorted hands and fingers to answer the call of their objects during these art encounters. For example, one student found needle and thread to sew a collage of paper together for her project (see figure 7). She continued to do this even after the needle proved challenging to poke through the thickness of the paper, often pricking her fingers in the process. Another student painted a sheet of art paper, sat ripping it into tiny pieces by hand, and glued the individual pieces down to create the effect she wanted (see figure 8).



Figure 6: Fabric explores the bodice



Figure 7: Entangled paper



Figure 8: Mixing mediums to speak

Like the children at the clubhouse, the students were encouraged to spend hours of class time devoted to deterritorializing and reterritorializing their art making tool through art making practice (see encounter four for more on (de/re)territorializing

multimodal literacies). Like the children at the clubhouse, the students were encouraged to become intimate with the objects in order to know it more deeply. This intimacy unfolds through art making, as well as the next provocation.

Provocation: Listening to the materials/objects of others

As mentioned earlier in this paper, students were invited to read their written responses from the opening prompt in both workshops (see figure 9). This practice is seen as part of the experience of listening to the materials/objects of others as well as listening to the material/objects of memories. Secondly, the women were asked to share their own connections and disconnections to others objects and materials as individual memory stories were shared. Third, in both classrooms, students were encouraged to make connections and disconnections to materials during a gallery walk of the artwork made during the workshop. Students were asked to provide written response on an index card that was sitting beside the artwork and labeled with nothing but the name of the primary material explored. This feedback was meant as a way for each member of the class to offer their bodily responses to the artwork and the materials (see figure 10).

Curiously, the process of listening to the objects of others quickly made its way through all of the provocations, even without prompt (see figure 11). As the women worked, storied memories of the materials seeped into the conversations during each workshop, as if the material demanded they be let loose. Stories of childhood experiences peppered the air vocally and visually for the duration of our time together in the atelier. One of the interesting things noticed in both workspaces was students' connections and disconnections to objects chosen by peers. For example, some students preferred the squish and feel of Playdough while others found it too stimulating as they discussed the

way their stomachs would turn over with butterflies and skin would shiver uncomfortably when they held the dough. Others reminisced about the smell of crayons, while a few of the women found this scent unpleasant.



Figure 9: A conversation about the life of things



Figure 7: responding to the embodiment of the visual



Figure 11: Conversations with peers

By listening to others, students were collectively building theories of the production of self materially (through art making) and discursively (through dialogue). In one instance, a student shared that as a child she felt an intense pull towards drawing utensils of any kind. Mark making tools afforded her the opportunity to create heart people, which she gifted to those she loved. She also expressed that economically her family wasn't always able to purchase elaborate art supplies but she could always find a drawing utensil and scrap paper of some sort to create with when compelled to do so. She connected this experience with a story their instructor (my colleague) had shared earlier in the year, explaining how as a child, my colleague's sister would create balls of taped tissues and leave them sitting at her door as presents. Another student connected this to the ways her family would burn the end of sticks, blow out the flames, and then use the remaining carbon ash as a means to write and draw. Others spoke of using red clay to "build with earth" while as a child or using cardboard because it was so readily available

when other supplies were cost prohibitive (see figure 12). The women expressed that they found this connection to the visceral, whether through connection or disconnection, extremely important to the understanding of their own becoming as artists and pedagogues.

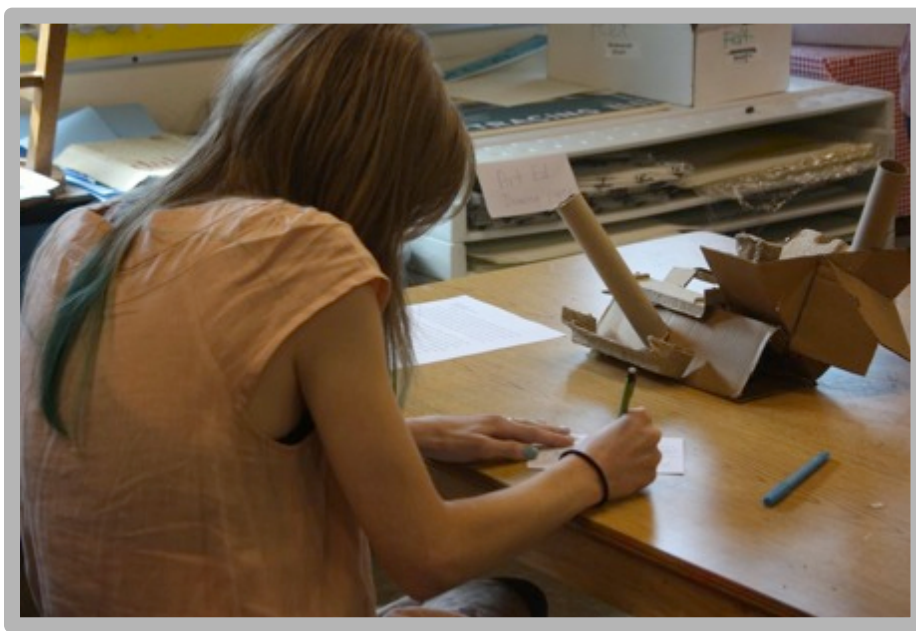


Figure 12: Responding to the objects of others

Provocation: Listening to materials/objects as diffractive practice

Curiosity about the relationship between teachers and materials provides insight in how these women describe themselves as women, artists, and teachers. As a follow up to the workshop, students were asked to respond to a series of questions and/or to create a collaborative rhizomatic mapping of pedagogical implications, bodily sensations, actions, and material influences of becoming woman/artist/educator. These questions are intended to be part of a diffractive practice rather than reflective one—similar to the conversations I would have with teacher candidates at the clubhouse about the pedagogical differences they perceived and how those differences might inform their practices in other educational spaces.

Diffraction practice comes out of the feminist theories of Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007) where consciousness is not about looking back on something, as reflection would suggest but rather about how one is different as a result of its relationship with and to another. The questions, which were explored and discussed as part of this diffractive method during the next calendar class meeting, were as follows:

1. How did your material or object speak to you?
2. Make a list of the *sensations* you notice *in your body* when you encounter your material or object. Often, these sensations are accompanied by an emotion, so you may map those too. (i.e. If you feel excited, where can you locate that sensation in your body?; butterflies in your belly?, etc.)
3. What did the experience open up for your teaching practice?
4. How did your experiences with your material/object in your girlhood influence the woman you are becoming now?

In addition to using these questions for classroom discussions, the women in the art education methods course were asked to use the responses to create a map of the ways they were producing themselves differently after the workshop experience. Students were urged to look for words and phrases that stood out in their responses to the questions above, to craft these words and phrases into a shape of their choice, and share their words and shapes with the group in order to explore how sensations connected or disconnected among their peers (see figure 13). These shapes and words were then put on cardboard, cut out, and build into a rhizome map as a class (see figure 14). Using the rhizome model allowed for multiple entry and exit points as these women put the pieces together to create one large body of work. For example, students were observed moving pieces

around to different places, assembling and disassembling the pieces until satisfied with how it connected to the work of other classmates that surrounded it.



Figure 13: Responding to how we have changed

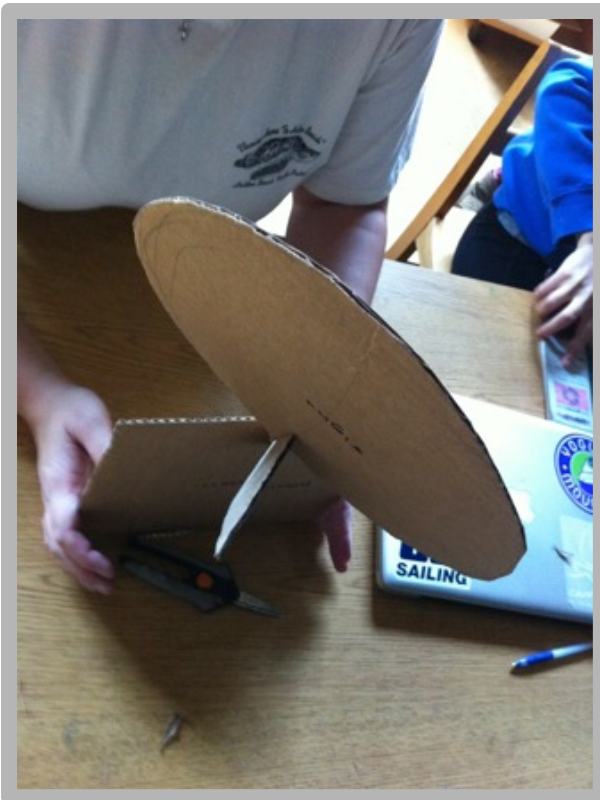


Figure 14: Mapping the rhizome

This provocation is part of the collective analysis of this inquiry and foregrounds the generativity of the maps for the emerging educators as productive collaborative analytical work. Students mentioned that this process helped them see themselves differently as teachers-artists-women and began to uncover the ways these objects shape how they see themselves in all of the contexts of artists, teachers, and women as well as the implications this work might have on their own teaching practices, ones where they might begin to consider taking risks. The shift towards visual text rather than written text highlight the artistic work of these women as vital to aesthetic material biography rather than peripheral and serves as a glimpse into the creative sparks of energy each of the actants (objects, women, teachers, memories) elicited during the workshop.

Possibilities Unfolding: Our Next Steps

Barad (2007) explains, “the world materializes differently through different practices” (p. 89). Aesthetic material biography (A:M:B) starts from a different pedagogical place than is typically explored in classrooms: the material/object. By shifting our gaze to the material this encounters suggests that educators are automatically living and conceptualizing practices differently by setting up the conditions for the possible experience of muchness. I see a strong connection between this work and muchness, which is sparked through affect, material, and composition (see other encounters for an exploration of muchness being generated in these ways). Glimpses of all three of these concepts were observed throughout the A:M:B workshop.

It is not lost on me, that these images, the artwork, and the material-discursive interpretations are part of the process of A:M:B and are embedded in the collective theoretical and pedagogical discoveries and implications of the workshop. Therefore,

when one of the participants brought forth awareness that A:M:B stirs educators to reacquaint themselves with materials, I began to see the potential in the everyday objects of classrooms for opening up something new for teachers, students, and pedagogies. Through the process of developing and piloting aesthetic material biography (A:M:B), I have been made more aware of the ways that art matters in building theory and pedagogy within education. There is something present in the action of creating and manipulating the material that cannot be captured in the discursive alone—the “*this-ness*” of the moment. Paying attention to and becoming reacquainted with the objects of classroom spaces and art making practices creates an opportunity to reimagine educational spaces, teacher renewal, and professional engagement.

This pilot study suggests that having access to a variety of different materials and modes of expression in the teacher education space opens possibilities for teachers to engage with curriculum more deeply. Many of the preservice teachers I have worked with have expressed their frustration with methods courses that simply use lecture as a means of instruction while simultaneously asking them to provide choices to K-12 students. At the very least A:M:B offers preservice teachers conditions that support multiple ways of knowing and thinking about the work they are being asked to do as teachers.

This work also has implications for inservice teachers as a way to engage in renewal processes. With the growing demands for teacher accountability, A:M:B provides a way for inservice teachers to engage in art related practices that support and encourage creative expression. In addition, A:M:B might suggest a new way to engage teachers intellectually in collectively exploring their practice. By participating in A:M:B

workshops, teachers might find new ways to engage students through materials, instruction, and the artifacts that children create to “show-what-they-know.”

As I move forward I take time to pause in consideration of several questions:

- 1) What might sustained exploration of A:M:B during a weekend workshop open up for in-service and teacher educators?
- 2) How might school-age children work through the process of A:M:B to explore differences in self, materials, and world?

I see these questions as following two streams of research—one within teacher education and the other with early childhood and elementary education. I will now briefly consider each of these streams and discuss plans for future work with aesthetic material biography.

Weekend workshop with inservice and teacher educators: To further explore this methodological practice, my colleague and I have planned a weekend workshop with inservice and teacher educators. Invited participants will engage in the four provocations over an extended period of time (three days), allowing for more sustained exploration with the materials and processes of A:M:B. This sustained exploration will deeply consider the implications of this work and its role in educational theory, practice, and teacher renewal/risk-taking.

Research with children: To further explore the potential of this methodology to seek new possibilities for teaching and learning, I recognize the importance of working through the process of A:M:B with school-age children. Currently, I am working in an after school community center in a working-class neighborhood two days a week where I am actively researching the ways children engage with the materials they have access to.

It is from this research that I hope to envision ways A:M:B can inform classroom spaces and pedagogies.

When the teacher candidate at the clubhouse remarked that she wished all of her teaching experiences were like the ones in that space, I sought to explore ways to make that possible. Seeing teachers, children, and objects as meaning makers in the reconceptualization of classroom practices, offers us rich opportunities to enhance educational spaces through a collective collision of intellectual bodies at work. I am excited about the potential possibilities of using this method to not only engage in qualitative collaborative research but to also bring about changes in the ways education is currently being conceptualized in traditional school settings, where risk-taking seems to be minimal at best. It is my aim that this method will not only engage preservice and inservice teachers in the conceptualization of theory and practice but to also engage children in that process, a voice that has very often been absent from our curricular and pedagogical choices, making this a method of equity as much as it is a method of inquiry. Last but not least, the objects so often encounter in these spaces are given voice as participants in this work give them more visibility. I see it as our ethical responsibility as researchers to engage teachers, students, and objects as active participants in our theorizing rather than passive participants of research method and suggest aesthetic material biography as a way to engage in that process, taking risks together.

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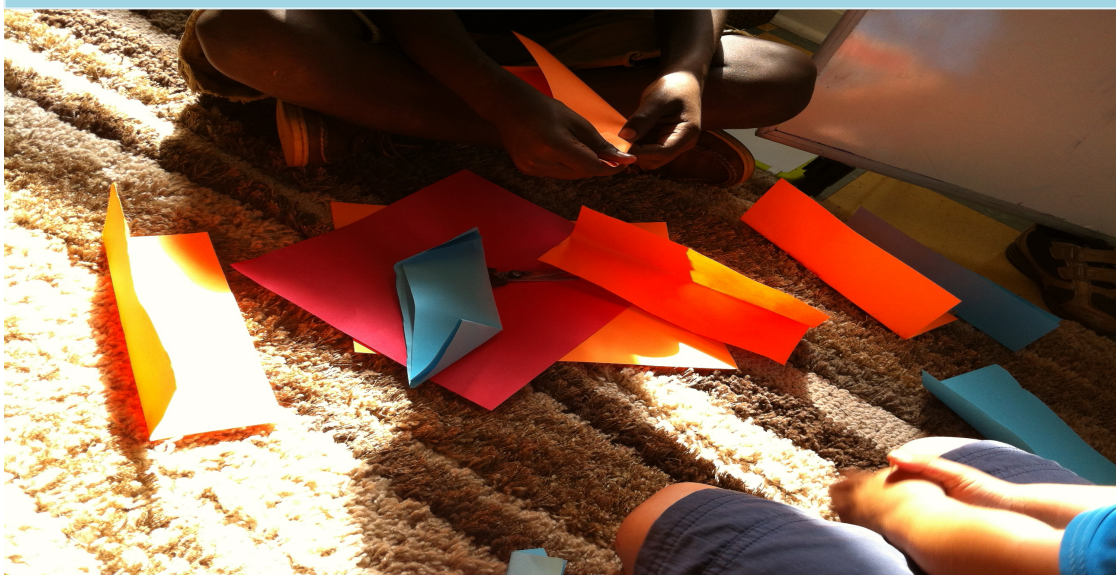
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Figure 13: Crinkle, Rip, or Fold Me: Multimodal Experience Five



The Journal of LITERACIES, Materiality, and WORKING-CLASS LIVES



This journal is committed to working against deficit discourses of working-class and working-poor children and families. The contributions in this journal serve as part of the solution to these problematic discourses by entering the intellectual lives of children and adults from a different perspective.