

Art in Curriculum: *Blurring* the Boundaries

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Abstract

Art, when used as a language of expression and communication, when documented and discussed, can act as a tool of reflection which facilitates the exchange of multiple perspectives of children, of ECE professionals, children's families, and the wider community. Art in Curriculum is an essential an essential and vital component woven into the core of curriculum.

We believe that the arts can enable processes of encountering and being in exchange with another's thinking and through the engagement of transforming and being transformed by materials of the world, there is opportunity as Loris Malaguzzi considered for contagion, tension, conflict, and possibility where ideas rise up, collide, fall, multiply, amplify and become entangled. This vibrant place of exchange becomes a complex and generative space for creativity and the birth of new understanding that is constructed through seeing/hearing/feeling multiple descriptions and a plurality of perspectives.

Gregory Bateson spoke often of how two descriptions of the same thing, are always better than one, singular viewpoint, which helps reveal the complexity in any inherent context. However, despite the complexity, children's growth and education and our responses to it are increasingly being approached in reductionist, linear and fragmented ways. Indeed, these reductionist and fragmented ways of perceiving other systems such as ecological, cultural, and economic, if maintained will continue and build greater more complex systemic problems that are already evident, such as increasing levels of poverty, conflict, hunger, crop failure, poisoned oceans, and climate breakdown.

If we consider the arts in curriculum as a possible way of thinking differently and identifying and solving problems, then the ECE professional of now and the future need to be able to recognize, observe, describe, document, reflect and relaunch contexts of learning that nurture and enrich, cultivate, and amplify the arts, creativity, and the exploration of multiple points of view. In doing so, we believe we can develop the necessary conditions for developing ways of thinking differently to disrupt the human harmful behaviors to each other and the ecology of our planet by becoming aware of our own biases and facilitating the socio-cultural awareness for building cultures that are accepting, appreciating, and valuing the diversity and plurality of views that can emerge and grow through art in curriculum.

Each of the films follow linked ideas in different ways:

Joke Den Haese and Kaat Verhaeghe consider how art can be used to build sensitivity to bias, to increase the understanding of socio-cultural awareness and to generate new ways of seeing/thinking/being in a diverse and complex world in the formation and professional development of future ECE professionals

Louise Lowings examines how we must reclaim the arts as an essential and vital component interwoven throughout the curriculum that reveals the learning occurring. Exploring the work of Gregory Bateson, a 20th Century thinker she makes the argument for multimodal, poly-sensorial, multi-contextual practice and pedagogy in early childhood education that values the richness of learning in relationship with all aspects of the curriculum that embraces the arts.

Debi Keyte-Hartland - explores how we see can the development of learning and understanding with materials as a entangled process where aesthetics, arts, materials, and curriculum subjects are not considered in silos, or separated from each other, or positioned as binary opposites but rather as transdisciplinary and transcontextual in nature.



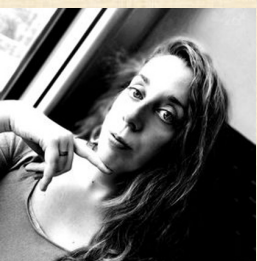
Joke Den Haese is a lecturer in visual art, intergenerational dialogue and cultural education in the Bachelor in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at Erasmus Brussels, University of Applied Sciences and Arts. She developed a vision and method described as 'growing through art'. She uses 'dialogue and real meeting' between cultures, genders and generations as a mirroring act to confront students with their cultural experiences and background. She has a background in visual arts and combines her lecturing with her activities as an artistic coach and atelierista in a childcare center. She is motivated through research to discover how art influences (future) professionals and the effect on children's development. Creative processes and play as a form of (in)formal learning is a strong part of her methodology in 'How to use art and materials as a way of dialogue?'



Debi Keyte-Hartland is an associate lecturer with the Centre of Research in Childhood, in the UK on the MA Education (Early Childhood) on the Creativity and the pathway. She also works as an independent artist-educator and early childhood consultant working in the UK where she is based and internationally with schools and educational organisations. She is also training with Reggio Children as a Teacher-Educator in the Reggio Emilia Approach. Her interests are in pedagogical listening as an approach to learning, 'ecological and creative inquiry and also in how materials/resources found in and near early childhood centres are materials with agency that intra-act in learning contexts with children.



Louise Lowings is the head teacher at Madeley Nursery School in Telford in the West Midlands of the UK. Her pedagogical approach is based on contextual relationships between children, their ideas and their encounters with the world. Together with the whole school community she has developed a place where educators and children are researchers. In 2000 she came across the work of the preschools in Reggio Emilia and continues to be inspired and delighted by their work. This led to encounters with other ideas and entangled influences. The most important of which were the ideas of Gregory Bateson, initially through dialogue and professional exchange with pedagogues in Stockholm and more recently through the International Bateson Institute. This line of professional enquiry has transformed her understanding of the place of learning, children, educators and schools. Louise was originally trained in art and design and brings this into every aspect of her work and life.



Kaat Verhaeghe is a pedagogue in the Bachelor in Early Childhood Education and Care at Erasmus Brussels, University of Applied Sciences and Arts. She is also a researcher for the research centre Urban Coaching and Education. Her main interests are in 'identity', 'child and society' and 'parenting'. She tries to stimulate professionals to look critically at society and the way of interacting with families and children. How identity develops and is formed through interaction with others is a central theme of her work. Her research explores the role of narratives in professionalization. Together with colleagues, she developed a narrative coaching method validated through in-practice testing. In her research the focus is on qualitative data with child-centered and participative approaches that use art-based methods to the value and acknowledge the voice of children.

Blurring the Boundaries: Art in Curriculum

Creating *diversattude* through meeting 'the other'

Extended Notes for Film with Joke Den Haese and Kaat Verhaeghe

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To connect with others, observing children provides a powerful reflection tool to rebuild our own imagination. In each of us, a child is still present, and it is a challenging adventure to make this child visible again. Art and culture activate stories and connections, empathy and understanding and have a positive influence on the mental, physical and social well-being of all. Art and culture can give rise to the meeting of alternative perspectives, to inspire to look outward and to question and challenge some long-held beliefs. This offers challenges as well as opportunities for expanding educational professionals' understanding of the world. Being sensitive to art facilitates the interaction (with children) and empowers reflective thinking. Socio-cultural awareness creates openness and comprehension towards deep pedagogical interaction and is the starting point for a strong 'diversattude'.

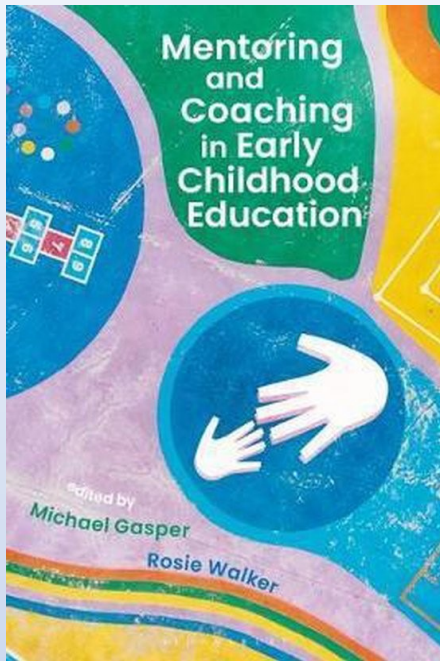
The diversattude (figure 1) is a 5 attitudes concept based on the narrative attitude, literature and the interviews with the school leaders (Wastijn, 2018; Verhaeghe et al, 2017 in Verhaeghe & Wastijn, 2018). All 5 attitudes (1) Socio-Cultural Awareness, (2) Empathy, (3) Respect, (4) Curiosity and (5) Openness are perceived as dynamic, equal and the basis to work towards an all-inclusive climate.

The diversattitude is an attitude that enables professionals to use diversity as a strength. Every part interconnects. The whole is more than the sum of its parts to be enriched by the encounter of 'the other' and have a reciprocal effect on 'the other'. Starting from socio-cultural awareness we are able to embrace vulnerability and openness to the otherness of the other in an unconditional way (Süle, 2006). By letting go of our own prejudice and know that we know nothing (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) we can be curious about the other. This enables us to be an intelligent reader of another person's story and try to (narrative) imagine what it means to be in somebody's else's shoes (Nussbaum, 2016). To think with an enlarged mentality which enables us to go visiting 'the other' (Arendt, in Von Wright, 2002). This kind of empathy is the bases for real meeting. We have to grow comfortable with the unknown (Malaguzzi, 1993) and believe that by giving voice to all, by taking others seriously and respecting them, we see the other, recognise him as a fellow human being and grow together (Korczak, 2007).



Figure 1: Verhaeghe & Den Haese, 2020;
Verhaeghe & Wastijn,
2020

Cultural awareness, Narratives and Identity



The pedagogical coach as a facilitator for quality in ECEC in Belgium.

In 2004, a participatory approach on quality assessment was introduced, defining quality as a negotiable construct, jointly determined by parents, childcare workers, children, and the management board of centres (Peeters, 2014). Since 2014 there has been a pedagogical framework in Flanders, with a concise vision for quality childcare. It clarifies what childcare means to children, families and society. The framework offers direction, and a firm basis to work from (MeMoQ, 2014).

Belgium was one of the only European countries where no undergraduate degree in early childhood education existed (Bauters & Vandenbroeck, 2017). A study on professionalism in Flemish childcare and some international reports were making the case for a bachelor's degree to break the cycle of de-professionalisation. In September 2011 the initial training course Pedagogy of the Young Child was established. This pedagogical course focuses on continuous professional coaching of the Early Years (EY). (Peeters, 2014; Urban, et al., 2012).

Eurofound (2015) showed that coaching in practice has the best chance to support professionalization. It must be focused on the creation of intrinsic motivation (Eurofound, 2015). Educational professionals, steered by their perspective on reality (Golombek, 2017), have significant impact on the behaviour of children in contexts of diversity (Vandenbroeck, 2001). A clear understanding of meaning and values, helps to clarify the goals that govern these actions (Stelter & Law, 2010). Creating a diversattude (Verhaeghe & Den Haese, 2018) and deepening the coach and coachee's cultural awareness to create a conscious professional identity is the focus of the following cases.

Want to know more:

Verhaeghe, K. & Den Haese, J. (2020). Cultural awareness, Narratives and Identity. In Gasper, M. & Walker, R. (eds). *Mentoring and coaching in Early Childhood Education* (pp. 163-178). Londen: Bloomsbury. ISBN: 9781350100725

Verhaeghe, K., & Wastijn, B. (2020). *Strong with Diversity through a narrative competent system*. In International Association for Intercultural Education (eds). *Another Brick in the wall Conference Proceedings* (pp. 35-54). ISBN: 9789090333755

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Blurring the Boundaries: Art in Curriculum

Blurring the Boundaries: Transcontextual learning

Extended Notes for Film with Lou Lowings

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Blurring the Boundaries *trans-contextual learning*

Louise Lowings, head teacher

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Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- Creativity, the arts, and curriculum do not stand in silos, separated from each other or positioned as opposites. Can we reclaim the arts as an essential and vital component woven into the core of curriculum?
- By revealing the learning that is occurring and making evident how creativity and the arts activate learning, we can make the argument for multimodal, poly-sensorial, multi-contextual practice in educational institutions.

Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- Using the work of Gregory Bateson a 20th century thinker we can begin to see some of the richness of learning in all aspects of the curriculum that embraces the arts.
- In his article Bateson and the Arts, Stephen Nachmanovitch brings Bateson's theory into the practicalities of daily life, "This way of seeing is not an abstraction, but a tangible experience that can be cultivated by practice. His fundamental message, of a reality compounded of relationship, communication, and a fused scientific / aesthetic truth."

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7866/433f599108cd04359044d355e7825086d0c0.pdf>

Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- We can look to the inspiration of the preschools and infant toddler centres in Reggio Emilia and to the beautiful idea of the “hundred languages’ proposed by Loris Malaguzzi for examples of creativity and arts interwoven with processes of meaning making and learning.
- However, we can also look behind their pedagogy to those who influence them and who influence radical ideas about learning more widely. The work of Gegory Bateson is one such influence, that in current times of ecological and environmental emergency has more relevance than ever.

Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- Our challenge in early childhood education is to bring the aesthetic, creative, scientific and logical thinking of children & adults into a public space and reveal some of the inner workings of the essential and vital relationship between the arts and curriculum.
- In this way we can see some of the interspace (trans spaces between disciplines and contexts) areas also help the diverse views of the work team to negotiate common inner images of what is going on, which in turn helps to see more connections that arise in everyday life.

Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- By analysing daily documentation, notes, images and video we create interconnected maps, each being unique and particular to the learning being observed.
- This is a deeply contextual and perspectival process, and these maps cannot be predetermined.
- They do not and cannot hold 'the truth' or all the strategies being used by children to learn. This is not a weakness but rather it is a strength to know our observations can only be partial and subjective and thus open to change.

Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning



- However, by engaging in these processes of using documentation and mapping practices with reflective dialogue and debate amongst teams of educators, artists, parents and others we are all trained by the process to practice and increase our capacity to describe abstract and complex situations and subsequently design curriculum that are closer to the interests and capacities of children.



Blurring the Boundaries trans-contextual learning

- By unwrapping the relationships and interconnectivity in learning we experience the joyful and vital hidden delights that exist between curriculum, creativity, the arts and materials in early childhood education.
- It is our responsibility as advocates for early childhood education and care to reclaim the arts as essential and vital, which should sit entwined at the core of early childhood curriculum and curriculum design.

In this short film I speak about how art and materials are interweaving in-between the interconnected relationships of subjects in curriculum.

In a brief, short encounter with a young child who had collected some leaves in the local woodland near to her nursery school that she had considered the aesthetic qualities and their affordances. It demonstrated a reciprocal relationship in which she acted on the leaves (counting them out) as the leaves acted on her (aesthetical agentic agency).

The arts, and materials are wide and diverse and intra-act with young children's bodies, the environment, their questions, and their investigations and the qualities inherent in the materials themselves. It is in this complex entanglement that ideas are formed, and expressions made. But how as educators, do we think ethically about our choices of materials or the ways in which they are arranged so as to connect with curriculum, knowledge, the ideas of the children, or processes of learning? Thinking about aesthetics and agency enables us to consider the ways in which to amplify contexts of thinking differently with materials.

Blurring the Boundaries: Art in Curriculum

*Extended Notes for Film with
Debi Keyte-Hartland*

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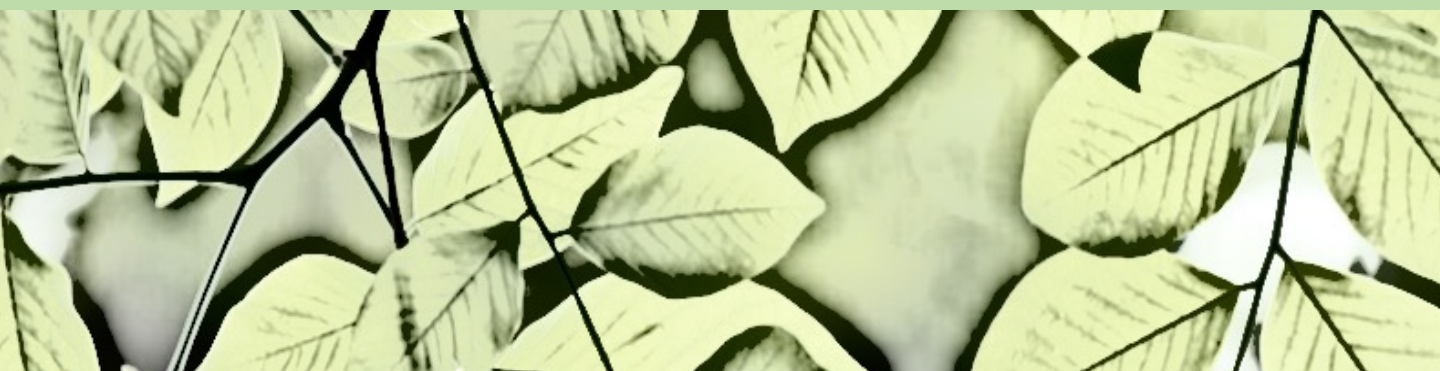
“Thinking *with* materials transforms early childhood, provoking educators to notice how materials and young children live **entangled lives** in classrooms, how they change each other through their **mutual encounters**. We are curious about the ways such a shift in perspective might change our interactions with materials, children, other educators - and perhaps even change the nature of our engagement with society and the world.”

Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind and Kocher (p2; 2017) in ‘Encounters With Materials in Early Childhood Education’



“I believe that there is a significant and growing danger, by relying on online influencers for “get it quick” provision, that we lose our professional obligation to think critically about our curriculum, our children and families, the materials we use and our duty to engage in debate. We must not allow ourselves to become passive providers of [an] unethical curriculum...”

Benjamin Braim in Early Education Journal Issue 89 (p.6) Winter (2019). Ed. Debi Keyte-Hartland



Intelligent materials: agency and aesthetics

Debi Keyte-Hartland

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Pages 10-12

I first visited the pre-schools and infant-toddler centres of Reggio Emilia, on a Sightlines Initiative study tour in 2003. I was curious about the way in which their educators prepared, curated and designed materials and learning contexts for young children that met with the ideas and thinking of the children themselves. It seemed somewhat of a contrast to what I had been experiencing as an artist educator in the UK where the emphasis seemed to be more about the filling of open shelves and surfaces with numerous possible choices of materials from which children could freely choose and encounter. It was a contrast of pedagogical choices that at one end appeared connected to ideas about aesthetics and expression whilst at the other, about choice and accessibility. Neither appeared to be wrong in either context, but it was a contrast that I had identified in those first visits and encounters with what is now known as The Reggio Approach.

On my return from Reggio Emilia I began to evaluate – in the Italian sense of giving value to something – the aspects of my practice as an artist educator that I wanted to think more deeply about. I began to look again at the familiar materials and tools of clay, graphics, wire, collage, light, photography, blocks and loose parts that I regularly explored with young children and set about researching how children approached and used these materials when they were presented in different ways. I also examined the perspective and perceived role of the educators who I worked alongside to explore our own intentions and knowledge about the materials we used in our work with young children. The underlying question that arose out of these researchful encounters with materials and children was to try to find out if our adult ways of working as educators were attuned and fitting with the strategies of the children themselves.

I found myself thinking more about:

- ▶ the qualities and intelligences of the materials
- ▶ the transformative potential of the materials
- ▶ the dialogues proposed with the materials
- ▶ the agency of the materials.

And how these were affected by:

- ▶ the educator knowledge of the materials and their potential
- ▶ the curation, design, organisation and presentation of the materials
- ▶ the intentions of the educator in meeting with the ideas and theories of the children.

Thinking with intelligent materials

For me, taking Reggio's idea of intelligent materials has made me think about the intra-active relationships and qualities that exist between materials, intentions and the environment. There is no free, independent choice of materials for the child in any early childhood settings because as educators we are making choices as to which type of materials to make available for children to explore, discover and play with. Materials have no neutrality but are imbued with different kinds of transformational, sensorial and representational qualities, with some having more of these characteristics than others. For example, clay is a material that can be as hard as a brick, that can create human-sized spaces, yet also be malleable and liquid in form, it can be used over and over again, or fired to create both functional and sculptural forms.

Cuffaro (1995) reminds us all that materials in the hands of children are akin to tools, which give form to and express their meaning-making and knowledge about the world. It requires us to:

- ▶ pay closer attention to our choices of which materials will meet the ideas of the children.
- ▶ consider which ways to propose and present the materials, in both the micro and macro environment.
- ▶ give thought to which materials are richer in potential and intelligence that enable children to give form to their thinking.

In thinking about materials, we know just how important it is for children to explore and discover their characteristics and

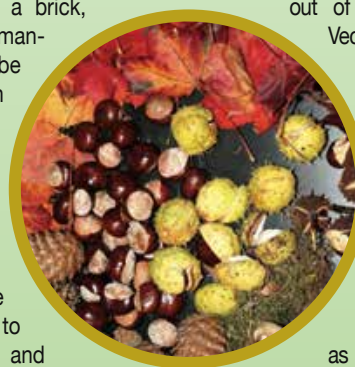
properties. These experiences are rich in sensorial exploration, are often open-ended and invite curiosity and questioning and provoke children to find ways to describe their surprising qualities.

Vecchi (2010) provokes our thinking further in suggesting that with young children, we must venture beyond the exploration of properties and techniques and consider the processes of empathy, of the expressive and emotional properties together with the rational and the cognitive processes of learning which will always be together in the study of intense relationships with both materials and ideas that we might call the ability of thinking with materials. Is it enough for children to be busy with hands without engaging their emotional and empathetic sensitivity together with other children and educators to research the deep relationships that connects matter and knowledge?

Aesthetics of learning with materials

The aesthetics of learning or the seeking out of beauty and loveliness, as Vecchi (2010) described it, has been embraced by the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy and can be seen in the ateliers, the spaces and rich environments of the schools, the presentation of children's learning processes through pedagogical documentation as well as in the materials offered to children on a daily basis to contemplate. On study visits to the schools you cannot fail to see the beauty in how they organise their spaces for children and educators to learn alongside of each other. Aesthetics in this context is a poly-sensorial approach to understanding each other and the world.

Dissanayake (2000), talks about aesthetics as a sensibility that defines how people intentionally show what they value, appreciate and care about. It is a playful way of being receptive to elaboration, exaggeration and emphasis and is about understanding and communicating the





human condition. This implies that aesthetics can be related to the idea of relationships too in all their forms. Relationships between people, children, between objects, materials, environments and places.

Carroll (1999) considers the aesthetic experience as a way of encountering stimuli that involve attention, contemplation and thoughtful perusal that must involve being open and attentive. In this way, aesthetics is the capturing of attention and wonderment.

Aesthetics and expression are activators of learning (Vecchi, 2010). In a presentation to the International Summer School (2010) Vecchi gave the example of the yearly provocation of the exploration of thinking about autumnal leaves. The study of seasonal change through exploring the materials of autumn is of course something that is familiar to many of us. Vecchi pointed out that all too often dried, decaying leaf corpses are collected and displayed for children to discover. The inherent danger in this is that we might teach children that autumn is only about death and only about the singular colours of red, orange and

brown. Instead she suggested we should contemplate the whole pulsating life cycle of trees and not just the structure of a single part of that tree. We can instead find the aesthetic and expressive activators that provoke children and ourselves to see colours not as a single, named shade, but as a diverse palette of variations of shades and hues. We can invite children to consider the relationships between the now fallen and transformed leaf to explore such enquiries as “What is alive?”, and “How do we know?”

Children in Reggio Emilia were asked if they thought trees were alive (Vecchi 2010:7) Children’s responses included:

“I think trees are alive because they make apples, they make leaves, they make wind.” Marco aged 4.

“The roots are very, very important because they are the tree’s brain.” Giuseppe and Giulia aged 5-6.

“The [tree] seed already knows how it has to become.” Vittoria aged 5.

In these early beginnings children were not just confronting the crumbled form of a leaf devoid of its mother tree but expressing their thinking regarding the aliveness of trees. Knowledge rather than something fixed was seen as fluid and provisional and worthy of elaboration and multiple perspectives in this interconnected way of understanding the relationships and living systems that exist in the world.

Aesthetics and expressivity offer an extraordinary educational path that embraces learning as a way of wondering, of seeking beauty, of looking for the complexities, of searching for connective and multiple networks and modes of understanding. It invites children to consider what they care about and offers others – other children, educators and families – opportunities to share, opportunities to share in their processes of learning and meaning-making. Aesthetics is a way of constructing knowledge that for many politicians and economists may seem unessential and irrelevant right now, but this myopic viewpoint denies children an expressive voice and a powerful and generative and relational context of and for learning.

New Materialisms and the agency of materials

A new and emerging debate is arising that is challenging the idea that materials such as clay, paper, charcoal, objects or sand, in fact anything that is matter or non-human, are passive or inactive and in waiting to be manipulated and used for self-expression by the hands, minds and bodies of children or adults. Rather the materials or matter are also considered as active and with participatory forces of their own. This opens up and creates new ways of thinking and learning with materials (Barad, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2016; Penfold, 2019).

This new and emerging field of thinking challenges the idea that children as well as adults project ideas and expressive thoughts upon and onto inert matter. Instead, matter is conceived as something much more dynamic and vibrant, in that it works in a mutual or intra-active way in dialogue with human beings to transform and inform each other,



rather than as traditionally seen as in a simple cause and effect, binarised position. Intra-action, therefore, is the constant exchanges between human and non-human materials that are influencing and working inseparably (Barad, 2007; Penfold, 2016).

This recent New Materialist turn further emphasises materials' aesthetic qualities, their intelligences, their poly-sensorial affordances, their transdisciplinary and agentic properties that are all at play in children's expressive, sociable and playful meaning-making. In terms of evaluating children's engagement and learning with materials it requires us to shift from the dominant discourse in education systems of testing accumulated, individualised and separated bodies of knowledge to one that documents and critically reflects upon the intra-active processes at play in the complex living system of learning with, from and in relationship with matter and materials.

Professional understanding of materials

In understanding the complex world of materials in the early years environment we also have to think carefully about our own professional knowledge about materials that we present to children. Whether it is clay, play dough, light, paper, loose parts, glitter or leaves we have to be attentive to the possible

learning processes and intra-actions that might occur. Being attentive also means understanding for ourselves the complex world of materials. We need to engage with materials ourselves, spending time with them, playing and enabling ourselves to think with materials. In doing so, we can better attune our strategies of being with children and materials so that our actions are not in tension with those of the children. Importantly, it also enriches our own creative and imaginative thinking in curating and designing contexts and spaces that delight not just the eye, the body, or mind, but to anticipate the possible scenarios that the children themselves might experience with their encounters with materials.

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