Literacy Disrupted: A Critical Autoethnographic Inquiry into Teaching and Learning in the Primary School Classroom

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Abstract

Top-down educational policies and pedagogic practices continue to dominate early literacy learning in primary school education. The increase in standardised approaches have amplified concerns of many teachers around the limitations placed on children by the curriculum. In this thesis, I think of the ways in which children's literate identities become constructed in the domain of primary schooling that are increasingly territorialised by neoliberal priorities and accountability measures. I seek to investigate how hegemonic notions of early literacy approaches operate in and through the daily classroom routines practice and behaviours; most significantly how pressures to standardise and measure children's learning results in marginalising children from low socioeconomic and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. To address these persistent pedagogic inequalities, I use a qualitative critical autoethnographic approach that puts postfoundational theories and concepts to work. As such, this thesis is (re)presented as critical, performative, layered texts of reflective practice. These are threaded with postfoundational approaches that draw on posthumanist ideas, affect theories and agential realism, which it is argued, enable a critical examination of issues of social justice and expand our readings of literacy classroom life. In order to achieve this, insights are generated through an analytical focus on one child, Grace and her experiences of being in a low ability group, to understand how issues of inequities are produced in the everyday human, non-human and more than human learning worlds we inhabit. By challenging the hegemony of early literacy instruction in institutional domains, this thesis will examine entangled relations that emerge in early literacy learning that are implicated in issues of inequality that have become obscured in the neoliberally configured classroom world. A significant claim argued throughout this thesis is that the use of less examined theories and concepts from the postfoundational world of ideas can open us to more expansive ways we can understand everyday classroom life. An emphasis on generating alternative narratives to reimagine literacy pedagogy in order to create more socially just spaces for children to learn, thus becomes an ethical endeavour.

Student Declaration and Ethics Declaration

"I, Jenny Sesta, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Literacy Disrupted: A Critical Autoethnographic Inquiry into Teaching and Learning in the Primary School Classroom' is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes.

This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), Approval Number: HRE22-091."

Signature: *Jenny Sesta*

Date: May 2024

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Finally, I want to thank all the children I have had the great pleasure of teaching throughout my professional life, especially Grace. This thesis is dedicated to you Grace, as you have inspired so much of it. The traces of our lives together live throughout this thesis and are viscerally felt, still.

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> Each story will take you so far, until you come across another that will take you further (Ingold, 2011, p. 162).

Dear Reader,

Welcome to my thesis. There I said it.
And here it is.

A mere fourteen words in and already dear reader you may be able to tell that I intend for this thesis to engage you in a kind of deeply personal reading, imagining and reflecting, perhaps of your own experiences, that of your own children, maybe your own past/present/future students? If you are an educational professional, then parts may evoke pedagogical experiences of your own. You may be agitated, surprised, unsettled or even entertained (that I can only hope for!). For me, however, most significantly, is that you are moved in one way or another to think with me, as I imagine otherwise in the world of children's literacy learning. Lofty goals for one who is a mere eight lines in! More to come there. Can you tell that this thesis aims to engender a dialogic reciprocal engagement of sorts with you? I offer you texts that speak of much desire to disrupt our ways of conceptualising literacy teaching and learning in the primary school domain, yet also significantly consider alternative theoretical ways that we might reimagine our research and pedagogical approaches. These two key areas are strongly threaded through the journey I have mapped out in this thesis. Please come with me. I truly and humbly believe (as implicit in the Ingold quote above) that our diverse stories enable us to travel to different places as we encounter them throughout our life. And then some.

This thesis offers several narratives from my career as a primary school teacher in a school located in a low socioeconomic and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community. It specifically draws on my experiences of teaching literacy in the early years (Prep to year three) although many of the issues raised are relevant across all the primary school years. I (re)story events, reflections and experiences and write of the moments of joys and the many challenges that entangled in the complex terrain of the primary school

classroom. I situate these to contest the increasing influence of neoliberalism on literacy teaching and learning in order to examine the more 'hidden' aspects of its impact, especially on children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities.

With/in these complex and deeply ethical concerns, I also seek to understand more broadly, what becomes pedagogically excluded when we reduce literacy learning in the early years to a 'one size fits all' model of learning. Thus, the increasing influence of neoliberalism to implement simplistic and reductive practices are a source of contestation. Understanding what lies between the systemic instructional world of the classroom, what Schechner and Brady (2013) have referred to as the 'creases' of literacy, can give rise to more complex understandings that transcend the usual rhetoric of simplistic '5 steps to be a better teacher,' '10 ways to teach literacy,' or 'How to better deliver your lessons' etc. Learning that is packaged as a commodity, transferable and as such 'transportable' from the expert (teacher) to the passive receiver (student) has become so normalised and reflected in increasingly narrow literacy policies. Policies that are "currently under the influence of positivist decontextualised knowledge that purports a disembodied objectivity and offers little insight into actually existing schools"(Hattam, 2018, p. 214).

I argue throughout this thesis that in the current educational landscape, neoliberal agendas have taken hold to (overly) determine narrow versions of 'what counts' as literacy. The standardising of approaches significantly impact on pedagogy and practice and have devastating effects, especially for many children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities. In this thesis, I will be asking questions about what/who gets privileged and what/who gets ignored in the neoliberal 'quantified' daily world of literacy. I interrogate these issues and the consequences for children who do not so easily fit into the narrow linear psychologically determined versions of literacy mapped out for them. I explore how profoundly exclusions can be felt by children who are considered 'below benchmark' levels and as such endure a 'remediated' learning life often in a low ability group. These concerns receive little recognition in a world that has become dominated by 'raising standards.' You will meet one such child, Grace, who I focus on in great depth throughout this thesis as I analyse her experiences. These become important threads as I question how children become constituted in the neoliberal literacy classroom; significantly those who are assigned a status that never quite measures up.

Thus I contest what I witness as the stark inequities (Dutro, 2018) that many children experience throughout their schooling life. Children who become disciplined and subjected to learning experiences designed to fix them and cruelly 'mark' them with deficit labels.

The need to address concerns with children treated as 'commodities' whose pedagogic worth is tied to their literacy level thus emerges as a key area of my research. These are responses to increasing pressure on schools through neoliberal directives to compete in high stakes testing arenas where they are ranked according to their students' assessment scores. As I argue throughout this thesis, teachers in this climate have become accountable for little more than the achievement levels attained by their students, and are subjected to continual pressures to standardise literacy learning and teaching practices. In this world, quantified data that concerns itself with all that can be measured, becomes the only legitimate 'evidence' that children/teachers/schools are effective. Literacy being conceptualised and measured in this way has implications for the kinds of literacy learning environments and practices that are privileged.

In light of these concerns, I strive throughout the thesis to create modes of scholarly and creative textual expressions where I imagine you are here with me as I ponder some of these complexities. As you will discover, there will be moments when the texts are deeply introspective and reflect on critical issues in education and research, other times when they become more playful. There will also be places where I map out specific literacy pedagogies using key concepts and theories from postfoundational research scholarship. I raise emergent questions throughout my writing, often as reflective pauses, with the aim to engage you to think with me. Regardless of their specific textual forms, however, they are all in pursuit of critical aims - motivated by a desire to 'imagine otherwise' for children as they learn literacy in the early years of schooling.

There is a rich genealogy of storying the lived experiences of teaching and a diversity of ways in which these tales have been narrated. Although almost a century ago, the insights of Waller (1932/1965) who described schools as "a despotism in a state of perilous equilibrium" (p. 10) are relevant today as we navigate the demands of institutional life. The stories of Ashton-Warner (1986) have taught us to be sensitive to the lifeworlds of children, especially those from minority cultures. Paley (2009) compels us in her stories

to remember the power of play and fantasy in children's lives and Leggo (2012) attests to the transformative potential of telling tales of our teaching experiences. Researchers and educators have embraced a critical edge in the stories they tell. Diverse tales that address the ritualised ways in which institutional life oppresses students (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2015) and issues of racial injustice and the need to cultivate critical thinking (hooks, 2014) are some of the themes that have been explored. In her compelling tales of her teaching struggles, Cutuly (1993) 'stretches the limits of narratives' to express her professional life through poetic modes that "search for a way to maintain beauty, laughter, intellectual elegance, and personal integrity within a system that not only fosters mediocrity and dishonesty but seems unable to define its problems" (p. ix). These issues are echoed in a more recent (and local) account of a teaching life by Stroud (2018) that speaks back to the harm inflicted on the lives of teachers and children through increased standardised testing. In expanding these rich traditions, an emerging body of researchers have embraced the use of philosophical concepts to engage in powerful storytelling that 'decentres the human' as they examine critical questions about our 'human' lives. Bringing into play a wide array of concepts, theories and relations, these accounts tell diverse tales that critique, narrate and reimagine our classroom worlds that "suggest that justice involves more than what can be found solely within the realm of human relations" (Ulmer, 2017, p. 833). The human is certainly not erased in these accounts but paradoxically heightened as we become more deeply attuned to issues of ethics (see, e.g., Blyth, 2022; Toohey et al., 2020). More to come.

I want to share with you places and spaces that I have explored that are based on many years of being an educational professional in the primary school setting. As I engage in these processes, I also share the ways I have become a researcher, thinker and educator, who lived/lives through many of the injustices produced in the increasingly neoliberally configured world of schooling. To achieve this, I focus on the institutional world of the literacy classroom where I argue we have a strong ethical responsibility to ensure that matters of social justice are addressed. I draw extensively from less examined philosophical perspectives that enable us to see our everyday literacy classroom worlds more relationally. In the process, I embrace the human, non-human and more than human elements that come into play. Inspired by researchers such as Hayes et al. (2020), I seek to "bring fresh insight to the enduring problem of inequality, particularly how schools

function in ways that re/produce inequalities through everyday relations and practices" (p. 358).

Along with Lather (2006), I strongly believe that "paradigm proliferation is a good thing to think with...[to challenge] the methodological fundamentalism" (p. 35) that has taken hold in the world of early years literacy education. As such, I draw on theoretical ideas from autoethnographic methods, critical pedagogies, agential realism, posthumanism, affect theory and Deleuzeguattarian concepts. Following Jackson and Mazzei (2024), I collectively refer to these theories as 'postfoundational.' I interweave concepts and theories that have been useful to achieve more complex readings and expand the ways in which we can understand classroom life. Embracing concepts from these scholarly worlds, enabled me to examine everyday literacy teaching and learning experiences with and beyond the 'human' as being dynamically entangled to understand children's literacy learning and the implications for teaching. In these ways, I have been able to make room for other elements that come into play in our pedagogical classroom worlds.

An interest in the epistemological and ontological relations as emergent in my research seeks to contest the overemphasis on teleological frames of thinking. With/in these pursuits, I share theories and concepts researchers have used to pursue social justice issues in education and how these became entangled in my own research efforts. I imagine how these ideas might live in our everyday teaching worlds and explore how they can inspire us to be more ethically attuned to the entanglements of human, non-human and more than the human elements. Although incredibly challenging as I narrate along the way, these ideas have transformed my capacity to see the classroom world I inhabited for so many years 'anew.' To reimagine 'what else' can be theorised to address persistent inequalities experienced by many children who experience the alienating affects/effects from a system that increasingly is dictated by neoliberal priorities. Priorities that are mostly concerned with producing 'little neoliberal' ideal learners (Bradbury, 2019).

Throughout this thesis my desire is not to ensure that I deliver certainties or truths from which you might then be able to ascertain my claims (Goodall, 2000), but rather engage you in entangled forms of research and writing that speak from the heart and body as much as the mind. Driven by the need to eschew any finished 'conclusions' that declare

to you that my research is over, all is done and dusted – this is what it 'means,' I instead opt to methodologically operate with a sense of openness. These 'desires' take many forms of dreaming, revisiting the heartbreak, tensions and moments of joy that constitute a teaching life. Striving to entangle more complex, less examined theories and concepts with/in these experiences has been a significant aim. This has involved continual cycles of inquiry - of iteratively analysing memories, narratives, artefacts and scholarly work to think with theories.

Much remains unexamined in the neoliberal classroom world of literacy teaching and learning, namely the experiences of our most vulnerable children and how teachers navigate these. Stories of more nuanced, local, heartfelt experiences are swallowed up by neoliberal discourses and practices that reflect a world of quantified 'big data' that perpetuates universal, unproblematic truths to which we all must adhere. Researching and writing of classroom life as embodied, as relational and as entangled in diverse 'more than human' ways, has enabled me to examine these omissions and significantly explore the implications for ways we can create and participate in socially just pedagogical change.

Sincerely,

Jenny

Moss (2019) proposes,

> The story of neoliberalism reduces everything to the economic...every aspect of life - the social, the cultural the aesthetic the emotional, the political is swallowed up by the economic, to be subsumed under the economic rules, relationships and practices of neoliberalism… and it is within this a weeping narrative of neoliberalism that it becomes possible to think of education not only just as another marketised product but also as just another investment, the returns on which can be quantified and predicted…(p. 17).

A weeping narrative.

Return on investments.

Quantified and predicted.

Schooling systems driven by neoliberal economic purposes have engaged researchers to critique a range of negative impacts on daily classroom pedagogical life and significantly the effects of these on children as learners. As suggested by Moss, the influences of an economic 'market logic' has seeped into all aspects of our everyday educational lives that threaten democratic and socially just pedagogies (Bozalek et al., 2018). Significantly, Kumashiro (2010) believes that the most dominant script or discourse shaping education reform today is that of neoliberalism which he describes as a market-like economy "that asserts individuals can reach their highest potential when put into competition with one another" (p. 59). Slee (2018) critiques neoliberalism and the 'exclusions' it creates in educational systems noting that:

> Schools are forged within the furnace of competitive individualism, and students are reduced to the bearers of results. They become individually measurable units that when aggregated reveal the performance of a teacher, a school, a school district, state jurisdiction or nation state. As individual units, students manifest risk or opportunity (p. 16).

Against this background of economically driven market priorities that is founded on the *pedagogical worth* of students, are concerns with how "learning [is] increasingly governed by discourses of human capital and efficiency" (Hall & Pulsford, 2019, p. 242). Davies (2009a) suggests that schools are sites in service of capitalist priorities and have thus become "consumed with the desire for end-products" (p. 3). From this perspective, pedagogical aims become primarily concerned with the pursuit of knowledge that is valued for its "contribution to capital enhancement" (Brown, 2015, p. 177). Consequently, as suggested by Sellars and Imig (2023), "neoliberalism in education sets up a form of social control that devalues human life and human interaction. It serves to 'polarise' society into those who benefit from the market economy and those who do not" (p. 716).

Many researchers contend that neoliberal policies perpetuate educational inequality. Goodson (2015) notes that although neoliberal ideas convince us that 'school improvement' and 'educational change' are panaceas, "in reality, most schools are not improving and what we see behind the promotion of change rhetoric is a vicious pattern of continuity in terms of which groups succeed and which fail" (p. 35). Similarly, Reay (2022) believes that education has been progressively narrowed to a sole focus on preparing children for a labour market and as such, issues of social justice and equality are compromised. This view is equally shared by de Saxe et al. (2020) who conceptualise neoliberalism as an *assault* on the purposes of schooling. They believe that "the current narrative of public education positions its policies and "reforms" as being "socially just," when in reality they actually serve to reinforce a patriarchal, capitalist, and racist society (p. 52).

Neoliberal policies support and sustain the proliferation of traditional approaches to literacy pedagogy through top down mandates that greatly restrict the kinds of literacy practices teachers plan. These approaches, often referred to as 'autonomous models' (Street, 2003) overemphasise the teaching of a neutral set of *universal* reading and writing skills that ignore the social and cultural contexts in which we learn. As such, children's opportunities to learn and thus assessment practices become limited. In the neoliberal quest for efficiency and demonstrable accountability (Jaeger, 2017), where teaching and learning becomes dominated by how to ensure certain predetermined outcomes can be achieved with as much certainty as possible (Moss, 2019), issues of diversity are erased. This is viewed by Wescott (2021) as "posing a risk to democratic underpinnings of

practice" (p. 65). Although researchers have repeatedly expressed concerns that autonomous models of literacy teaching and assessment are no longer adequate or representative of the increasingly complex and multifaceted ways that we communicate and use texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2012), these approaches still dominate.

In this narrowing of pedagogy, there is little attention paid to the complex and structural inequalities created in these highly individualised and regulated worlds. According to Hargreaves (2019), rather than using assessment to investigate and inquire into children's learning, a focus on *measurement* is motivated by the desire to prove successes, to sort, and to sustain control. "Amid this reductive emphasis" (Keddie, 2012, p.3), is the concern by Roberts-Holmes (2021) that performance measures in literacy direct teachers towards inappropriate practices such as ability-grouping "to obtain required outputs and results which negatively impact children's self-esteem and confidence" (p. 244). From this perspective, the enactment of pedagogy is reduced to teacher-controlled practices, the privileging of numerical scores and the valuing of high attainment in "measurable subjects within a data-obsessed school system" (Bradbury, 2019, p. 309).

Comber (2015) notes that the overemphasis on mandated standardised testing closes down teachers' opportunities for innovation and creativity in connecting curriculum with children's lives and interests. She states that especially worrying is that these impacts are more significant in high poverty contexts, in schools with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and in schools in rural areas. Profoundly, Patel (2021) writes of the effects of these practices on minority students by noting that "the overpronounced tendency and desire to codify and count in literacy research is the mechanism through which young people, their families, and their neighborhood learn about the limits of their mattering" (p. 313).

Literacy teaching and learning in an era of standardisation

> Standardised tests and league tables have quickly claimed privilege and domination in the professional lives of educators, but more concerning is the impact of their pedagogic presence in the lives of all students. Quantitative measurements and analysis of tests never tell the whole story or even half-

> adequately provide in-depth understandings of the complexities of literacy (Vicars, 2013, p. 131).

Literacy reform measures in a raft of top down mandates and testing regimes have become viscerally *felt* in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning. Policy directives have resulted in the proliferation of accountability measures through the increasing surveillance of teachers and children, often in the guise of improving 'outcomes.' As suggested by Vicars above, these 'rarely tell the whole story' and their impact have become a significant concern in the pedagogic lives of children. These concerns are especially evident in schools with a high population of low socioeconomic and CALD communities (Exley et al., 2014). Teachers and children are consistently being *diagnosed* to fix their deficiencies as they are kept in perpetual states of accountability. In the relentless pursuit of obtaining 'measures' of learning through standardised testing, teaching becomes driven by the use of data that positions *reality* as knowable. In these fixed, rigid approaches, children become defined by who they "are" as literacy learners according to a specific level. The problematic status of these 'rationales' is highlighted by Reay (2020), who suggests that standardised testing regimes compound inequalities that set many children on a trajectory of failure. Concerns with how vulnerability is reproduced for children from working class families, she states that, "for many of these children, test results were not simply about how well they were able to perform, but went to the very heart of who they were, and what they could become" (p. 407).

There is little room for movement in this system where children determined to need remediating are in for the *long haul* - a learning life filled with highly regulated and managed literacy learning. As such, their status is defined using external measures, mapped out in the form of linear progressions, that constitute what is 'normal.' These take no account of the child outside of their capacity for "cognitive acts of decoding printed texts" (Ivinson & Renold, 2018, p. 281). Assessing these 'acts' as forms of (apparent) 'evidence' then unproblematically determine a child's dis/abilities. Nichols and Campano (2017) believe it is concerning that in these restricted "articulations of what counts as 'evidence,' data driven education can quickly become a way to locate responsibility in individuals and teachers for the strengths and shortcomings of classrooms." (p. 245).

In contesting reform measures, researchers have drawn attention to how teachers become pressured to narrow learning and assessment in literacy that focus on teaching 'basic' skills. For Coles (2019), these 'reforms' predominantly target children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities who are considered unable to proficiently master the standardised English official school curriculum. He believes that an exclusive overemphasis on phonics is determined to be the *answer* for overcoming the impact of deficient socioeconomic conditions on students' academic achievement. This perpetuates deficit thinking for Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) who argue that approaches to the teaching of basic skills (exclusively) "prime teachers to see and teach children predominantly in terms of what they are presumed to lack" (p. 94). Literacy, in these narrow ways, becomes reduced to the teaching of disconnected skills that can be easily measured. Terms that reflect processes such as the 'schoolification' (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013) and 'datafication' (Roberts-Holmes, 2017) of children highlight the impact of increased standardised assessments that result in more 'test-driven cognitive' conceptualisations of literacy practices. As top down policies restrict what children are expected to know in literacy at a particular stage in their schooling, teachers find themselves being required to deliver scripted programs that are disconnected from children's lives. These issues are especially significant for children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities according to Parkes and Gore (2022) who believe that children become subjected to the 'hidden injuries' of race, ethnicity and class that they bring into the classroom. They state:

> These 'hidden injuries' are the lived experience of structural disadvantage that surfaces when a student from the margins encounters a school system which privileges their counterparts from the dominant group that has set the protocols and norms for behavior, desire, and communication (p. 156).

The limitations of narrow forms of assessment and data collection have been expressed by researchers who identify how "regimes of standardised testing have been centrally implicated in constructing the individual learner as the unit of analysis without any recognition of his or her cultural identity" (Yandell et al., 2020, p. 4). Researchers argue that these approaches systematically disadvantage cohorts of learners that have different funds of knowledge and cultural capital (Moll, 2019). A focus on the *individual* to the detriment of their social, emotional and cultural worlds, ignores the ways that the school

as an institutional force influences how children become constituted in the world of the classroom (Triplett, 2007). These increasingly narrow approaches to (apparently) 'fix' literacy problems have amounted to little positive change. In fact, as noted by Woods (2021), despite decades of literacy reform and policy, inequalities in the achievement of learning outcomes are increased and reproduced rather than diminished for "individuals and groups who are already at the margins" (p. 35).

Concerns that stem from the research and my professional experiences of teaching contest the taken for granted linear psychological models of teaching and learning that purport to *authorise* a child's level of attainment. These versions in the guise of literacy benchmarks and levels of reading/writing outcomes, leave little room for digressions. To imagine more complex and nuanced understandings of a child as capable. As normalised indicators of achievement, they perpetuate *fixed* notions of ability (you either have it...or do not) that feed into deficit constructions of the 'struggling' literacy learner category. Bradbury (2021) argues that "ability, as an idea, does a great deal of work in establishing, maintaining and reinforcing patterns of inequality" (p. 60). Significantly, Hackett et al. (2020) ask whether it is possible to "rescue competency in relation to early childhood literacy practices from the clutches of hyper-capitalism – can it exist beyond notions of function and usefulness? (p. 9).

In these universalising, unjust methods that reduce literacy learning and classroom life to all things 'functional' and 'useful,' I argue there exists a parallel *unrealised* classroom literacy world. One that contains a heterogeneous assemblage of bodies, desires, affects, identities and possibilities that are erased in our currently configured neoliberal worlds, where we rarely imagine learning or children beyond deficit or fixed ability frames. Understanding what we miss when we focus only on *what* children can recall at a given point in time, I seek to contest the effects of these unjust experiences on young children to understand more fully what it could mean to *thrive* as a literacy learner.

Research aims

Das (2020) asks, "how can a conception of the everyday allow us to think of a politics of the ordinary as a stitching together of action and expression in the work of bringing together a different everyday?" (p. 58). In thinking of ways to generate alternative

narratives and immerse myself in less conventional approaches, I turned to scholars such as Bright (2020) who provocatively asks,

> How might we, as researchers, encounter the world differently, think through difference and not identity. How might we write outside of representation, identity, judgement, and recognition? How might we continue to conduct critical qualitative research when we are only certain that the world both is and is not as it seems? (p. 16).

These provocations agitated me to pursue ways I might research my experiences and those of my children *differently.* To "study [the] seemingly unremarkable and routine events that can tell different stories" of classroom life (Moxnes & Osgood, 2018, p. 297). I strongly believe that in order to understand the complexities and persistent challenges of teaching literacy in contemporary times, critical questions need to be addressed by using methodologies that see the world in *new* ways. As such, the aims of this research are:

- To critically analyse and (re)story children's everyday literacy learning experiences using postfoundational concepts.
- To use critical autoethnographic forms of writing and storytelling that challenges conventional qualitative approaches to writing and research.
- To expand methodological engagements by thinking with theories.
- To generate how new stories of practice and research can work in the interests of inclusion and social justice.

In drawing from the myriad of experiential moments taken from a lifetime as an educator, my research question has formed: *What do children learn about the world, themselves and what they may aspire to in the neoliberally configured world of the literacy classroom?* And as I critically question how we can challenge the 'official' schooled literacy practices that standardise learning, label many children in deficit ways and limit what they learn, I am faced with another question: *How can these ideas inspire us to reimagine more socially just literacy pedagogies?*

My research seeks to contest the impact of neoliberal policies and practices that produce limited, unjust literacy practices in the name of 'education.' With/in these contestations, I seek to find ways to reimagine pedagogies of justice for children who have been positioned as 'low' achieving learners made vulnerable in institutional life.

Writing Devices

Throughout this thesis, I offer forms of critical storytelling I conceptualise as writing performances that aim to enliven and challenge the hegemonies of discourses and practices that are produced in the neoliberal literacy classroom. Following Gannon (2008), I have created rhizomatic "textual detours" (p. 4) where I experiment with strategies...

including

writing

fragments...

disrupting chronology ← → Sometimes words sit over here (like 'reverse headings!')

At times, I also speak from different positions to tell counter stories that interrupt straightforward readings of 'truth.' These can be considered an "eclectic affair'" (Henderson, 2018, p. 9); a narrative experiment of sorts, that intend to question, provoke, and challenge conventional approaches to qualitative research. In many ways they comprise "a collective assemblage of enunciation – a machine of expression" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 18), that are intended to "violate the authoritative narratives" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6) that have been complicit in marginalising children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities in the literacy classroom. Bayley (2018) suggests that "differing from rendering an event, the performative mode [of writing] *does what it says* rather than shows something already captured and 'reflected' in a representational mode" (p. 51 italics in original). In this spirit, I aspire to express "new forms of relationality" (MacLure, 2017, p. 54), that engage in disrupting "sedimented habits of thought" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 54).

Throughout this thesis I use different devices to layer texts and experiment with the "disruption of continuity" (Barad, 2010, p. 240). These are intended to reflexively weave

"stories over, under and in between each other in a non-linear manner" (Rambo, 2020, p. 401). In this way, they form lines of connections and disruptions that dialogically invite you, as the reader, to pause, and perhaps, provoke your own levels of reflection. The specific features I employ include the use 'affective scratchings' (in the form of the header -*Scratch*-) as a textual interruption. This follows Dernikos et al. (2020a) who use it as a way of creating possible ruptures throughout the text that might guide, re-orient or even interrupt the reader's thinking. Many of these are excerpts from my research diary and appear throughout the chapters. At times these are threaded with key questions to invite the reader to think with me and other times there are links to key theorists. I also integrate the use of epistolary forms of writing in 'letters to the self' (*Dear Self)* that engage in introspection (throughout Chapter 3). Other 'detours' in this thesis emerge in the forms of direct quotes that are placed throughout chapters, and 'Interludes' that embody a range of texts. The Interludes are located in between chapters and include poetry, short reflective texts and vignettes.

At times I use a recursive arrow (↔) to symbolise the inseparability of ideas. This is employed mostly in Chapter 5 (e.g., to describe material↔discursive practices) where I map Grace's literacy learning using ideas from agential realism and posthumanism. It follows postfoundational theorists (e.g., Kuby & Rucker, 2016) who have used it in their research and writing to denote the inseparability of ideas; "the fluid, mutually constitutive relationship among concepts" (p. 3). I also interweave symbols (e.g., the elbow connector) as a means to disrupt linearity throughout the texts as they 'frame' them differently. These also might rupture thought, perhaps evoke a change of direction, as well as to add diversity and interest. I am inspired by St. Pierre et al. (2016) who urge researchers to, "Destratify. Liberate thought from the dogmatic image that imprisons it. Experiment" (p. 104).

I am drawn to Pelias (2019), who conceptualises performative writing as "a political intervention of undoing problematic structures, uncovering social practices that damage and that strive to have significance beyond the page" (p. 49). In this way, I seek to provoke thought, to agitate for a sense of change by inviting you, to be a "co-conspirator in the pursuit of social justice" (Johnson, 2022, p. 41). If I may be so bold. Nevertheless, I say 'bring it on.' These processes I consider as critical postmodern and postfoundational textual assemblages that plug into various concepts that aim to produce new forms of

re/presentation. They seek to push thought into new territories and invite new lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These methodological 'movements,' I now reimagine as dynamic intra-active processes where boundaries between myself as researcher, data, methodologies, analysis, writing and the reader, became inseparable. Entangled.

As I question and contest the universal narratives that become naturalised in our (educational) worlds, I turn to Foucault (Cited in Kramer, 2020) and his notion of parrhesia. As a form of "courageous truth-telling in the face of powerful people or institutions...[it offers] a mode of resistance which can subvert oppressive power structures that perpetuate injustice" (p. 22). Using this idea, I am ethically and morally charged to compose my stories that tell of "a truth that cannot be kept hidden" (Stone, 2011, p. 151).

-Scratch-

Let us imagine for a moment that I do not have to be the researcher who follows the linear expected path of writing the research question, finding the 'gap,' filling the gap and drawing specific (final) conclusions where I make 'recommendations' to the reader. I can methodologically embrace the mess that is the lived experience of daily classroom life. One that requires I write myself into moments of...

Pains and pleasures
hopes and hauntings
intuitions and apprehensions
losses and redemptions
mundanities and visions
things that slip and slide
that appear and disappear
things that change shape
or don't have much form at all
unpredictabilities
that take flight as textual experimental assemblages
"as the world is textured in quite different ways" (Law, 2004, p.2).

The need for alternative narratives

At the heart of this research, is an examination of how we can think in new ways to invite a constant reimagining of the everyday word of literacy teaching and learning. To (re)conceptualise more emancipatory and relational spaces for children to know/be/do literacy. This responds to processes of neoliberalism that have "worked through into education as a systematic transformation of governance in ways that have not helped disadvantaged students" (Wrigley, 2018, p. 269). Gannon et al. (2018) state that the question of why educational inequalities persist is still urgent and call for research that continually seeks to understand schooling as problematic for low socioeconomic communities. Seeking to embrace more uncertain ways of thinking, of inquiring and imagining can be complex, quite a divergence from the repetition of the *usual* prescribed methods of research that relies on "normalizing forms" (Jackson, 2017, p. 1) that produce repetition. How can we strive for new ways to bring to light everyday unexamined literacy practices to address forms of 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007) children experience? How can we disrupt literacy policies and practices that standardise learning and segregate learners in the name of *education*?

In the neoliberal classroom, the proliferation of 'evidence based' strategies that are *proven* (apparently) to ensure children make progress (i.e., lift their levels) leave little room for creation or invention. They purport to unproblematically map out what teachers *should* teach without any conversations as to how they can be interrogated from a social justice perspective. Increasingly, children are required to be diagnosed through specific literacy assessments (screenings that are limited to phonological awareness, phonemic awareness based testing) with interventions (remediations) soon after they arrive at school. Some schools actually implement assessments *prior* to the child's school entry and use this information to make decisions about who will require interventions of sorts. There is little doubt that alphabetic knowledge and skills play a significant role in the early years as children become proficient literacy learners. As such, they require space in the curriculum to be *explicitly* taught. My concern is, however, that they have incredulously become *all* that appears to be what constitutes literacy pedagogy in the early years of school.

Educational researchers have identified the need to generate alternative narratives that challenge educators to think beyond existing approaches and to work in new ways (Iorio

& Yelland, 2021; Moss, 2019). According to Woods and Luke (2011), too much attention in educational reform is given to the rhetoric of outcomes and measures at the expense of empirical considerations of teachers' and children's interactional work. Consequently, significant amounts of children continue to be disadvantaged and blamed for not being able to learn. From their extensive analysis of studies in the science of reading research, Hoffman et al. (2020) argue that this research community promises a "quick fix for the current so-called crisis in literacy teaching" (p. 262) and as such silences the complex stories of "teachers and students, especially in schools serving linguistically rich and culturally diverse communities" (p. 263).

Understanding the complexities and the challenges of teaching literacy in contemporary times, invites critical questions that address the persistent disadvantage and limited opportunities cohorts of children experience to learn. Hayes and Comber (2018), in quoting Haraway (2016), urge researchers to *stay with the trouble* of inequality in schooling in order to seek new ways of understanding the relations between knowing, doing and ameliorating inequality. This study recognises the need to generate alternative narratives in literacy teaching and learning (Moss, 2019) to (re)story classroom life that challenges simplistic accounts of literacy and instead embraces the complexity and messiness of educational experiences (Burnett et al., 2020).

(Re)Storying classroom worlds

Davies and Bansel (2007) suggest that the "installation of neoliberal technologies and practices remain *diffuse* and largely *invisible* [and as such] require a great deal of analytic and observational work to make their constitutive force open to analysis" (p. 249, emphasis added). This has urged me toward examining how the neoliberally configured traditional models of literacy that dominate classroom life are harmful to so many children. I also seek to work *beyond* these critiques to understand the pedagogical and ethical consequences of different theories (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) that examine literacy classroom life. What might happen if we work beyond conventional qualitative methods that prescribe step by step what needs to be 'done' at each stage in the quest to "discover" or unearth what things *mean*? Throughout this thesis, I propose that there are generative ways of reimagining literacy learning and significantly how children learn with/in classroom spaces if we pay attention to the entanglement of human, non-human and more

than human elements of classroom life. These ideas challenge ontologies and epistemologies that dominate scientific thinking and research and, in the process, centres the human as the all-knowing subject who seeks certainties and *truths* that aim for universal explanations of the world.

Shifting ways of conceptualising the world – to think of it as composed of emergent, *entangled* elements moved me to different ontological and epistemological locations from which I could think, research and write. They helped me be open to possibilities to imagine alternative narratives of the everyday, by considering the human, non-human and more than human entanglements in the literacy classroom. The assemblages of materials, spaces, histories, objects and memories (and so on) that could be conceptualised to produce different ways to research and different ways to think of literacy teaching and learning. This was a far cry from the highly regulated pedagogical literacy worlds that neoliberalism currently prescribes through formulaic steps to teach literacy. Throughout this thesis, I refer to the 'human'; as the *child*, the *teacher*, the 'non-human' as literacy materials and objects, and the 'more than human' as affects and intensities.

My interest in (re)storying classroom life - to seek 'what else' might be happening, turned me toward philosophies and theories that imagine differently. Far from looking for simplistic *solutions* or *remedies* that will be concluded and able to be generalised – that will *fix* the (eternal) problems that policy makers and 'back to basics' researchers would have us believe, these seek to generate alternative narratives that help us understand issues of social justice in new ways. Lenz Taguchi (2010) describes a form of 'resistance writing' where the use of personal recollections, narratives and different writing genres becomes a means to oppose prevailing reductive strategies. In this way, I examine how the affordances of less examined concepts can inspire socially just orientations to research writing and pedagogy. To address the "never ending story" of "inequality of educational opportunity" (Ewing, 2013, p. 73) that our most vulnerable learners experience.

Ingold (2011) states, "knowledge is not classificatory. It is rather storied" (p. 159). The same can be said of our lives as I reflect on the power of being able to engage in critical (research) yet also create new possibilities to (re)story classroom life. Entangled in these processes is the capacity to declare one's deepest, personal expressions, struggles, challenges and the joys in our (professional) life. Yet these resist any straightforward

'clear' explanations. Rather, as I have learned, these *personal* experiences can be (re)storied as human and more than human relations that entangle in our ways of knowing, learning and living. The less examined power of these 'small' stories are invisible in the educational world of big data that is concerned with "reproduced, fast, rapid, generalizable data [to] reinforce the already known, and, as such, is unlikely to innovate, create newness, or generate a difference" (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017, p. 63).

In (re)storying literacy classroom worlds, key concepts in postfoundational research offer ways in which we can inspire more experimental approaches to research. Many of these concepts can be found within diverse areas of interdisciplinary research projects that are invested in recognising the more than human worlds we inhabit and significantly how these inquiries can produce new knowledge. These theoretical and conceptual orientations require us to challenge the persistent dualisms and binaries that greatly shape our lives, in this case, the literacy lives of children. They also severely limit the opportunities many children are afforded in a system that relies on traditional learning hierarchies to achieve its neoliberal aims. To counter this, there is a strong ethical obligation to respond. In agential realist terms, Barad (2014) urges us to become consistently attuned to the need for 'response-ability,' which they define as "an iterative (re)opening up to [and] an enabling of responsiveness" (p. 183). Central to this capacity to respond is the role of 'invention' for many researchers, as they seek to examine complex relations in our everyday [teaching] life in new ways. Davies (2021) suggests:

> Generating the linguistic forms through which new thought can emerge, means breaking loose from habituated forms of research writing; it means searching for quite different linguistic and artistic forms of expression, and it means generating different ways of living life itself (p. 3).

Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) similarly inspire qualitative researchers to "think the unthinkable...[to] think with and beyond the traditional boundaries of research design... [to] contest the ideas of "oppression" of traditional research design and methodology" (p. 613). These openings prompted me to expand my research into critical, creative and importantly *disruptive* methodologies. Exploring the material worlds of the classroom highlighted different ways of imagining social justice issues in literacy teaching and learning. Using varied theoretical perspectives and concepts located me in a diversity of

research and writing spaces where I could weave different ideas as I engaged in thinking with theories. This inspired me to think more intentionally about ethics, ontology and epistemology – importantly their *inseparability* and how these are implicated in our classroom literacy learning worlds. A focus on the relationality of these emphasise the dynamics and flows that become entangled in everyday life. Aspects that are rarely considered in our rush to make visible and measurable all that seems to matter in literacy education.

In these reimaginings, in addition to the 'human,' I have brought into play a wide variety of non-human materials and objects and more than human elements from affect theory that are entangled with humans in the lifeworlds of the school, classroom, teachers and children. I seek to make visible "the layers of complexity that constitute practices and untangle the ways they often participate in the perpetuation of inequality" (Nichols & Campano, 2017, p. 249). In this way, I explore how children's literate identities are constructed within the (humanly created) binaries that dominate discourse in literacy practices, e.g., the *good* speller, the *struggling* reader, the (streamed) ability group, and so on, that remain naturalised practices. Howlett (2018) believes that these ideas "posit a rethinking of what it means to be human by transgressing stable categories created by our systems of language and knowledge and opens up possibilities for understanding the effects of those divisions which could be enacted differently" (p. 109).

By paying attention to the more than human elements of classroom life, it is proposed that we can begin to theorise as to what else is implicated in children's learning worlds, and what these insights might afford us as we look to imagine more critical, emancipatory aims for education. Despite the increasingly complex and fragile times, Osgood et al. (2019) state that educational institutions continue to maintain status quo norms, practices, discourses and understandings that preserve traditional ways of thinking. Within those traditional ways of thinking in the neoliberal classroom world is the separation of mind and body where learning is equated only with acts of cognition. These reductive ways limit what we can know about the children we teach as they are reduced to brains on sticks who engage in "disembodied headwork" (Murris & Haynes, 2020, p. 26). Erased are other ways we might relate, learn and live more ethical lives together, areas that are of little *economic* worth in the increasingly marketised neoliberal word of the classroom where measures of 'mastery' are constantly privileged.

This thesis is a collection of chapters set out in a linear sequence, however as previously stated, offers many textual detours "both as it was written and as lived" (Gannon, 2008, p. 2). I conceptualise it as a mangle (Pickering, 2010) of autoethnographic stories that are at times theoretical, deeply personal reflections, stretches of analysis, forms of academic writing and modes of performance that all pursue more socially just learning worlds for young children. These appear as entangled throughout my research as bodies, images, ideas, words, memories that intra-act with feelings, emotions, experiences and also with affective intensities. These moments aspire to perform as critical interventions (Denzin, 2017).

Following this chapter, **Chapter 2** - Critical Immersions, further explores critical issues of concern that emerge through an insight into the impact of neoliberalism on everyday classroom life. Of significance is how it has *disciplined* literacy and produced dehumanising effects on many children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities. I explore how these became the catalyst for my research pursuits and discuss my methodological *movements* from critical theories into the postfoundational world of ideas that contest conventional qualitative methods.

⟶ Taking a *detour* to its first Interlude titled, The (Dis)Order of Things: The Ravages of Rituals, these texts perform their way into reflective and poetic expressions of the *absurdity* of neoliberalism's impact on everyday literacy classroom life. Using the notion of parrhesia, they engage in a form of 'truth-telling' that contest the ludicrous rituals required in the early years literacy classroom. They reflect deeply ethical concerns, however, in their critical, performative aims.

Chapter 3 explores the ways in which I 'found' critical autoethnographic approaches as a way of examining the personal and cultural aspects of classroom life. Throughout this chapter, I discuss autoethnography as a method for undertaking critical research and I highlight ways in which researchers have used autoethnographic approaches to pursue critical and embodied expressions of knowledge. Woven throughout are 'letters to the self' that layer the text to engage in introspection. These reflect on processes of research that entangled me in more creative, inventive modes of writing.

⟶ The second Interlude – Performative Speculations invites you to consider some possibilities for qualitative research and writing in less conventional ways. These reflect a more playful take on 'serious' research endeavours and draws on key ideas from scholars who have paved the way for experimental, ludic and creative forms of research and writing.

Providing a detailed account of the concepts and ideas from the scholarship of agential realism, posthumanism and affect theories is the focus of **Chapter 4**. It aspires to welcome you into this complex, yet expansive world of ideas to explore an array of concepts that I used to assist me to examine classroom life *differently*. Throughout, I discuss the processes of 'thinking with theories' I engaged with, examine key concepts and ideas and how I put these to work throughout my research. I also explore what this means for the role of *data* in these new imaginings.

Mapping the experiences of Grace using concepts from agential realism and posthumanism is the task of **Chapter 5** that is concerned with examining her learning experiences from the year she was in a low ability group. Throughout the analysis, I ponder the implications for children who are streamed in classroom practices according to their perceived 'ability.' There is little to love in this world that Grace inhabited from a social justice perspective, however, as argued, it powerfully brings into view the vast array of *characters* that we can theorise become complicit in constituting the literacy worlds for children who are deemed to be 'at risk.' It seeks to make visible the hidden *micropractices* and theorises how harmful these become in the learning lives of our most vulnerable children.

⟶ The final Interlude 3, offers a series of texts that speak to The Power of 'Things.' Here poems and reflections embody ideas from posthumanism, agential realism and affect theory in a mangle of forms. In many ways they undertake conceptual work as they weave key concepts from across this thesis.

The purpose of **Chapter 6** is to take you into Grace's literacy learning world using theories of affect. Throughout the analysis and discussion, I draw on three vignettes from the year I taught Grace. Tracing the affective encounters of our literacy practices, it examines how ideas from affect theory can bring into play intensities and vitalities that

greatly shape the atmospheres of classroom life. Oriented toward more hopeful imaginings in Grace's learning life, this chapter illuminates the less explored *more than human* theories of affect. Throughout these vignettes are implications for ethical considerations in our early literacy classrooms.

An in depth discussion of the Spectres of Neoliberalism commences the work of **Chapter 7** as it threads key insights that have emerged throughout my study. In imagining these as the 'reckonings of the ghosts of neoliberalism,' I argue that these significant 'matters of concern,' become the catalyst for reconceptualising our literacy classroom worlds. I propose three broad interrelated areas as 'Rethinking classroom life as assemblages,' 'Rethinking binaries and boundaries' and 'Rethinking learning as emergent.' These ideas theorise more hopeful, ethically and socially just pedagogical orientations for literacy teaching and learning.

I conclude this chapter with a quote from Barad (2007), whose ideas are threaded through much of this thesis. Their words encompass so intensely significant aspects of my research work where I strongly argue that:

> The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package or a scrapbook...we never leave it and it never leaves us behind. Memory is not a record of a fixed past that can be ever fully or simply erased, written over, or recovered...and remembering is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of a past and future that is larger than any individual (p. ix).

So, to now examine the "past that is never finished...to map out how my research became an "enlivening and reconfiguring of a past and future" that I hope you will experience throughout this thesis.

Critical issues in the neoliberal early years literacy classroom
Threaded with autoethnographic reflections
Entangled postfoundational approaches
Profound critical movements
Shaping methodological curiosity (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016)
Critically (re)storying literacy classroom life.

Lessons that lessen

Anyone who has experienced the joys and heartbreak that permeates a teaching life and that infuse one's bones, knows all too well how many emotions, experiences and levels of complexity can be felt. All in a day. In a moment. My methodological desires are entangled - shifting from mind to heart enveloped in critical reflections of the dialectic of my professional and personal identity. I have come to realise that acts of empowering pedagogy reside in moments of critical reflection to contest all that feels so unjust in the world of literacy teaching and learning. Living with these ideas have confounded me, plagued me and (at times) haunted me. These moments have become a form of living with ghosts for a justice yet to come (Bozalek, et al., 2021).

Traces of the lived experiences of Grace are threaded throughout this thesis. Although I draw primarily from narratives of her literacy learning, she has become a distillation of (m)any child(ren) who are negatively impacted by neoliberalism. As I re/turn to examine injustices that are experienced by children like Grace in the world of literacy education, I sought to lean into personal, more intimate forms of research and (re)presentation that are strongly underpinned by critical approaches. Cannella and Lincoln (2012) offer questions that are commonly used in critical research - most notably in examining educational institutional life. These include; Who or what is helped, privileged or legitimated? Who is harmed, oppressed, or disqualified? These questions invite the recognition and analysis of power relations in order to understand how unjust and oppressive conditions come to be reified as 'givens.' Central to this proposition is the illumination of hidden structures of power that function to construct and maintain

oppression of the vulnerable. So, as I tentatively put words to paper, fearing their permanent inscription on the page, I keep telling myself my words work to tell stories that reflect my passionate pursuit of an embodied socially just literacy pedagogy. That they are partial expressions reflected in and of an unfinished comprehension.

Words as critical, partial expressions.

-Scratch-

The labelling of children's identities starts early. These can be considered enactments that locate the subjectivity of the 'at risk' child within the calculable frames (Trifonas, 2019, p. 1362) of assessment regimes. Often (incredulously) children are timetabled to be assessed in early literacy concepts prior to attending their first year of school. All part of the efficiency; the order of things that shapes/regulates/governs processes and bodies in schools. Especially those in the early years of literacy where teachers anxiously await the children they will be required to teach and the relentless demands to 'lift their levels.'

Throughout my research, I sought to critically examine how children's potential for thriving becomes erased in dominant functional school-based approaches. These are reflected in "neoliberal policies of individual measurement of development and assessment of progress in a performative and competitive culture of education" (Murris & Haynes, 2018, p. 10). Within these cultures, teachers are required to be little more than the 'deliverer' and evaluators of facts. Facts that can be checked, ticked off with efficiency. Silin (2010) laments the ways in which "every activity must be rationalised with a measurement" (p. 13) in early years educational environments. What then becomes erased? Cossa (2020) reminds us, "when hearts and souls are not nurtured, epistemic, ontological, and axiological territories are at stake" (p. 38). Children are perpetually denied any other (complex) possibilities that their emotions, histories, experiences or knowledge might be recognised. Opportunities to become otherwise are erased. This erasure is so profoundly felt when closely examining issues of social justice.

The process of resisting has no ending; there is no time of arrival, just a constant state of becoming (Lynch, 2019, p. xviii).

As the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination becomes mobilised through institutional practices, symbols, discourses and representations that work to stabilise and unify the neoliberal subject (Fritsch, 2015, p. 47), children are subjected to a cruel and cynical logic (Hargreaves et al., 2022). Such a logic works to cast children who may not attain desired literacy 'levels' as subordinated, inferior or invisible (Alaimo & Heckman, 2008). O'Loughlin (2017) notes that "formal schooling addresses itself almost exclusively to cognition – and a very reductive form of cognition at that – while emotional and embodied experiences which form the foundation for human imagination are neglected" (p. 80). Moreover, Roberts-Holmes (2021) argues that the intensification of data collection and neoliberal governance has steered early years teachers towards inappropriate ability-grouping practices to obtain required outputs and results demanded from the systems of accountability. Over the years, the reality of classroom and school life generally, has increasingly become conceptualised as pedagogical 'non-negotiables.' In the literacy classroom, these are reflected in practices such as segregating children into ability groupings and ensuring their reading materials are 'levelled' accordingly. These practices then become sites of increased regulation and governance by teachers (closely watching children) and leadership teams (closely watching teachers) and the department heads (closely watching leaders). Many layers of surveillance. 'Non-negotiables' that are (apparently) designed to improve children's literacy learning and teachers' practice. Increased measures to surveille and prove one's *worth* become relentlessly pursued.

Critically bringing to light how this paradigm positions children in the standardised English (only) world of the classroom as being the *cause* for not being able to attain the desired level (which then affected the overall school ranking) is a key area of contestation. These issues are further propelled by the 'back to basics' researchers who seem to thrive in the discourse of the 'literacy wars' (Snyder, 2008) and have us conceptualise complex literacy problems as being 'cured' by reductive Science of Reading (SOR), cognitive based approaches. These approaches compound literacy *problems* for children from poverty and/or ethnic minority communities. It is of significant concern that "even after decades of working to enact socially just literacy curricula, schools, children and families, are still marginalized and framed in both deficit language and/or approaches to pedagogy" (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017, p. 288). *Repeated declarations that, "Your school has the worse data in the region..."echoes still.*

The increasingly public *prizing* of competitive rankings of schools based on standardised testing data, for me, began the end of any hope that literacy pedagogy could be creative, critical or democratic (as it turned out). A sense of urgency is needed to resist educational inequality in schools that serve our most vulnerable children and families. To strive towards new ways of thinking about the prevalent inequities in children's learning lives (Gannon et al., 2018) requires pedagogical nourishment that speaks as much to the heart and body as they do the mind. It requires a capacity to feel connected to something more than being defined as a reading 'level' where children's pedagogical lives are "reduced to silence or one-word answers to teachers' questions" (Wrigley, 2005, p. 224). Conceptualised throughout my research I reimagine such *neglect* as forms of pedagogical starvation.

Morbid symptoms (Gramsci, 1972)

-Scratch-

How effortlessly we create the 'at risk' category for the Other, propagating pedagogical fears and anxieties that take material and non-material forms; injected deeply into the bodies of young children in the quest to attain high levels of literacy. In their most extreme, these categories keep children in eternal states of 'performing the problematic' in the heightened individualism that is perpetuated through neoliberal directives enacted in the literacy classroom (Davies, 2021).

As I critically question the ways in which children are required to perform literacy and how literacy identities are constituted through practices such as ability groupings, I think of how the use of intervention practices and remediation becomes all 'in a day's work' in the stratified classroom, whereby bodies become classified and "frozen by type" (Gale & Wyatt, 2013, p. 142). In such a scenario, removed is any sense of complexity that might actually spark a capacity to imagine education otherwise and hope that teaching and learning could be different. For Vicars (2015), there is an urgent need to be attuned to what often remains *hidden* in daily classroom life by engaging in forms of critical questioning. He states:

> Knowledge of and about pedagogy, is increasingly being constructed in the context of the disappearance of what lies beneath and beyond the surface of classrooms...methodological research practices that participate in this rich discursive and 'textual space' are a necessary, critical resistant form of world and self-making (p. 383).

These forms of 'critical resistances' as suggested by Vicars, point toward the need to continually question and redress the fact that "despite the best intentions of committed educators, the differential educational effects of normative schooling practices (whatever the rhetoric of their theoretical protagonists) on different groups of children continue to haunt the field of literacy education" (Comber, 2006, p. 53). Comber's concerns compel me to examine *what lies beneath and beyond the surface of classrooms* as Vicars suggests. These concerns are threaded through my research as I seek to critically reimagine issues of inequity that are reproduced in neoliberal classrooms. Those that continue to perpetuate marginalisation for children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities.

Do not walk gently into that status quo (Shor, 1999, p. 12).

-Scratch-

Teachers become persistently overshadowed in all aspects of pedagogical life by the relentless pressures to test, assess and ultimately define children purely by their 'results.' Any challenges to these became pedagogical 'covert responses' in my professional life. How crazy. Striving to contest these injustices are so deeply dependent on our professional capacity to recognise the harm that is inflicted through these practices for so many children. Especially for those who had teachers who believe that pedagogical responses such as ability grouping are the 'solution.' Entangled with teaching approaches that simplify vocabulary, language structures and minimal engagements year after year was (apparently) going to fix them. The reality was that these actually increased and continued to marginalise children even further (if that was possible). Challenging behaviours continued to rise - many children refusing to be regulated and reduced to the boring repetitive, disconnected tasks required of them.

Dreaming of Alex

Alex, I dream of you still. So (clearly) labelled the "ID (intellectually disabled) child" from your first year at school and then throughout your school life. For funding purposes (apparently) all came to know you as the boy who was always taken away from us/from your class/from yourself. Placed onto different tables – into different rooms at different times in order to relegate you to the constant gaze and close physical proximity of the teacher's assistant. You were to learn simple words. Simple sentences. You often cut out little shapes or followed along emboldened thick (unmissable) lines with your little scissors. Do you remember the year you were with me? I took photos of you with the children in our class, sitting with you, engaging with you, making you *feel*/*belong* and you making them *feel/belong*. Boundaries dissolved in those moments. Laughing. Being together. We annotated those photos to tell your parents how *you* actually taught the children things! You were to become different in those moments. Do you remember I then came to visit you at home? Your parents spoke of their many challenges. To see you so happy in your home has stayed with me. There was such warmth that surrounded you, that you exuded, these were like vivid colours that emanated from within you that I had never really seen in the world of school. There was a liveliness about you Alex. You *beamed*! You make me wonder what are the colours children live with/in/through their classroom life? Over time, I came to learn how creative you are. You expressed your interests and desires so passionately. These had been erased in your life at school. I still dream and wonder where you are now. Do colours continue to animate your world?

Buried stories.

Reproducing vulnerability

The need to critically question ways in which children are required to perform in/through contemporary pedagogical practices such as ability grouping in the quest to fix literacy *problems* are the epistemic and ontological drivers for this research journey. A continual questioning of the huge disparities that exist in schools is complex. In my contestations of practice, I have come to understand how deeply these experiences reproduce vulnerability (Jaeger, 2017). Children subjected to classifications which amount to the literacy *have nots*, become subjected to years of remediation in the form of

dull pedagogies (Thomson & Hall, 2019) where learning tasks become consistently simplified (Luke, 2018). These mask concerns with equity that profoundly impact children's academic and social relationships and overall well-being. Issues that are rarely critiqued in our daily literacy classrooms.

Social justice issues remain a consistent concern for researchers who have examined how literacy policies and practices are implicated in reproducing inequalities in classrooms for children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities. The perpetual systems of standardised assessments that define *intelligence* in literacy learning (and hence life chances) as determined by 'norms' and arbitrary levels continually position children who are unable to perform at standard as 'at risk.' In our relentless pursuit of producing the ideal individual learner, Bradbury (2019) notes that "not all children are recognisable as this ideal learner, based on raced and classed discourses, and those who do not engage are placed further outside the realm of educational acceptability" (p. 322). Luke (2012) highlights how the 'at risk' label plays out in the daily lives of literacy learners. His research demonstrates how children from low socioeconomic communities are often defined as 'at risk' learners and are routinely given tasks that require very little intellectual engagement. He notes that "there is a stripping out of higher order, intellectually demanding and critical work [as] often the curriculum for working class and migrant kids is simplified in ways that shape a passive relationship with knowledge" (p. 8).

Comber and Woods (2016) draw attention to how these issues become entangled in the reproduction of deficit discourses and simplified pedagogical practices for children who are deemed to be 'at risk.' They describe how these children become immersed in what they term, "fickle literacies - that result in limited learning being accomplished [within...] a diet of low expectations" (p. 205). Furthermore, Shields et al. (2005) emphasise the prevalence of deficit assumptions of minority groups in school settings and their harmful effects. They contend that "schooling creates and perpetuates images of children in ways that are destructive, in ways that predispose some children to be successful, confident, and engaged, and others to become lower achieving, timid or aggressive, reluctant, and disengaged" (p.1). For Fricker (2017) these are epistemic injustices, "forms of (direct or indirect) discrimination ...a prejudice through which [a child] is misjudged and perceived as epistemically lesser" (p. 53).

-Scratch-

F*un with teacher and child*

Teacher says,
"Look, look.
I see a big green car.
See the green car go."

Child says,
"I see it.
I see the big green car.
I want to go away in it.
I want to go away,
Away
Away
Away."

Hayes (2016) suggests that "the endemic nature of deficit discourse in education operates in ways that constitute differences in students and their communities as inherent or *natural*" (p. 215). The production of deficit discourses and practices are devastating in the lives of children deemed to need consistent remediation. These persist as unquestioned 'truths,' as naturalised ways of thinking (and operating) to keep our literacy worlds ordered, controlled and segregated. In these enactments, we erase vital inquiries that may compel us to consider the ethical, social, emotional, material and affective realms of the literacy classroom. Those that might turn toward more complex insights that can help us understand persistent issues of inequity. The system keeps us numb, mostly silent and confused as we are immersed in what feels like an immensity of 'big data' that has emerged to dominate daily teaching life. As teachers, we often remain unaware that alternatives to these deficit discourses and practices exist.

> Perhaps we have become enslaved by existing narrow curricula (Malone et al., 2020, p. 151)

-Scratch-

What I would give

(It has cruelly plagued me)

Regardless of where I be in time or space

spiritually physically

An idea

An antidote

An expression

Calling into being

Molecular lines of flight

To "counter the heavy and unwieldy

system of Cartesian philosophy" (Conley, 2010, p. 177)

that produces dullness in the everyday world of teaching and learning

Where are they?

Where do they reside?

How dare you assume that I will be

The transmitter of your modes of governance

inscribing dull transmission models that further

manipulate

segregate

propagate

your offensive ways with words and

practices

with ideas that limit

any potential for becoming anew

In what ways might we fight the structural expectancies?

the systems

the 'scripted' ways of being and doing literacy?

Instead seek movements – practices

emancipatory expansive ways of being

Invite alternative possibilities

Of becoming something other.

> In order to change the world, we have first to understand it. In order to change the world, we have to create new human [and more than human] practices with respect to the realities around us."...it is, of course, the task of critical and reflective thought to understand our condition and to reveal the potentiality for the future imminent in the present (Harvey, 2001, p. 36-37).

Harvey's insights have much resonance with my professional experiences in the world of schooling. Seeking to understand the complexity of classroom life – why inequities proliferate despite years of (apparent) attempts to redress the profound injustices that so many children experienced in schools such as ours. It seemed I had all the thinking power necessary to "understand" the inequalities that greatly affected many children's learning lives, yet we consistently fell short of "revealing the potentiality for the future immanent in the present" that Harvey suggests. In fact, being a teacher for me had increasingly become about *existing* in an alien world. As neoliberal directives intensified, the drive to school, the familiar, well-travelled (literal/metaphorical) roads were like resounding paths to conformity leading to a destination that was everything antithetical to creativity, to invention. We rarely stop to imagine how might these experiences *feel* for so many children who are subjected to endless mandates of testing regimes and pedagogies that form "a kind of alienated labour" (Wrigley, 2005, p. 228).

Agitate for change

-Scratch-

It seems from birth we are always readying children for the world of institutional life. With/in educational neoliberal mandates that persistently standardise learning, children are directed towards instructionally laid out individual paths to certainty. Ones where the final destination is little more than correctly identifying alphabet letters, chunks of words, and the like, that determine the type of literacy learner they "are." Giroux (2020) sees this as "shamelessly reducing [children to...]'cheerful robots' through modes of pedagogy that embrace an instrumental rationality in which matters of justice, values, ethics, and power are erased from any notion of teaching and learning" (p. 1).

Throughout my years of teaching and being a school leader, the force of neoliberal accountability measures – in the guise of constant surveillance took a multitude of forms. I still wear these on my body. Consistently checking children's data levels. Regulating their bodies. Consistently observing teachers' practice. Constantly assessing whether they were effective and so on. These erased any possibilities for making a pedagogical space for understanding children's subjectivities, their histories or knowledge. With/in these experiences, I sought critical research approaches to explore alternative ways in which I could begin to reconceptualise more socially just literacy practices. Shields (2015) notes that critical research begins with the premise that the researcher's role is not to describe the world as it is, but to demonstrate what needs to be changed. In line with this is the need to critically analyse the grand narratives of neoliberal policies that play out in daily classroom life. McNinch (2009) argues that:

> The 'real,' the most impressive, stories are found not in curriculum documents or instructional strategies or in the results of achievement scores and mental testing. Rather it is the complex relations among students and between students and teachers that should most concern us (p. 67).

McNinch's insights draw attention to the importance of understanding our classroom relational worlds beyond the current emphasis on teaching as *technical* modes of content delivery. Becoming attuned to how we can put critical theory to work to more deeply understand our relations beyond the official curriculum is recognised by Lather (2004). She suggests that we need to be aware of the dictating and regulating practices that form 'regimes of truth' and order as they largely remain uncontested and taken for granted. These disruptions are imagined in the ethical imperative that:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories (Haraway, 2016, p. 12).

Haraway profoundly reminds us of the deeply critical and ethical implications of the 'stories we tell' as researchers. Seeking to understand how to write of the *buried* stories

of my children and classroom life, I expanded my readings in critical theories to understand researchers who seek to produce knowledge differently (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024; MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2021a). To engage with theories and philosophies that will enable me to 'speak back' to traditional forms of knowledge creation and importantly, produce openings in order to *reimagine* daily classroom life. To be aware of the complex relations that have deeply ethical implications for the ways in which we research. And live. Those that challenge dominant neoliberal narratives in educational domains and seek more socially just ways of learning. How might these theories assist me to examine the complex power relations that circulate in assemblages of classroom life? I am moved by the declaration that "all qualitative researchers are philosophers" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12) and as such am inspired to pursue theories and concepts that will assist me to think *differently* about persistent issues of injustice in children's learning lives.

Researchers are philosophers.

As I became immersed in reading diverse philosophies throughout my research, I explored ideas from critical theories, yet became aware of how significantly these were being reimagined through postfoundational approaches. As I reflect now, I was becoming attuned to the emergence of multiple relations that can produce new ways in which I could think with theories and concepts. Emergences that came to greatly expand the ways in which I analysed and storied classroom life. Bayley (2018) refers to a form of criticality that is "an embodied, affective, performative and material-discursive [practice]... that becomes capable of approaching teaching and learning with increased critical complexity" (pp. 231-232). This approach to criticality framed the ways I sought to further understand theories and concepts used by postfoundational scholars that contested narrow approaches to qualitative research. I began to explore how researchers were using creative and experimental ways to unsettle conventional 'humanistic' research. Jackson and Mazzei (2023) note that many researchers have sought to reframe qualitative research by taking up philosophically informed inquiry as a way "to provoke the unthought" (p. ix). With/in these provocations is a willingness by the researcher to "borrow and reconfigure concepts, invent approaches and create new assemblages that demonstrate a range of creative analytic practices of thought, creativity and intervention" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018, p. 717). The importance of embracing research that inspires social change and emancipation from relations of domination is suggested by Lynch et al. (2016). They

state, “if practices are not simply reproduced, then they can be done differently” (p .4). In relation to literacy education, this meant looking for alternative ways to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal practices that overemphasised literacy learning as purely psychological – where children’s level of cognition is all that matters. Boldt and Leander (2020) propose this as “imagining the radical difference” (p. 515) when we use alternative theories to guide our inquiries.

Imagining the radical difference.

Seeking methodologies to counter the persistent inequalities produced in our everyday teaching and learning worlds, became a kind of liberation from what was the unchangeable order of things. Ways to break from the “insufferable sameness” (Berlant, 2022, p.1) that teaching had become. That learning for children had become. The endless rhetoric and policy directives that mandate high levels of meaningless accountability, inordinate amounts of time spent on everything and nothing that perpetuate unjust practices. We have become so adept at keeping these injustices hidden from view. St. Pierre (2024) suggests that the first task of postfoundational scholars is to challenge the foundations that constrain our scholarship and our lives. She emphasises that “any foundations we lay down are contingent – that is they are invented, made, and can therefore be reused and remade” (p. ix). This calls into question the need to critique how knowledge is produced, by whom, how it effectively is made intelligible in the literacy classroom and significantly how it shapes our learning worlds.

Foundations are *contingent*.

-Scratch-

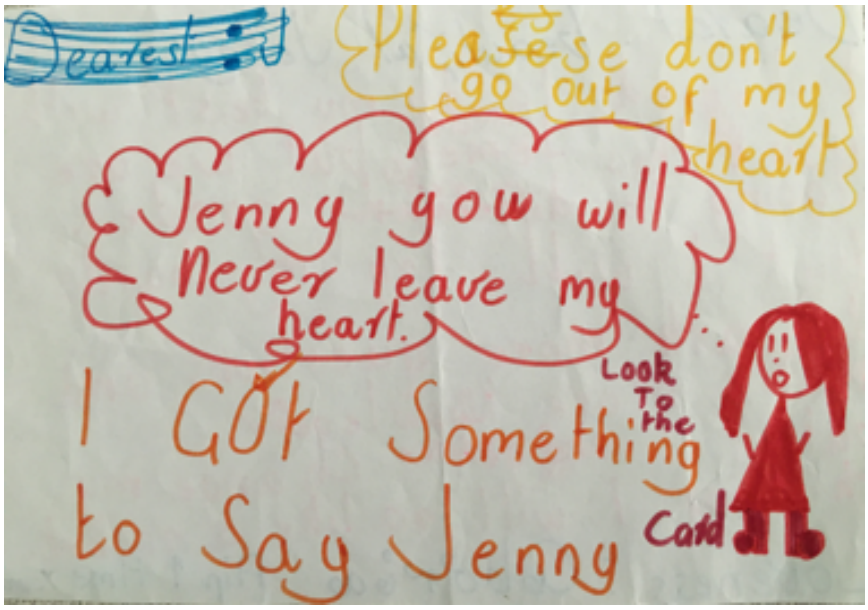


Figure 1
Grace has something to say.

When efficiency and the drive to achieve pre-determined literacy outcomes becomes the only goal in our literacy classrooms, what is erased? Who is excluded? What becomes of the kinds of knowledge children learn? These critical issues remained uncontested throughout my teaching career. Well, in any sense, beyond the classroom walls. Directives in early years literacy teaching and learning continued to overemphasise approaches that relied on an adherence to hegemonic 'foundational' definitions of literacy. As such, they were predominantly concerned with alphabetic principles (and little more) that privileged a child's capacity to recall what they could remember. What they had 'learned.' Psychological models of developmental learning trajectories supported these (deficit) universalities. Erased by these 'foundations' of thought and practice were any possibilities for thinking otherwise about children's meaning making, that could draw from research to open up new ways to think about classroom life. That might challenge the perpetuation of approaches that excluded so many children and reduced their capacity to learn. Being increasingly mired in simplified renditions of literacy learning and the measurement of knowledge in depersonalised 'teach-assess-diagnose-remediate-intervene' cycles came to constitute our literacy worlds.

Furthermore, the world of 'big data' that reflected positivist aims carved up our classroom learning life into "discrete measurable and controllable variables" (Moss, 2019, p. 36) which became intensified to secure these foundational principles. Traces of its presence circulated in our daily learning lives, demanding that efforts were strengthened to 'capture' what children had learned (aka - *remembered* at a point in time) as defined by their assessments. Processes that privileged 'data' as *the* representation of *the* child – speaking for *the* child. Constituting *the* child. That it is even possible to 'speak' for itself is ludicrous, yet this regime of truth dominates our classroom worlds. Concerningly, this 'objective measure' then (unquestioningly) determines the nature of literacy practices that children will then experience. In contrast, Jackson and Mazzei (2024) propose more expanded, complex readings of our (classroom) worlds. They suggest that in postfoundation thinking:

> Enactments are considered sensings, doings and interventions activated by concepts in a thinking with ... they are curations of thought that come out of our

> engagements with the world ... in a refusal of representationalism, enactments bring forth the question of how things work: how different attunements make something else possible (p. 11).

Refusals.

How things work.

Different attunements.

Making something else possible.

Researchers who use postfoundational theories "deconstruct the foundations of certain concepts and ideas [in order to] see how contingency operates to secure the 'foundations' [and] using that contingency [they] open up other possible meanings/matterings" (Murris & Bozalek, 2019, p.1507). These other possible 'meanings and matterings' contest foundational knowledge as 'universal truths' to be discovered by the *detached* researcher. St. Pierre (2011) critiques "conventional humanist qualitative inquiry" (p. 40) that is grounded in the human being of humanism—the individual, person, or self who (as researcher) seeks to find stable 'objective' truths in the world. She urges researchers to challenge the ways in which we "cling to an objectivist epistemology [where] knowledge *accumulates* and has *gaps* that *findings* can fill" (p. 42 italics in original).

Postfoundational researchers work with/in an immanent ontology—a world that's *becoming,* which recognises the "relatively unstable conceptions of the world, of human beings that match that ontology" (Stewart et al., 2021, p. 1052). Knowledge creation is entangled throughout research and is considered "ambulatory thought [that is] emergent and creative" (Davies, 2021, p. 35). Processes of movement and change are thus central to these propositions as noted by May (2005). He suggests that "in traditional philosophy, being is contrasted with becoming. Being is that which endures...which remains constant. Being is the source and the foundation, fixed and unchanging whereas on the other hand becoming is ephemeral, changing and inconstant" (p. 59). The notion of *becoming* thus serves as an antidote to representational thinking that focuses on being and identity as fixed and stable entities. *Becoming* is considered in terms of processes of change, movement and an attunement to the production of the new - it is a critical concept as it suggests, "oneself must be conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 27).

Being immersed in the world of postfoundational theories significantly shaped my research as I sought ways to challenge persistent images of thought that keep our thinking as 'fixed' – as *stuck* in unchanging universal ideas perpetuated through neoliberal policy and practice. That limits what we and significantly, our children come to *know* - to *become*. Being opened up to think differently in the mangle of these refusals and re-creations has consumed much of my research time. I have been taken to unanticipated places and spaces.

Critical. Movement. Change.

-Scratch-

I recall so vividly the intensification of top down mandates increased in the raft of literacy 'non-negotiables'. One example, among several, was the expectation that all lessons contained learning intentions and success criteria, which were required to be submitted one week in advance on lesson plans. After these plans were submitted they were then checked by designated school leaders to get the approval that they were written in child friendly language (dumbed down?) so that children were 'crystal clear' with what was expected of them. The school leaders then visited our classrooms to check if children could recite them. "Universality...Objectivity... Certainty... Stability...Closure..." (Moss, 2019, p. 32).

Several scholars have inspired much of my thinking and approaches in utilising theories throughout my research. Concepts and ideas from Barad's (2007) agential realism, posthumanisms (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Kuby et al., 2019), affect theories (Ahmed, 2004; Stewart, 2010) and Deleuzeguattarian ideas (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) have enabled me "to experiment and create new forms of thought and life" (St. Pierre, 2021a, p. 163). As I became immersed in the world of postfoundational approaches (Mazzei & Jackson, 2024), I developed an awareness of how scholars have questioned forms of critical research that have not resulted in transforming the lives of vulnerable groups. Despite the diversity of approaches and the long history of critical research, "many groups of human beings continue to be treated as if subhuman, ravaged by continued forms of sexism, ageism, economic inequities, and/or other forms of marginalisation and disqualification" (Koro & Cannella, 2024, p. 633). Furthermore, researchers have questioned whether

specific forms of knowledge creation and methods may be implicated in the reproduction of inequalities. A turn to postfoundational concerns means that coming "to know" is reconceptualised by the use of theory that "does not totalise...[but becomes] an instrument for multiplication...to enable the production of new questions and previously unthought knowledge" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018, p. 720).

In 'opening up' forms of knowledge creation, St. Pierre (2019) urges researchers to find concepts that reorient thinking and writing. She states that in generating new ways to research "we need practical experimentation and the creation of the *not yet* instead of the repetition of what *is*" (p.3). In responding to St. Pierre, I came to understand alternative approaches to my research, analysis and writing that produced different ways to critically understand Grace and my children's literacy experiences. In those entanglements, I became "open to the emergence of the unforeseen" (MacLure, 2023, p. 217). As I expanded my readings of theorists in these fields, I also learned of many of their struggles and challenges as they navigated the complexity of this work (see Strom & Mills, 2021; Ulmer 2017). Studying ideas and concepts such as intra-action, material↔ discursive practices, posthuman performativity and affect theory enabled me to expand how I analysed classroom life. It required, however, that I learn a new language and be open to experimentation as I sought to critically analyse and theorise issues of injustice.

Dissolve boundaries. Create openings.

-Scratch-

My research feels like it is driven by an expedition of sorts - that seeks expressions that agitate-that might incite an action - that get in, to contest something 'other' than individualistic pursuits of knowledge creation. To find ways to examine the cultural politics of classroom life is illuminating -quelling the forces of representation. Research and writing into the fires that burn within, forms of writing myself into resistance (Pelias, 2023).

I read voraciously as I wanted to specifically understand how researchers were using these concepts and how they could be useful to explore the critical and complex relations in the everyday world of the classroom. In what ways could we examine persistent issues of marginalisation that seek to engage new ideas through "encounters with the 'unthought'

‘unknown’ ‘uncertain’, and ‘unclear’...that call towards a wonder of methodology itself?” (Pearce & MacLure, 2009, p. 249). The scholarly work of Jackson and Mazzei (2023) became significant in my research in terms of their proposition to ‘think with theory’ using different concepts. Complex concepts, ideas and possibilities regularly left me curious, at times excited and frustrated - but mostly shaking my head in bouts of WTF (Strom & Mills, 2021), trying to understand what these concepts actually *meant* (hm, note the positivist in me seeking ‘the’ answers...) and how they could inform my own research and writing. Seeking insights from researchers who argue for the use of concepts as provocations to explore new ways of thinking and writing, I learned from theorists such as Mazzei (2017) who refers to ways in which she uses concepts to follow “the contours of inquiry” that can open up new thought (as opposed to following linear steps in prescribed methods). Similarly, encountering Deleuzian scholars such as Wallin (2014) prompted me to focus on not just what a concept ‘means’ (in representationalist terms) but to rather imagine what it can *do* in helping us to produce new ways of thinking and researching. With/in these analytical engagements, I could reconceptualise literacy classroom worlds as entangled in a multitude of relations. Far from straightforward, yet these invited performative departures from conventional academic writing (Burnard, 2022). To “productively push the limits of ‘conventional’ research and writing [and...] expanding what constitutes a research text” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 506).

In “casting a net for concepts, ideas and tools” (Ellingson, 2017, p. 3), I pursued the possibilities of working with/in and beyond interpretivist qualitative inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023); a key principle of postfoundational approaches. In line with Butler (2005) who states that “the ‘I’ has no story on its own that is not only a story of relation” (p. 8), I reconceptualised literacy classroom life beyond the human only gaze, as suggested by St. Pierre (2011), by incorporating theories from agential realism and posthumanism. These brought into analytical view human and more than human entanglements that can assist in creating new knowledge and theorise issues of inequity in everyday classroom life. Classroom worlds in these complex assemblages become objects of analysis (Clifford & Marcus, 1992) that take on new forms, qualities, possibilities in their human, non-human and more than human configurations. Being attuned to these disparate entities that throw themselves in “scenes, acts, encounters, performances and situations” (Stewart, 2012, p. 518) enabled me to also pay close attention to the ‘affectively charged’ moments in classroom life as conceptualised by affect theorists. In response, my research

and writing also recognised “things coming into being rather than as a system already set in place” (Lesko & McCall, 2023, p. 61). These becomings entangled me in different postfoundational concepts with autoethnographic methods to *speculate* alternative critical readings of classroom life.

I came to understand that our senses, our capacity to feel, perceive and *know* in multiple ways are not relegated to the sidelines in favour of knowledge that corresponds to a (seemingly) verifiable ‘Truth.’ Knowledge creation in this way takes on a renewed status, a vibrancy, a necessity to be called on to create words, worlds, ideas and imaginings in pursuit of difference. Andrews (2020) notes what stories are told, and ultimately tellable, have consequences for our ability to imagine the world otherwise. These research enactments became what I now consider as assemblages that emerged iteratively as I analysed classroom life. Assemblages that were constantly shifting as I took diverse lines of flight that lead me to entangled theoretical locations. I remained open to exploring these *locations* - ideas that iteratively intra-acted with my personal experiences, my compositions, theories and the material↔discursive spaces of the classroom. To open up my thinking and analysis, these research movements were propelled by putting “And” before “Is” (Rajchman, 2000, p. 6) enabling a multiplicity of entanglements.

-*Scratch*-

Forms of writing/researching ‘in the middle’

A recursive, unfinished in between

Critical imaginings

Bleeding into postfoundational inventions

A mangle of counter hegemonic experimental openings

Where writing and research become political/ creative acts

Where ambiguity, confusions, contingencies

With/in worlds and states of unknowing

Aspire for a sense of the new

> An attunement to relational encounters is to become undone, unbounded by predetermined static particularities of *a* body, *a* place, *a* space, *a* time. This relationality activates circuits that lead elsewhere: to what could not be anticipated, predetermined, or ordered (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 6).

Being immersed in the world of postfoundational ideas that challenge conventional qualitative processes of knowledge production, I now conceptualise as profound critical interruptions to my *colonised* self. These have challenged me to resist the urges to research and write in pursuit of certainty. As Jackson and Mazzei (2023) suggest, these encounters force us into places of becoming *undone*. For me, this meant striving to eschew uninventive acts of representation (ensuring *all* the proverbial t*s* are crossed and i*s* are dotted and the like), pulling myself back from the need to tell (tell... tell) continually, on the well-travelled road to clearly map out every step for the reader. MacLure (2017) is enlightening here as she suggests scholars face several challenges when wrestling with attempts to express new forms of relationality among human and non-human entities. She notes that we need to be aware that our colonised (habitual) forms of seeing all in our world as representational are "old epistemological habits tend to reinsert themselves behind our own backs" (p. 56).

Gradually as I started to write, read and research each day I found myself slowly becoming attuned to the ways in which particular concepts and theories inspire forms of experimental thinking and writing. Davies (2021) suggests that new ways of experimenting in research does not have a specific template - but rather "it remains open to the unexpected, to serendipity, and to new ways of thinking and doing as research questions and explorations take shape" (p. 6). I began to see classroom worlds so expansively. So differently. As I connected with more complex concepts I was reading about, I began to *feel*, to *embody* and think of the numerous heterogeneous assemblages of ideas and connections that come into play. These *becomings* were inextricably threaded in immeasurable ways – on the page, in my thoughts – in my body (where I noted more closely levels of excitement, anxiety and impatience). Strangely I was conceptualising these as intra-actions, as having agency – moments which propelled me into new ideas and places. Were these emergences of 'rhizomes intra-acting?' Could such a thing even

exist? These concepts challenged me yet I felt myself being entangled into processes that urged me towards analysing and composing my ideas in new ways. These were like moments of flow that resisted capturing the 'essence' of things, to write freely and imagine differently. There are strong connections in these notions of 'becoming undone' to what Foucault (cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986) proposes when he states, "maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but refuse what we are" (p. 216).

-Scratch-

There is much personal joy, beauty and creativity for all to those who go against the grain! My heart was radical but every day it was required to be mechanical - churning out the technical skills expected of the teacher as 'deliverer' of information. Think Uber. Disconnected from the hearts of children – from anything they may actually desire as learners. No sense of creativity or possibility. Plenty of misleading espoused 'visions' – eternal promises to meet your child's learning needs (aka, standardising learning) or help them to 'strive for excellence' (or some other vague deceptive school vision that had no relevance to 'their' lives). Rarely did we seek to imagine our lives as being entangled in anything other than that which could be measured, quantified or verified. Did I dream too much?

The theories and concepts I used throughout my research became a toolbox of sorts allowing me to move beyond what I thought I *needed* to know, to *prove,* and thus communicate 'to' the reader. I began moving into spaces to experiment with new vocabularies I had been learning and finding ways to express these. I strived to find inspiration from researchers that might assist me to express my passion for and longingness to critically address issues that I remain haunted by (Gordon, 2008). I found resonance in the words of Vannini (2015), who conceptualises new ways to imagine our everyday life by striving to:

> ...animate rather than simply mimic, to rupture rather than merely account, to evoke rather than just report, and to reverberate instead of more modestly resonating, in this sense offering a true 'escape from the established

> academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation (p. 318).

My immersions into critical and postfoundational theories and concepts helped me to *break free* from the 'established academic habit' that Vannini refers to. Entangled with autoethnographic approaches (outlined in Chapter 3), I searched for ways to research and compose texts that transgress the adherence to conventional humanist qualitative writing. These processes became creative spaces where I pursued a fusion of diverse forms of writing that became critical, personal and performative (these are ideas are further explored in Interlude 2: Performative Speculations).

Sidebar: Complicity, confessions and contradictions

> I am seduced when I am pushed beyond myself, put in a new place where I can see what I couldn't before, put in place by the error of my former thinking, put on an alternative path...I must put up or shut up, must put an end to where I was. There is no putting off, putting down or putting away that which must be put forward (Pelias, 2018, p. 163).

Throughout my research and writing I kept a research journal where I recorded key insights from the literature and personal responses that often took the form of emergent questions. These drew me into new places where I encountered many alternative paths as I have discussed. Along the way, however, were realisations of how deeply implicated my actions as a teacher and school leader were complicit in maintaining many of the unjust practices in literacy that I now seek to contest. For so many years, I participated in a system that contributed to many children being labelled as 'at risk' and as such were denied any alternative ways of knowing, being and becoming. Seeking to support our children's wellbeing and literacy learning, I constantly sought to identify who the 'at risk' children were across the school in order to plan literacy interventions of various kinds. These intentions were motivated by what I thought were forms of social justice as I could easily point out who required additional help. Yet this became public knowledge amongst the staff. Where were the children's rights to any privacy? To be conceptualised as anything *other* than 'at risk'? I had pathologised the very children I sought to empower.

Perhaps this is what Pelias (2018) means when he suggests we need to listen to the "resonant and dissonant" (p. 163) voices that move us to "see how the plight of others cannot be ignored" (p. 164). I now realise these were practices that did little more that perpetuate the (further) labelling of children which was a response to increasing accountability measures. To seek out those children who were not achieving at desired benchmarks. Who were effectively in need of *fixing*. I unwittingly contributed to keeping specific children in disempowering forms of pedagogies as their teachers then looked to remediate their shortcomings. These processes entangled with/in institutional demands, our individual lives, desires, histories and fixations with sedimenting identities and practices. I now critically question how as teachers we become complicit in perpetuating hierarchical and authoritarian modes of pedagogy. Often, these become unquestioned ways of keeping stability in the 'order of things.' Yet these actively created *Others*. All guided by fear at that time - fear of not being a worthy teacher, a 'good' school, of our children not being capable and in the process, we pathologised them and their families. These all were enmeshed in a complex educational system that frequently reminded us that we had the *worst* reading data in the region. These concerns propelled me toward the realisation that:

> If we are to better articulate and challenge inequitable ways of doing, being and thinking, we need to notice where and when things open out in other ways, and to cultivate spaces where we can do and think in ways that work against the common tide (Burnett & Rowsell, 2022, p. xxxvii).

These sentiments are embodied throughout the following Interlude 1: The (Dis)Order of Things: The Ravages of Rituals, where I offer texts that speak back to what I have conceptualised as the absurdity of what our early literacy pedagogies have become as shaped by neoliberal directives. There are also general reflections on aspects of school life that also contest these rituals to 'articulate and challenge inequitable ways of doing, being and thinking' as suggested by Burnett and Rowsell (2022).

Rhyme Zones NOT Rhizomes

It was 9.48 am.
Any school day will do.

Tim stated “ch”
Anna knew ‘ing’
Grace didn’t know
Rick murmured ‘*spr*ing.’

Phuong chanted ‘at/cat/splat’
All in a row
Mimi looked confused.
Brian uttered ‘No!’

Frank muttered ‘it’
Cece articulated ‘sh - ed’?
Shelly stretched out “to- mor- row’
Grace looked with dread.

So, in this wildly disparate assemblage
To which your literacy ‘program’ faithfully abides
How is one to understand the complexity
From where classroom life resides?

Sorry EBB

How do I assess thee? Let me count the ways.
I assess thee to the depth and breadth and height
My checklist can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the mandated ends of being and imposed “Grace.”
I assess thee to the level of every day’s
Most useless need, by sun and also by fluorescent-light.
I assess thee determinately, as policy makers strive for ‘right’.
I assess thee purely, as my spreadsheet allows.
I assess thee with the [dis]passion put to use;
In my mounting grief, and with my Principal’s faith.
I assess thee with a directive I seemed to lose;
With my dissolved beliefs, I assess thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if my leaders choose;
I shall but continue to assess thee even after death.

A musing

"You will be organized, you will be an organism,
you will articulate your body
– otherwise you're just depraved.
You will be signifier and signified,
interpreter and interpreted –
otherwise you're just a deviant.
You will be a subject, nailed down as one,
a subject of the enunciation
recoiled into the subject of the statement,
otherwise you're just a tramp."
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 159).

Interpretation as impoverishment

Words we use *perform*
they create practices
make us move
or keep us still;
motionless
chanting reciting
Standardising; measuring

All in a day's work
Nuthin much else matters
Hearts erased
Souls destroyed
Bodies regulated
"Stop [day]dreaming!"
"Eyes on me…"
"Hands and feet to yourself..."
So it goes on.

"Cheerful Robots" (Giroux, 2020)

It starts early.
Worlds of *this* means *that*.
Are you ready for it?
The dissolution of curiosity, creativity
The erasure of languages, culture even?
[*and more!]*
Don't be alarmed
[but *be alarmed*!)
You won't notice it
[but *look closely*!]
It goes something like this,

"Get your mouth ready,
Say CHOP…
Now say CHOP
but don't say the 'OP'
What is left?"

Say SHOP
Now say SHOP
but don't say the "SH"
What is left?"

"Read these words!
[lists of high frequency
words populate
the page vertically]
…about
…my
…the
And it goes on.

Futile acts of levitation

Lift the reading levels!
Too many red squares
Danger
Fear mounts
Profuse sweating
Regressive effect sizes!
Tolerate the Others
Subordinate [however]
Simplify the books
Simply the words
Simplify the teacher!
Simplify the child!

Diagnose

Fix the children
[Fix the teacher!]
Surveille the child
[Surveille the teacher!]

Tell them it's for their own
good
It's so quiet
So pervasive
Are there any cracks?
To let some light in.

The Hypocritical Oath

Now say with me…
I solemnly pledge to consecrate my (social, emotional, family et al.) life to the service of the academy and all of its regimes of truth;
I will give to my policy makers the [dis]respect and [un]gratitude that is their due;
I will practise my profession with various levels of [un]consciousness and [in]dignity;
The data of my students will be my first consideration;
I will respect and administer the levels of gloss that will be needed to ensure that the spectacle of "All children will achieve excellence" will be believed whilst in my heart they live as cruelly optimistic;
I will maintain, by all the means in my power (that which I hold little) the honour and the [un]noble traditions of my father's paradigm,
My colleagues will [outwardly appear to] be my sisters and brothers,
I will [not] permit considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene between my curriculum planning and pedagogical approaches;
I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my [dis]honour; if indeed I possess any of the former.

Dubious contracts

Grace, do you take this level 2 text
To have and to hold
In sickness and in health
From this day forward
Do you promise to love it?
Comfort it?
Honour and keep it in sickness and in health?
In good times and bad?
Forsaking all others
Remain faithful to it and to the love you share
Excluding all others
For all the days of your learning life?

One-way street

There's nothing *standard* about children
About people
[She states the bleedin' obvious!]
Persist/force/put/assess/contain all
Prescribed arbitrary norms
Inventions conjured up
Fair is foul
Foul is fair
[Apparently]

Perils of datafication: denying ?

Here's a gap we can fill!

Denying_____
Denying _____
Denying _____
Denying _____

Ah, just imagine!
"What is wrong with me?"
could be
transformed into
"*Whom might I become?!"*

Datifying lives

Making Little N e _ l _ b _ r _ l _
Hmmmm, so we have the levels,
Now…let's
Reduce
Simplify
Divide

Maybe even disengage?
Let's bring on the ability groups!
Reading for the teacher,
Writing correct spellings
So then,
what might you be?
In what group might you live?
Might you become;
A whale?
Swimming free in the ocean;
A kangaroo?
Mostly on flat terrain
Looking carefully at their surrounds;
Or perhaps a wombat?
Burrowing furiously
Through the mounds
To escape the heat
Labouring for their lives.

Around in circles

(And they ain't even *Hermeneutic*!)

♪♫ Sing with me ♪♫

Here we go round the low ability group,
The low ability group
The low ability group
Here we go round the low ability group,
So early in the morning

This is the way we say the sound
say the sound
say the sound
This is the way we say the sound
So early in the morning …
This is the way we write 'the'
write 'the'
write 'the'
This is the way we write 'the'
So early in the morning …

This is the way we….

[and so, it goes on
insert a random skill
to be dutifully recited
repeat pattern
and chant joyfully]

A literacy crusade

Going into battle in the literacy wars
Face painted to elude the enemy
Under constant observation
[cue: the panopticon]
Data collection
Military style
Efficiency planned
Enacted
Surveillance
Observe the target; and
Reconnaissance
Collect data
Find the *deficit*
Follow the signs
The fashionable fascism of the times
Fetishes even
Perhaps we are doctors
Diagnosing symptoms
Remove the tumour
Or at least
Stem the bleeds
Relieve the pain
Desiring machines
The stings of capitalism.
By Grade 1...
By Grade 2...
[and so, it goes on...]

Planning under the influence

It was ~~the best of times, it was~~ the worst of times, ~~it was the age of wisdom~~, it was the age of foolishness, ~~it was the epoch of belief,~~ it was the epoch of incredulity…

Start again.

Well, it was 'one' of the worst of times. There were many. [Further] actions of incredulity took their forms of the perpetual eye rolling, the perfected art of contorting one's facial expression so that it revealed just enough **disdain** but not too much as to be called over to the Principal's office to "Please explain…" that afternoon [yes we were adults]. The regimes of truth became too much. This is just *one* of those times. In an era of increased surveillance and accountability some self-proclaimed educational bigwig of sorts thought it would be a great idea for *all* of the teachers ensure *all* of their lessons outlining *all* of their learning intentions, *all* of their success criteria, *all* of their small ability groups et al… would need to be submitted onto the school's intranet – fit for inspection; one week;
7 days;
168 hours;
10,080 minutes
604,800 seconds prior to the week where all this was to occur.

These exercises in excess were creativity killers and soul destroyers as one dabbled [even further] into the night becoming DELIRIOUS in acts that made little sense. Other to fulfil these supposed bigwigs' constant quest for order and control. At times, these mad acts went into the early hours of the next morning making one further delusional, dejected and ultimately empty.

Concerned Teacher

Her disposition takes the form of a slow movement... a pensive, melancholic demeanour as she seeks to make [non]sense of it all

She wonders,

In the fragments

What remains?

Unfelt…

Unrealised?

Unknown?

Rich opportunities linger in the atmosphere

Of what could be

Waiting their turn, their time

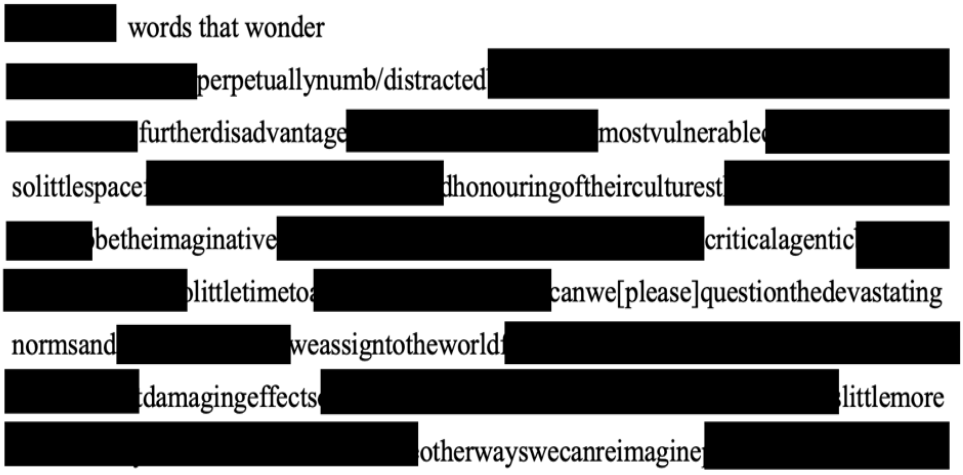
If ever realised

Yet we persist to layer doses of

Dull, disconnected skills

Chunks - detached parts of words

Erasing possibilities of being alive to anything Other



On meaningless metrics (Riddle, 2018)

What a futile, exhausting and demoralising/dehumanising (choose one/keep both) endeavour it is to be constantly entangled in the neoliberal desires to seek all that is provable, quantifiable in the daily world of literacy teaching and learning that demands the standardisation of all! A teacher carries these expectations, they are felt through bodily sensations immersing her heart and mind in the rational ordered world of the classroom. Where the clinical so called 'truths' purport to be authorised knowledge of what is worth knowing, being, doing and measuring in the name of *education*. Drawing her attention, heart and mind away from any sense of the *embodied* ways in which we experience the world. In citing Downey (2007), Pink (2009) discusses questions related to 'how does the body come to 'know,' and what kind of biological changes might occur when learning? This prompts me to consider how might we account for and appreciate more embodied ways of knowing in our classroom spaces.

Where are the moments, the calls to the occasions where we might explore with a child the relations felt with/in our learning and emotional lives? The pedagogical, deeply intimate space that might be created where great potential resides. Where a teacher might communicate, *I am here with you…you greatly matter.* Hope infuses those encounters. They are deliberate radical refusals to buy into the cold liberal humanist system that cruelly privileges the cognitive, the objective over the [inter]subjective. Maintained and sustained is the normalisation of reason over any sense of emotion; of belonging, of being with others. Where are the possibilities for reimagining more embodied encounters? What becomes of the present/past/future hauntings which are infused with histories, memories, emotions, and yearnings all entangled with one another ? (Newfield & Bozalek, 2019).

Say Cheese(y)

Driven by my deeply felt passion for unruliness; to defy the "pathological normativity" (Das, 2020, p. 198), that everyday school life had become, I recall the yearly ritual of the school photo. The requirement that hundreds of bodies descend onto the basketball courts for precious time wasting endeavours to capture how very happy we all were...

straightening this,
moving that
pulling this way
prodding children moving into wrong lines
policing smiles (& frowns... and they were just mine!)
prising
punishing

Sca/olding those who did not have the 'correct' jumper (translated: those children whose parents may have not been able to *afford* the 'correct' jumper…) in essence messing with the purpose of getting the 'perfect' school photo.
"Who dressed you, the cat…?" was one such scalding remark directed to my Grace by the photographer. I will never come to terms with just how cruel it was. Did she hear? The other children certainly did, and they all looked at me for a response. So, in this powerfully emotionally charged moment full of possibilities - what was my response?
A passive angry eye roll.
An act I am well practiced in.
No words back. No rebuttal.
What a chance I lost to put this prick in his place.
It still burns so many years on.
We had a history, this prick and me. The year before I had a *run in* with him when he told my class to …"Come here *guys*…" to which I said, "*Girls* too…!"
He didn't like that, stating that he meant the girls as well. Yeah, exclude us, erase us, you unthinking privileged, pasty, patriarchal prick.
Do not get me started.

How was it then that I could counter his exclusive term yet just be dumbfounded now regarding the cat comment.

That prick and the comment pierces, still.
Oh *no*, Grace. Sorry, Grace.
Anyhow how presumptuous to assume that cats of all species lacked any skills in taking care of themselves. They pride themselves on their appearances. Have you not seen the obsessiveness by which they aspire to have all hairs in place? Delicately, obsessively even; licking, re-licking, injecting the occasional pause to rethink their next move. If you knew anything about the anatomy and the behaviours of cats mate you would know that they have a barbed tongue with which to lick, forepaws which they moisten with saliva and use as a surrogate cloth of sorts, and they use their teeth to dig out the remains of the any undesirables left. So, take that re your cat comment with its intention to rip through the heart of my dearest Grace; so effortlessly, so viciously. And a cruel one, but you know they are not unfamiliar words to her. She had heard barbs like that all her life.

And then there were the adults.

The same spot year after year after year…the same cynical rolling of the eyes as we are all called from our cosy well heated classrooms (Why were the photos always taken in the dead of Winter, was that just our school!?) - many thrilled to be wasting time emancipated from their assigned scripted literacy teaching, doing nothing really...others annoyed that they could be actually reading with their children (well, er, ok that was probably just *me*). Being 'lined up' moved by that annoying rude prick of a photographer who probably started the business as an ex-teacher trying to get away from the dullness of school life but not completely able to get 'school' out of his system. Or maybe it was the opportunities to control others I told myself.

Being required to stand on flat earth meant I did not need to navigate the dangerous steel narrow concertina steps prepared for the short arses (self-named). Feeling somewhat at an advantage as my height afforded me quick, easy positioning and as such produced much annoyance as "I" was ready – "let's do this fast!" Towering in height over most throughout my life often resulted in constant requests by strangers to retrieve products

from top shelves in supermarkets of course to which I willingly obliged. Anyhow, that's another story.

Back to the photo.

The *shorter* staff members however were led onto differently levelled platforms, hands being held as though they were some kind of precious cargo and all the while I prayed that someone would trip, fall (a little?) to break the monotony (not any bones) of this useless, mundane exercise. Cruel but fair, I thought. They were, at the very least, required to bring any possible balancing skills to the fore (amusing myself -well we were at times in a *circus* after all). Many who had fervently taken on the Jane Fonda workouts of the late 80s but had let any physical skills lapse in the decades since, who ultimately lacked the required 'body balance' capacities needed to navigate the elevated planks assigned to them (as well as the *planks* many of us were navigating in our teaching lives). Being ushered onto these from the hand of that prick photographer and pushed along by the assembled staff members into position and waiting to go. Why? Oh, why did there have to be so many takes? Vanity Fair cover? Hardly. Who was this photograph *for* anyhow? To be relegated to the future dusty draws of one's house, to lay dormant, frozen in time and space. A record of...? Okay, again probably just *me*.

The front row was (of course) assigned to the Principal, the Assistant principal centred in their spatially superior realm (perfectly) to reflect their status as the leaders of all ... physically and metaphorically staff were grouped *around* them. *All that is good in the name of education emanates from us!* Insert vomit emoji. Or just vomit. I would amuse myself by looking at the tops of the teachers' heads in front of me... noting how much he/she is balding, gaining weight… any skin or clothing that might be protruding, a wayward hanging tag that could reveal where their cardigan was purchased …(mostly of the cheapskate, *not* designer category as we were teachers after all). Such was my disengagement. My cheap thrills I reserved for my transgressive mind. The children looking on at the spectacle of their teachers similarly being lined up, straightened. Regulated, bodies being repeatedly *manhandled* into desirable actions.
Sound familiar?

NEWS JUST IN

A sense of urgency pervades and is evident in the exasperated speech and the incredulity felt through the practices observed...

Reporter

In the eternal quest to reinforce that A is indeed for Apple, the mindless chanting of continual "a…a…a…through the likes of "Ants in the apple a a a ! " can be heard across the school from the early years classrooms. Children understand [and comply]with the necessity to be on their guard to ensure that they chant in unison…some reprimand others for 'missing a beat'…teachers gaze at those who do not project their voice. These acts of chanting appear to prevail in the face of infinite imaginative alternative possibilities that could be harnessed. It seems however these rarely see the light of day; are cruelly expunged from children's daily literacy life as they systematically and continually are immersed in the (re)productionist world of school where representational thought is analogical - concerned only with establishing eternal correspondences between some [invented... so called] shared internal essence which must adhere to its [so called] external meanings – forms of arborescent thought (Massumi, 1987).

~~A Is for Apple~~

Ce n'est pas une pomme

Leaning into autoethnography
Critical explorations of personal and cultural intersections
Disrupting linearity of thought
Stirring up embodied entangled accounts
Bridging literary and experimental
Performances that 'speak back'

Braidotti (2010) suggests,

> ...writing is not the manipulation of a set of linguistic or narrative conventions; nor is it the cognitive penetration of an object; nor even the appropriation of a theme...it is an orientation, it is the skill that consists in developing a compass of the cognitive, affective and ethical kind. It is quite simply an apprenticeship in the art of conceptual and perceptual colouring (Braidotti, 2010, p. 311).

Throughout the research process, I sought to write of the critical, complex and emotional stories from my experiences and layer these with insights from the research to generate ideas and narratives of practice. These processes became orientations by which I learned to research and write into the 'cognitive, affective and ethical' spaces suggested by Braidotti. Central to these processes was thinking through the ways in which children are constructed in the institutional world of schooling and teaching broadly in relation to issues of social justice in literacy education. Engaging in the use of self-reflective questions prompted me to further expand my writing practices that in turn led to deeper writing and analysis. What else could I imagine…? These cycles of self-questioning and creative processes provoked me to express my ideas through different forms of writing; to explore the nuanced details of experience from the personal to the cultural features. I sought to craft my texts using theories to think with as I engaged in practices and processes of writing as a form of inquiry, which have the purpose of opening up how researchers construct knowledge about people, themselves and the world (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Braidotti et al. (2023) state that "different formats of thinking and writing are needed to find ways to adequately account for the complex present" (p.3). Eschewing the belief that language somehow represents 'reality' (out there), I turned towards the belief that language 'creates' reality (St. Pierre, 2015). Richardson (2000) describes a range of creative analytic practices that researchers can employ when seeking to break genres of research and writing. With/in these practices the researcher is freed to write in a number of different ways, eschewing the idea of 'getting it right' but rather 'getting it differently.' With/in these deeply introspective processes, the researcher pursues a deeper understanding of areas of their research that would not be 'knowable' using conventional methods. I came to understand from these ideas that even if one chooses to write using a conventional format, "trying on different modes of writing is a practical and powerful way to expand interpretive skills, raise one's consciousness and bring a fresh perspective to one's research" (Richardson, 2000, p. 10). It is from these key research explorations and ideas that I *found* autoethnography.

Researchers have conceptualised the aims and purposes of autoethnography from diverse perspectives and disciplines. There is a consensus however, that as a methodology, it is concerned with examining the nexus of the self and culture (Pelias, 2004) in which the researcher produces creatively written, detailed, first-person accounts of the relationship between personal autobiography and culture (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013). As articulated by Adams and Herrmann (2020), autoethnography can be described as both a methodology and orientation to research and is defined by three interrelated components: 'auto,' 'ethno,' and 'graphy.' They state that autoethnographic projects use selfhood, subjectivity, and personal experience (auto) to describe, interpret, and represent (graphy) beliefs, practices, and identities of a group or culture (ethno). Significantly, what emerges, however, is the need for "personal experience [which] must be used intentionally to illuminate and interrogate cultural beliefs, practices, and identities ("ethno")" (p. 2).

-Scratch-

How might you write of the experiences in your life? What comes to the fore? I have come to believe as a researcher when writing of the personal and critical aspects of

experiences, it is impossible to separate our histories, memories, and feelings when engaging in deep introspection. In this way, my writing flows almost as if it takes a life of its own. It is impossible to bracket out emotions as they come in waves throughout the research process. Anger at times, frustration and moments of joy experienced throughout my career re-turn to take hold throughout the research process. So deeply inscribed in my body. Calling forth different ways to think, to critically engage with my imagination – uncannily this eluded me throughout my career in the institutional world of the classroom, driven by neoliberal desires. The immeasurability of emotions, understandings and experiences account for very little in the neoliberal world of the classroom, yet are intensely felt.

> What if we were to write to find out what we are thinking rather than meticulously to recapitulate the views of others? (Herzogenrath, 2022, p. 10).

Exploring autoethnographic research approaches engaged me to consider the deeply personal methodological and theoretical potential of ideas – to write to find out what I was thinking rather than "recapitulate the views of others" as suggested by Herzogenrath (2022, p. 10). To engage in forms of writing that might *stir* something up, touch an analytic nerve or provoke a way in which something new might come into play. As a methodology, autoethnography became a way of not only being able to write of the deeply personal realms of my professional life but to critique educational institutional life. To be able to use words as *performances* on the page as a longing to make visible issues of injustice. Vicars (2015) describes this as a consciously ethical stance in research endeavours to 'speak back' to the normative practices that create oppression for the vulnerable. Disrupting ways to unsettle and trouble the grand narratives that prescribe narrow ways to teach and research became central to how I was becoming a researcher. In coming to autoethnography as a methodology, I found ideas that were vital in my research, especially the use of forms of critical storytelling that were evocative, expressive yet engaged deeply in cultural critique of the institution of schooling.

Autoethnography opened up moments throughout my research that immersed me in writing that goes beyond the mere description of events that are driven by positivist aims to prove, verify; argumentative claims that unequivocally declare... *this is what it*

*means...how it happened (*and the like). It seemed to entangle so beautifully with many of the ideas I was exploring from the world of postfoundational research. Seeking to eschew my father's paradigm (Lather, 2004) as I experimented with writing in creative and expansive ways, I began to understand forms of analysis and writing that embrace the potential for wonder – to invite elements of surprise. How else might I write of all of the emotions and moments in daily teaching life that do not easily and readily translate? Or as Law (2004) describes those things that "exceed our capacity to know them?" (p. 6). I constantly sought to examine ways in which I could think more deeply about my research and ponder all that we miss in research, in life, when we reduce human experience in/to a series of methodological prescriptive *logical* steps or explanations. Gergen and Gergen (2018) are informative here. They argue that a goal in composing autoethnographies is to provide an in-depth and embodied experience of the life of the writer. In line with this, researchers 'cast aside' alienating forms of traditional academic writing and instead employ more vibrant and expressive discourse of everyday life. They note that, "a premium is placed on emotionally engaged writing that will bring the reader into the subjective world of the writer" (p. 5). Yes - vibrant, and expressive. Words that might *live* on a page. This was a far cry from my (colonised) belief that any *serious* research endeavours required the constant need for the researcher to prove and validate all knowledge claims with 'evidence' which was to be recorded in *scientific* prose. There were alternatives.

Autoethnography is a methodology well suited to understanding the ways that stories of personal experience can interrogate the broader contexts of social inequality that shape life trajectories (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Several researchers have employed its use to write of their teaching lives. Henderson (2018) composed autoethnographic 'narratives of the heart,' to interrogate the deeply emotional and troubled worlds of the children she taught and how these intersected with her teaching life. Narrating the daily challenges she faced as an educator and writing of the complexities of those worlds, involved her in deep introspection and the interrogation of institutional life. Legge (2014) used a dialogic component in her autoethnography from her experiences as a physical education teacher. She *invited* readers "to compare their experience...to consider how they might research their practice...to initiate further dialogues that resonate from the tensions that educators face as they negotiate their way in the profession" (p. 118). The power of sharing autoethnography as a critical process of self-analysis and understanding in relation to

social and cultural discourses positions it as a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and at times, messy world of education.

Bochner's (2013) belief that autoethnography is "not so much a method but a methodology where one agitates, questions yet importantly critiques the dominant discourses in culture" (p. 53) resonates with me. As a classroom teacher and school leader, I always felt somewhat isolated in my thoughts and views related to teaching and learning, especially in the (highly contested) space of literacy pedagogy. In seeking to understand how issues of disadvantage affect the lives of children and importantly the ways in which these can be challenged, I am reminded of Pelias (2019), who notes that autoethnographic research often emerges out of a sense of agitation and a desire for social advocacy and change.

-Scratch-

What kind of 'knowledge' do you encounter in your everyday cultural, social, personal and emotional life? Assuming for a moment these could ever be separated! Is this something you think about? Exploring approaches that critically examine the intersections of the cultural, social, personal and emotional elements of school life invited me into methodologies that examine the nuances of more situated experiences. These enabled me to work towards a multilayered, critical account of the world of literacy teaching and learning where traditional concepts like validity were eschewed in order to create space for the emotional and affective worlds of lived experience. I thus sought approaches that embrace the critical examination of school life yet were threaded with personal and intimate layers of experience. Forms of expression that invite the reader to critically reflect on their own experiences.

Autoethnography as critical research

Several researchers attest to the critical, emancipatory and transformative potential of autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020; Holman Jones 2016; Marx et al., 2017). Although there are a diversity of approaches and perspectives, I came to understand that autoethnography has been likened to a form of critical pedagogy in its commitment to

transformative and emancipatory processes in pursuit of situated understandings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). In other words, autoethnography offered me opportunities to enact a "genuinely critical pedagogy" (Hickey & Austin, 2007, p. 21) as it pursues the examination of oneself and at the same time exposes the mediating social and cultural structures play in the construction of identities. Tilley-Lubbs (2018) believes that critical autoethnography enables a socially just way of conducting research in marginalised, vulnerable communities. Furthermore, Miller (2017) states that autoethnographic methods allow for the interrogation of experience where as teachers, researchers, authors, and people we are able "to critically examine the stories, assumptions, values, habits, and emotions we bring to our work" (p. 2).

Critical processes are reflected in autoethnography as the researcher asks questions about *how* the personal and cultural intersect and provides a story of how those intersections influence those involved (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018). These processes "seek to identify manifestations of power and privilege in everyday practices; discern social injustices and inequities; and describe beliefs and practices that should— and should not—exist" (Adams, 2017, p. 79). Key ideas in these approaches further helped me understand ways in which researchers could trouble and transgress the boundaries separating scientific and literary modes of truth telling (Bochner, 2017).

Researching the experiences of my children and my own literacy teaching involved writing of the emotional, intellectual and political landscapes of teaching and learning. At the core of this methodology is the need to challenge the authoritative dominant discourses of educational policy that marginalise specific children. Adams and Holman Jones (2018) believe that as a form of doing social research, autoethnography bridges literary and experimental writing with the social and cultural in order to teach us about the work of life, illuminating what otherwise remains hidden. Similarly, Tenore and Justice (2018) suggest that critical theoretical orientations in educational research include the aim to *speak back* to dominant discourses in education. They argue that, although diverse, critical theories are underpinned by several core tenets including the use of "counter-storytelling, narrative and naming one's own reality; decentring power; consciousness raising; and activism and advocacy" (p. 2).

Looking more closely at ways in which researchers critique dominant culturalised patterns of literacy teaching and learning and to ask critical questions about how we learn and why we do the things that we do (Hayler, 2016) expanded my critical aims. Following Pelias (2023) who has staged his autoethnographic research as opportunities to find his way into resistance, I became more attuned to the need for my writing to not only explore the personal realms of experience, but also to express a sense of agitation, a dissatisfaction with the status-quo and all that is unjust in the world of literacy teaching and learning. I engaged throughout my research in response to Gannon (2018a) who writes of the up close and personal narratives of practice that "exceed the neoliberal logics of capture and distance that we have become used to" (p. 54).

Critiquing autoethnography

Writing of the self and cultural experiences in deeply emotional and critical ways is not without its critics. Several researchers have questioned concerns that as a methodology, autoethnography that uses personal experience as the basis for research is self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualised (Stahlke Wall, 2016). Many have argued that autoethnographic modes of inquiry and writing have no *analytic mileage* and tell readers "nothing about anything of social scientific, pedagogic or educational interest" (Delamont, 2009, p. 58). Others have called for autoethnography to be *rescued* as it has been methodologically lost to the fashion for subjective and evocative ethnographic work (Atkinson, 2006). Moreover, the need to represent research texts that adhere to more *analytic* interpretations has been argued by Anderson (2006). He contests the use of evocative forms of research instead emphasising the need for detailed analysis which he conceptualises as, 'analytic autoethnography.' He states:

> The purpose of analytic autoethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an 'insider's perspective' or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insights into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves (pp. 386-387).

Mere cultural exposure without profound cultural analysis is also cautioned by Chang (2008), when using autoethnographic methods. Aligning her beliefs with Anderson, she

claims that an excessive focus on the self in isolation from others and an overemphasis on narration to the detriment of cultural analysis and interpretation, are 'pitfalls' that need to be avoided by researchers. In response to these concerns, Tedlock (2013) argues for the braiding of evocative with analytic ways of undertaking autoethnographic research. In this conceptualisation she makes a persuasive case that speaks to the need to create spaces where the use of both evocative and analytic approaches can produce forms of powerful writing about the self in the world in order to agitate for changes. She notes that "writing and performing vulnerably ...with passion and analytic accuracy allows one to emerge from a soulless representation of social worlds outside the self into sensuous, evocative research that encourages and supports both personal development and social justice in the world" (p. 361).

Dear Self,

How easily we slip into our colonised self, so utterly primed for modernist enactments of a singular detached researcher whose quest aligns with mechanised productions of 'credible' knowledge demanding that we erase any semblance of our capacity to feel through our research, to trust what we know, what might be imagined in alternative frames. To recognise our relations in the world that call on us to pause, to take hold, to complicate desires for certainty, to incite turns toward other possibilities. Koro et al. (2022, p.163) note that these can be felt as slippages that enter our attempts at representations. I reimagine these as affective forces that refuse to be pinned down in dry, detached accounts of classroom life - that circulate to agitate for newness.

Addressing criticisms: the need for critical and embodied ways of knowing

Just as there are multiple ways of living in and experiencing the social world, so too are there diverse ways in which we can research and write scholarly autoethnographic investigations (Banks, 2007). Zimmerman (2021) suggests that "while neoliberalism would have us take for granted that hard data is the only knowledge worth knowing" (p. 243), autoethnographic forms of research call for a diversity of creative ways to explore cultural and social phenomena. Given its aims to critically examine the subjective worlds

of experience to investigate the nuances and complexities of social life, autoethnography disrupts "master narratives [that] possess a totalising character as they aim to impose order on the world from a distinct, if often hidden ideological point of view that appears to be authoritative, final and exclusionary of alternative viewpoints, all-knowing" (Barone, 2008, p. 38). In these disruptive moves, Freire's (1970) words have resonance when we consider, "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72).

Eschewing the grand narratives that dominate and set the parameters for educational research (and what is valued as knowledge), autoethnographic methods challenge dominant, traditional forms of research that claim to have greater explanatory power, forms of validity, reliability and generalisability than more personal forms of research. This kind of knowledge generation reflects the pursuit of *certainty* (Eisner, 2007) which is antithetical to autoethnographic methods that foreground particular and subjective knowledge (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2022). In this way, knowledge creation becomes entangled in research and writing possibilities in order to generate alternative narratives (Moss, 2019). The turn towards more creative and multiple forms of knowledge generation and *knowing* is recognised by Sesta and Vicars (2024, forthcoming), who highlight the need to expand how we conceptualise knowledge generation. They suggest:

- Knowing as embodiment- knowing through our body recognises the hunger, tastes, discomforts and pains.
- Knowing as emotion- opening us up to worlds of passions, intuition, fears and betrayals.
- Knowing through deliberate imposition- thinking with ideas about the world and ourselves that are slippery and indistinct.
- Knowing as situated inquiry- how far is knowledge able to *travel* and does it still make sense in other locations and lives?

Being curious about the ineffable and the tacit can take us into "the fleeting, sensory, embodied and emotional aspects of experience that are difficult to observe or find language to describe" (Holman Jones & Adams, 2024, p. 424).

- Scratch-

I wonder to what extent you experience the effects of neoliberalism in your daily life. Perhaps more significantly, what impact has it had on how you learn, teach, research and live? Well, for me, neoliberalism had significant effects on what became privileged as 'knowledge' in the early literacy teaching world – what was worthy of 'knowing.' It demanded that 'knowing' was consistently aligned with memorising facts that erased opportunities for imaginative thinking, feeling or creativity. Learning that is 'external' to the child. Detached from their body. It demanded the teacher deliver a host of disconnected facts and enact endless assessments to then measure knowledge of these facts. A dehumanising endeavour dominated by the collection of "meaningless metrics" (Riddle, 2018, p. 28). Emotions and feelings are rarely discussed in the world of schooling that privilege quantified, big data as the (only) legitimate form of knowledge. These are felt by teachers and in turn children in their limiting, limited and oppressive forms.

Finding evocative and analytic forms of writing and research that works against the neoliberal desire to reduce complexity into singular, simple explanations is at the heart of autoethnography for me. Zembylas (2021) advances the call for a critical pedagogy to acknowledge the affective dimension of resistance. He believes this marks an important and necessary moment that addresses the challenges faced by teachers and students in neoliberal education. Recognising the *critical* aspects of autoethnography as well as embracing the evocative layers of experience, enabled me to reimagine forms of expression that created new ways for me to conceptualise and (re)present my research. This involved a deep dive into the complexities of teaching and learning; being concerned in essence with the everyday.

Using approaches that critically examined the cultural, social and personal elements of school life invited me into the nuances of more *situated* knowledge that come from a range of positions and perspectives that are sorely neglected and 'de-legitimised'. Effectively, this meant questioning, 'Whose science, Whose knowledge?' (Harding, 1991) in light of the fact that "far too often [this is] a "science that silences too many voices" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 16). From these insights, what emerged for me

methodologically was the importance of legitimising knowledge that values and "deploys a personal, literary, aesthetic, and affective approaches to construct moment-to-moment and concrete scenes from the world" (Gannon, 2020, p. 5) of schooling.

Paying attention to embodied and critical forms of research and writing means turning away from humanist quests for certainty; to explain, define or represent data in neatly structured 'findings.' Rather what is enacted is the creative exploration of ideas, feelings, moments, events and memories that 'intra-act' in writing – where narratives may perform a multitude of work. A critical, postfoundational framework that privileges practice, politics, action, consequences, performances, discourses, methodologies of the heart (Pelias, 2004) is aligned with autoethnographic methods. My argument for conjoining these approaches is central to highlighting and interrogating cultural beliefs, literacy practices, and identities (Herrmann & Adams, 2020) to interrogate issues of power, identity and agency, and how these impact on the learning lives of children and teachers. These concerns are expressed by Kincheloe et al. (2018) who urge researchers to avoid clinging to the "guardrail of neutrality" (p. 237) to pursue critical inquiry that pushes back to redefine the place of the academy and challenge prevailing forms of inequality, poverty, human oppression and injustice.

Autoethnography as narrative research

Autoethnographic inquiries frequently make use of narrative methods to explore the complexity of lived experience (Denzin, 2014; Glesne, 2016) and highlight the power of stories to "help us live with more creative, ethical and political conviction" (Leggo, 2012, p.xix). Adams et al. (2015) note that autoethnographers foreground the power of stories to describe and critique culture. In this way, stories have the capacity to pay attention to the critical aspects of life through the re-examination of the values and interests undergirding certain discourses, practices, and institutional arrangements (Harwood, 2001). Bochner and Riggs (2014) describe researchers who use personal narratives to explore experience as 'academic storytellers' who strive to connect theory to story by inviting others to think and feel with the stories we compose. In this way, autoethnographers pursue forms of storytelling that create connections between "past and present, researchers and participants, writers and readers, tellers and audiences" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 23).

Dear Self,

To deeply understand forms of oppression, what ways can we shed the skin of our colonised selves? Is this ever even possible? These questions provoke me as I repeatedly tell myself that I must unlearn all that has come to constitute my learning and researcher 'self.' A lifelong process. The lessons learned very well that produce the highly self-disciplined, individualised self that pursues success in accordance with the requirements of the academy. But what are the lessons we really learn? What resonates from our knowledge encounters, those predominantly delivered through transmission banking models of education (Freire, 1970) that mostly engage in the production of the recall of facts and quests for 'truth.' In the world of the academy, we learn mostly about modes of research practices that teach us to seek little more than the replication of methods that limit ways of seeing and conceptualising the world. Key messages and requirements to ensure we know up front what we will "do", guarantee we map out each step of the way, verify all, fill a (pre-determined) gap and thoroughly and clearly justify what things mean. Too often this involves leaving out the mess in the stories we tell which mostly express the complexities, emotions and experiences in our teaching life. Those sources of knowledge that are still (incredibly) marginalised as legitimate ways that we come to know in the unquestioned evidence-based world of education. Yet it is with/in this mess that resides powerful critical, and aesthetic ways in which we can (re)tell our stories. To examine how autoethnographic narrative prose may elucidate the complexities of our subjectivities and bring into relation increasingly expansive frames for (re)situating our lives (Singh, 2018).

Researching autoethnography took me into diverse words, worlds and ideas that examined the personal and cultural moments from classroom life in beautiful, evocative ways. There were moments of heartbreak. Ludic, at times playful. Diversity. A multiplicity of interpretations, infused with empathy and understanding expressed through powerful storytelling. Being in what felt like the *freeing* world of writing and research that was not reduced to singular interpretations. The autoethnographies that drew me in were imbued with a deeply *critical* edge, a research and writing landscape that called for the reader to feel, to ruminate...to do *something*. To understand that "ultimately

political change depends on good storytelling (Plummer, 2016, p. 281). Being compelled however to *feel.* I am reminded how "the sharing of stories illuminates the often hidden and private experiences that give meaning to everyday life, making things more visible without making them simple" (Hayler, 2013, p. 22).

In using narrative methods, Pinner (2018) argues that the researcher is unconcerned with issues of reliability or a recoverable *truth* but rather recognises the alternative perspectives that it provides. He notes that in using narrative methods to write autoethnographies, there is always a level of subjectivity and as such the value of the narrative comes not from its representation of the unrecoverable 'truth' but rather from the alternative perspective that it provides. Similarly, Pelias (2004) calls for more creative methodologies and multiple ways in which we can story our lives, 'from the heart.' These mark a different space in response to traditional modes of research that claim verifiable 'truths' in favour of compassion; crushing alternative possibilities in the silencing of minority voices. The need to agitate through personal forms of storytelling is recognised by Ettorre (2016) who describes the role of narrative as one that shifts or pushes us from notions that there is a single cultural perspective revealing an irrefutable set of truths. She identifies the power of how speaking about oneself has the capacity to transform into stories as political responsibility.

Several researchers attest to the power of storytelling as a means to understand lived experiences and how meanings can be reshaped to give new hope and promise. Bochner and Herrmann (2020) believe that in practising narrative inquiry we are orientated to the multiple fluid nature of experience not the fixed self (where the experience is outside of us) but that of a complex shifting identity that is continually being constructed. The use of narrative as a way to understand how individuals are shaped and changed by the stories in which they live and act is recognised by Sisk-Hilton and Meier (2017). They believe that:

> Much of our "success" with narrative inquiry in educational contexts is predicated on our openness to embracing our memories and those critical events, experiences, ideas, and feelings that intertwine our personal and professional lives, as well as our openness to counter-narratives, the stories of others that may interpret events and actions completely differently than we do (p. 11).

Furthermore, a variety of narrative elements are used by autoethnographers. Hamilton et al. (2008) describe various genres of writing that the autoethnographer may incorporate including personal writing in first person, the use of a multi-genre approach and the incorporation of short stories, poetry, novels, images, journals, fragmented and layered writing. Crucially, for my research, was the need to harness the critical power of storytelling, to explore the assemblages that are entangled in systems of oppression that exist in the everyday life institutional life of schools that greatly affect lives. In this way, critical autoethnographies critique harmful, dominant narratives, which often go unnoticed because of their mundanity and/or lack of acknowledgment (Bolen, 2017) and arguably their complexity. As I engaged in deeper processes throughout my research, I became more aware of the diversity of methodologies that have been used to explore the entangled relations with/in storying our lives. Ingold (2011) suggests:

> to tell a story is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, bringing them to life in the vivid present of listeners as if they were going on here and now....where the meaning of the 'relation' has to be understood quite literally, not as a connection between predetermined entities, but as the retracing of a path through the terrain of lived experience (p. 160).

The potential of 'retracing paths' by bringing stories to 'life in the present' has resonance. Throughout my research, I wondered about the dominant narratives that shaped our literacy lives and the potency of understanding how "changing the stories we live by have the power to change our lives" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 212). Were these propositions, invitations, compulsions (even) to imagine otherwise - to live otherwise?

Troubling the "I"

> [The] polyvocal being, listening with and embodying many voices at once while tearing a line through stability, is the existence of the unsettled 'I' (Spry, 2016, p. 77).

With/in the practices of critical autoethnography, scholars have sought to *trouble* the subjective "I" i.e., the subject in conventional qualitative research that can be seen to be

the [only] authority of knowledge production. Gannon (2022) suggests that the "I" claimed in autoethnographic texts may give the impression of a stable and coherent humanist subject who seeks to generate *truth* accounts of lived experience. Framed with/in poststructural theories she proposes that autoethnographers have to "think beyond the stubbornly human dimensions of subjectivity" (p. 41) to consider our more than human relations as we work within the materiality of encounters and the lines of force that are brought into play. St. Pierre (1997a) conceptualises the researcher as embracing a 'folded subjectivity' to illuminate the inseparability of the researcher and the processes of research. She states that this enabled her to enact a different subjectivity where the "subject no longer remains separate from objects or time or space, but enters into composition with them" (p. 412). Relatedly, a preparedness to eschew the authority of voice as (the only) source of knowledge in autoethnographic narratives is argued by Vu (2018). She suggests the use of a performative voice as an alternative noting that:

> The performative narrator is concerned not with identifying who researchers are, and how they are similar or different from the Other, but how their experiences constrain what they know and how they represent participants or themselves in their worlds. Writing autoethnographies now is less a way of telling than a way of knowing in being (p. 75).

In striving toward this 'knowing in being' are ways to reconstitute the 'I' in narrative research. According to Jackson and Mazzei (2008), they suggest a poststructural deconstructive form of autoethnography that acknowledges the constraints of "one" telling in order to trouble the authority of the researcher as being able to account for *unproblematic* representations of experience. In these deconstructive ways, they seek "to move toward a performative 'I' who uses experience not as a foundation for knowledge but as a concept under erasure to expose the indecidability of meaning, of self, of narrative without requiring self-identification or mastery" (p. 305). A key aspect of their proposed form of deconstructive autoethnography includes an emphasis on the 'I' as *becoming* which produces a fragmented and incomplete subject and narrative that is "an assemblage of multiplicities" (p. 309) as opposed to a 'truthful,' stable narrative account. Working against the coherent, all-knowing subject is also put under erasure by Davies (2014a), who argues that the researcher embodies multiple subjectivities. In this way, she believes that "the intra-actively becoming subject is reconceptualised as [an] emergent, relational

being [who is always] becoming different...in this way of thinking we are all made of the same matter and inhabit the same humanity" (p. 35). In expanding this view of multiplicity further, Coulter (2020) conceptualises the subject *diffractively* to imagine possibilities in narrative research. This involves a capacity to:

> ...create ontological sense-events that exist within assemblages that entangle the reader, the narrator, the place, the writer, and the participants temporally and spatially [with/in] a fleeting assemblage of material and discursive entanglement of temporality of causality and sensually within a flattened event (p. 1213).

Strom et al. (2018) also question how the researcher subject in 'intimate forms of scholarship' such as autoethnography, become open to multiple entangled relations. They ask, "What happens when the researcher is decentred – as no longer the sole focus but as part of the entangled material-discursive research formations?" (p. 1). This form of scholarship offers opportunities to disrupt the "I" of the researcher and analyse the multiple, dynamic entanglements of material and discursive forces in which knowledge can be produced. Further to this notion of the fragmented, relational subject is the idea of an emergent, nomadic subject embraced by Braidotti (2019). She argues that the *posthuman* subject is one who is constituted beyond human exceptionalism, "not unitary or autonomous [but] embodied and embedded, who is constituted with/in relational and affective collaborative entities"(p. 46).

-Scratch-

Where might you begin in narrating your life experiences? Weaving the complex terrains of memory, experience and creation saw me engage in ways to make the past live in the present...forms of writing to unsettle injustices, and to closely examine what often remains hidden in the complex worlds of the classroom. I have come to understand that (re)telling stories of experiences, deeply felt emotions, imagining the voices of Others are never settled accounts of what 'was.' These narrative practices refuse any chronology of accounts or definitive 'meanings' but rather seek to reanimate and reshape the complexity of lived experiences. These took the form of a kind of dislocating the subject as all knowing, all seeing, challenging normative discourses in educational policy and

practices that reduces knowledge and knowing to limited versions of all that can be 'verified'. Creativity killers.

Autoethnographic entanglements

As I became immersed in the world of postfoundational ideas, I began to understand how these shifted the ontological and epistemological ways of writing and research found within conventional qualitative research. These 'new' ways of pursuing research required that I become open to relational matters in the world that go beyond the *human* limitations of representation (these ideas are expanded in Chapter 4). This entailed relaxing *not* into the familiar comfortable ways in which 'this *means* that' but rather embracing encounters of living-writing as plugging into different assemblages (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). Barad (2008) notes that:

> practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices, but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather, they are mutually implicated (p. 147).

With/in these relational assumptions, my thinking and writing became conceptualised as a process of creativity from which I sought to more deeply understand the human, non-human and more than human entanglements and what these might mean for autoethnographic research and writing. These became continuous engagements of thinking with disparate assemblages of experiences, artefacts, memories, children's literacy learning, neoliberalism and theories which opened up opportunities for more experimental and speculative approaches. I wondered about different forms of writing and the ways in which it could be used to express critical, evocative and analytical compositions. I turned to researchers such as Gannon (2018b), who recognises the more than human relations in her research and writing 'inventions.' She advocates for "the invention of a textual space where affect moves amongst us and the material things and events of the world, where my story might ripple with yours (and yours and yours and yours ...) in unpredictable ways" (p. 21).

Dear Self,

Do you remember when all you did was 'take' notes, furiously highlight (at times a whole paper!) that did little more than momentarily appease an indoctrinated subject/ method under the guise that you were somehow 'learning' by retaining tomes of information (as if). Then over time, you realised the liberating and creative potential of finding new ways to imagine knowledge creation and conceptualise your ideas in research and writing as inquiry that could be guided by new concepts. My (mere) recitational acts of knowing as duplicating the already known now strive toward more creative possibilities.

Writing and researching into these spaces where the generation of alternative narratives might live, enabled me to continually experiment with different writing forms that invited new ways to use concepts and to think creatively. This meant pursuing what St. Pierre (2018) refers to as "experimentation... [which] cannot be accomplished within methodological enclosure... it cannot be measured, predicted, controlled, systematized, formalized, described in a textbook, or called forth by pre-existing, approved methodological processes, methods, and practices" (p. 604).

Delving into the complex layers of experience that are interpolated by histories, hauntings, nostalgia of place, space and time (Pillow, 2024), engaged me to think deeply about the implications of these entanglements for my research. I wondered about how these possibilities could enable me to write and research against forms of oppression in the institution of schooling. My readings produced a sense of curiosity and passion to understand these complexities to inspire ways I might research *differently*. As I pursued these, I encountered key ideas from postfoundational thinking that inspired me to question issues such as knowledge production, the use of data, the positioning of the 'Other' and most notably, the ways in which research has evolved (and continues to...) in terms of writing and representation.

As I became entangled in these ideas I came to understand educational institutions as knowledge production entities that contained strong traces of positivist practices. This is reflected in its privileging of evidence that somehow reflects *the* 'truth' of the "Other" vis

a vis the child being endlessly assessed and immersed in the discourse of *objectivity*. Practices, perspectives, policies and beliefs experienced and felt so profoundly across the landscape of literacy teaching and learning became entangled in the texts I composed. Specifically, I pondered the ways in which notions of the 'Other' was sought to be understood from a colonising position of the all-knowing (all conquering...) detached 'human' researcher (teacher) who essentially seeks to document the 'Other" (child) ensuring accounts were devoid of any personal reflections or considerations of the more than human elements in our teaching lives. How pervasively these ideas still live within the contemporary neoliberally driven world of education. Worryingly. Especially concerning were considerations of children's experiences, their capacity to bring their *whole* selves into the classroom that were completely erased from neoliberal narratives of teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

In terms of representation, I was challenged by the notion that "language has been granted too much power" as stated by Barad (2003, p. 801). As a teacher, a writer and researcher who has literally fallen in love with the possibilities of autoethnography, I struggled to come to terms with this proposition. Language for me had such profound potential in the research and writing of injustices. I believe that autoethnography has an incredible power to use words to deeply touch, to agitate, and to call on the world to notice, to feel, to *act.* Does this mean my passions for words, for language, need to be sidelined? In turning to researchers such as Wilde (2022), I learned that thinking with ideas from posthumanism did not erase intimate forms of storytelling that relies on the power of words or personal expression, but rather recognises that our writing and researcher *self* becomes part of an assemblage. Wilde (2022) suggests that when storytelling the 'self' we acknowledge the entangled and distributed 'multiple self.' She states, "storytelling the multiple self in this way, and exposure to such 'experimental' forms of writing—and thus being—allows an opportunity to radically reconsider what 'self' means and to disrupt humanistic hierarchies and the sanctity of the individual" (p. 3). Furthermore, we are able to:

> ...explore the fullness of the meaning of 'I', [and] we can use it as an operational enactment to break out of the individualistic suggestion it makes, and to embolden it as a critically reflexive becoming through which we make sense of how we experience the world (Wilde, 2022, p. 10).

So, what then becomes possible or thinkable in the doing of inquiry in this 'emboldened' storying of the multiple self that seeks to work with/in and against interpretivism? As previously stated, several researchers have inspired much of my thinking and ideas in utilising theories and concepts in my research from the world of what Mazzei and Jackson (2024) refer to as 'postfoundational' inquiry. As one who has heeded St. Pierre's advice to study those philosophers' theories and concepts, (i.e., to read, read, read...), I regularly reflected on these and importantly how they could inspire my research. To assist me to think differently and generate alternative ways of conceptualising (literacy) classroom worlds. There have been many revelations in these processes which continue to challenge me. One in particular has been the critique of the 'human' which begs the question, 'who actually is constituted as human? In light of the oppressive experiences of children like Grace, do we consider our children as *less than* human? 'What else is happening in the classroom world that may enable us to theorise the everyday in new ways? Provocations such as these led me into diverse, complex and challenging philosophical/theoretical ideas that open up analytical possibilities as we embrace human, non-human and 'more than human' entanglements.

-Scratch-

Struggling to learn, to know, to write. My immersion in and determination to constantly think with and write with these complex ideas leaves me at times in places of confusion that turns into moments of deep anxiety as I wrestle with the ideas I am drawn to. They are all so new. Like learning a new language I frequently tell those around me. Tell myself. I am constantly thinking with and writing with these complex ideas that leave me at times in places of confusion and heightened anxiety as I wrestle with the vocabulary and the concepts. To bring them into view as I analyse literacy classroom life – to find expressions. This can be such a lonely place ..so solitary… between you and some distant writer. Entangled with a host of emotions, affects, memories, hauntings and self-doubt. Attempts to consume all that is antithetic to the neoliberal desiring machines at times immobilises me.

Dear Self,

A rant. Today I am anxious, angry even. I seem to be looking to pick a fight. As I delve deeper into my research I feel such resentment for the years I witnessed such epistemic violence against so many children. How is it that these appointed leaders/policy makers/purveyors of injustice are able to so effortlessly perpetuate such unfair divisions created by the neoliberal machine as normalised ways in which we do school? So many beautiful children who have done little more than apparently been born in the wrong post code. How cruelly neoliberal 'reforms' that conceptualise teaching as technical modes of content delivery deprive us of rich opportunities to imagine otherwise. To rush us through each day, configuring our teaching worlds as those that must be 'endured.' Scripted forms of classroom life requiring mechanical acts of content delivery that exclude and carve up children's literacy learning. The moving from one unthinking, unquestioned motion from day to day with little recognition of the need to stop, to acknowledge all that feels so unjust - so unethical….as we are driven toward the empty promises of the next big educational 'initiative.'

These ideas provoked me to think more deeply about the everyday institutional world of literacy education, especially the use of standardised English and the nature of knowledge production. Of significance, were concerns with how narrow literacy practices and an intense focus on individualism operated with/in the tacit conceptualisations of the 'human' to the exclusion of any other relations. My questions lead me to think with specific concepts and theories to imagine what else becomes implicated in social justice issues. The human is certainly not erased in these approaches but 'decentred' in order to bring a diversity of relations into play. Throughout, I engaged in much contemplation related to the ethical nature of teachers' work, and that of the researcher. How we are so mired in everyday institutional discourse and practices - the persistent human centred 'normative' language, structures and ways of seeing that perpetuate dogmatic thought. I became much more attuned to the unquestioning ways in which 'man' and his method (St. Pierre, 2024) continues to assert itself in its hegemonic forms. It has enabled me to employ diverse concepts that I used to help me to 'imagine otherwise' - to critically question and write of the alternative ways in which we can conceptualise children and literacy learning worlds.

Herzogenrath (2022) asks, “can’t we try to infuse life, and the senses, into education? Might we need an academic unwriting to change or challenge the “gold standard” of academic critique?” (p. 3). Pursuing these forms of academic ‘unwritings’ and other ways of conceptualising research that produced difference, completely transformed me. Yet significantly transformed the ways in which I could challenge conventional approaches to researching classroom life. Being attuned to the emergence of relations in its differential entanglements has been recognised in autoethnographic methods. In these ways, the personal is significant, however it unfolds with/in a strong commitment to *becoming-with* people, things, and environments that strive to exist in better and more just ways (Holman Jones & Adams, 2024). This notion of *becoming-with* is conceptualised by Gale and Wyatt (2019) who suggest that “autoethnographic practices are assembling and dissembling bodies that are active in always territorializing space and in world making. They have the capacity to affect and be affected and, therefore, as performing and performative practices, they act and are acted upon” (p. 566). In a similar fashion, Spry (2022, p. 167) suggests the notion of a posthuman performative subjectivity where the body, texts and voice are not separate entities but elements that are equally agentic with things human and non-human.

Dear Self,

This morning I wrote, ‘when efficiency becomes the goal in our literacy classrooms, hearts and minds do not enter into the equation.’ It made me wonder what the possibilities for thinking, research and writing might be opened up when we use alternative theories to think with - that take us beyond the narrowly defined quantified methods in the world of ‘big data.’ Where the privileging of all that can be seen, measured and quantified dominates the world of education. How narrowly we see children, their worlds when all is defined by a series of numbers in their educational life. Where the body and mind are separated. The energy required to keep our emotions, feelings, and affects separate from all things teaching and learning depletes us. Colebrook (2002, p.xix) notes that for Deleuze, great thinking does not settle with a fixed system or foundation but rather in acts of creation where “we create concepts not in order to label a life and tidy up our ideas but to transform and complicate our ideas” (p.xix). What kinds of new worlds; new ideas and subjectivities that redress socially unjust practices can be imagined if we pursue new images of thought?

The entanglements of myself as researcher with my writing and thinking became profound throughout the research process. It was impossible to separate the aspects of my research and my researcher life. My *former* researcher self sought to use the artefacts of my professional practice as catalysts to find 'what they meant' or what they *could* mean. As representations of a 'Truth'. Knowledge production that relied on the human 'all-knowing' researcher who seeks only to find "how meanings are represented, contained and then indexed" (Leander & Rowe, 2006, p. 431). In this way, revisiting my professional artefacts of practice and memories meant that I was intentionally focused on including the material aspects (Blaise, 2013) to consider the possibilities of *difference* that might be created.

Throughout processes of research and writing, I learned to notice 'interferences' through processes of diffraction (these ideas are discussed in Chapter 4). These enabled me to produce new ways in which I could think with theories, read through them and be attuned to the emergence of differences. As I engaged in understanding the assumptions and concepts used by postfoundational scholars, (still a project of becoming!), I began to resist the desires of the academy vis a vis conventional qualitative methods. This entailed a critical shift from the kinds of writing that seeks to prove, to validate scientific 'truths' but rather engage in creative and experimental ways to unsettle normative conventional research. Using ideas from postfoundational methodologies helped me to "illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter" (Barad, 2007, p. 30).

Becoming entangled in the world of ideas in autoethnography and postfoundational methodologies, concepts and vocabulary enabled me to critically research the complexities of experiences. To imagine new ways of seeing the world of the classroom *anew.* Conceptualising these entanglements, enabled me to interrogate the human, non-human and more than human elements of classroom life to theorise how language, discourse, materials, affects (and so on) co-constitute the conditions in which we teach and learn. I now detour into the second Interlude, Performative Speculations, that employ playful propositions I experimented with to pursue alternative ways to research and write of classroom life.

> Performative writing provides a critically, aesthetically appropriate and generative method for analysing and representing stories. The nature of performative writing as a method of inquiry allows for the complexity of human beings and recognizes the sensory elements of the phenomena as significant in the investigative process (Fitzpatrick & Longley, 2020, p. 115).

Perhaps you desire to engage in forms of critical research, writing and pedagogy that strives to contest the *business as usual* conventional qualitative research methods? This has become a vital space for my research which was brought to life by writers who suggest that in " learning to write like scientists, how limited we become! Any writing that smacks of art, the ordinary, the passionate, or the playful is considered illegitimate [as] the responsible scientist will be on guard against "frivolous" rhetoric" (Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 57). 'Frivolous rhetoric.' Hardly!

Writing that embraces the *passionate*, the *playful* as suggested above have become for me, entangled forms of critical, postfoundational, postmodern and performative possibilities. A mouthful of sorts indeed, yet I believe these produce more creative ways to think and write of our (research/pedagogical) lives. With/in these performative speculations I offer insights that might create "unexpected and surprising new relations" (Taylor & Ulmer, 2020, p. 7). You might also be interested in exploring these offerings as invitations to become entangled as you critically reimagine what we can make possible for our research and pedagogical lives. Let's go.

⟹ REMEMBER TO "GET LOST"

Questioning how and *what* we come to 'know' in our research and teaching worlds invites researchers into places of 'getting lost' (Lather, 2007). Searching for less examined ways to generate knowledge and 'see' our classroom worlds in new ways led to moments of uncertainty as I was moved into places that I had not anticipated. For me, I was soon to become "lost" (possibly still am!) - a far cry from the 'student' who arrived at my first postgraduate class. One prepared to dutifully produce and re-produce the predetermined

steps I would require to map out my research, propose declarations of methods, ensure I left traces of crumb like 'audit trails' that might magically *reach* (at some linear endpoint) findings that will fill a (self-created) gap. Those to which we then *draw* on that assure us of a kind of certainty of *conclusions*. Reconstructing fragments of my professional career was in essence (re)storying the self and classroom relations in its various entangled assemblages. These methodological enactments have helped transform my *colonised* self who feared at one point she did not have enough "data" to "prove" her claims... incredulously. Was that me?! Why do educational institutions not explicitly problematise what it means to 'know' in qualitative research – which might invite diverse ways of generating knowledge? Was that in the course and did I miss it….? The inextricable threads that entangle research, data and writing compels movement into the unknown, requiring us to dig into our bones, become entangled in the new, to trust what we might know yet also what we *feel*. Items rarely on any conventional qualitative course agenda.

IN LIGHT OF BEING LOST

Become immersed in less conventional ideas proposed by postfoundational scholars that invite alternative ways to generate knowledge. A world of possibilities can be opened up that challenged the orthodoxy of established, institutionally approved methods (St. Pierre, 2019). Ah, institutional life…it indeed starts early, its raison d'être to ensure we all achieve a high level of uniformity from our clothing, to our actions to the expectation we will all be able to produce knowledge that apparently exists out there; awaiting discovery and often determined by external criteria. Those postfoundational theorists are onto something! When learning, life and living can be reimagined as being in relation, as emergent and entangled we can shift into new, more creative ways of conceptualising our research. Our lives. A sense of vibrancy, of creativity, can be ignited when research and writing becomes entangled in our human and more than human worlds. These create opportunities that open us to the diverse ways in which we can write ourselves in/out of education (Black, 2015). To "productively challenge potentially deadening discourses" (p.50). Resist and refuse. Find rebellious ways to "transgress disciplinary boundaries ...[to find] productive space to research and write within and beyond intersections of scientific and artistic ways of knowing and being with(in) the world" (Burnard, 2022, p. 15).

⟶ SEE/BE/KNOW/DO/TEACH/LIVE ENTANGLED

Wherever possible, engage in bouts of running from trying to map out every step of your research beforehand, to ensure you explain the 'real' in your quest to find *solutions* to your research problem. Instead you might embrace 'thoughts in the act' (Manning & Massumi, 2014); ideas you have not yet imagined. These can provoke diverse thinking that might pierce through the ordinary conventional ways we think of research and writing. Engage in what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) conceptualise as 'ontological writing' that can activate thoughts in motion leading to new "becomings and doings" (p. 133). In light of this, embrace writing as ontological encounters that point towards new ways to think of persistent issues of injustice. In these inventive ways, theories become entangled in a multitude of configurations at times evoking a scholarly edge or perhaps at others a deeply felt *sting* that haunts. Tracing the entangled relations that arise in our research encounters can bring into play a wide range of heterogeneous elements that exert forces in our lives. That shape how we think, write and research. Theorising life this way draws attention to how our lives are entangled in dynamic relations where materials, objects and affects can open us up to radically rethink our everyday worlds.

⟶ ENJOY THE MESS!

Dive into research and writing that is immersed in the complexity, the messy (Law, 2004), the deeply felt ways to understand and theorise learning and classroom life. How could it be anything *other*? Isn't life messy? Look to researchers (wait for it...) to find "fruitful convergences" (St. Pierre, 2014 p. 325), that are helpful in writing of the elusive, the ethereal and difficult to describe worlds that often defy representation. Yes, more fruitful convergences please so that writing might became acts where possibilities can be opened. Expanding our writing spaces and imaginaries work against notions of order and certainty and "lead us toward the overlooked or discounted potentials of human and beyond human experiences" (Carlson, 2020, p. 1148). As Loch et al. (2017) state, spaces are not fixed into "unbreakable binaries ...[rather] they are constantly being translated, traversed, and reversed: striated to smooth and smooth to striated" (p. 67). Let's be open to take unexpected lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that lead us into the messy spaces we usually ignore. Let's take our children there also!

⟶ FEEL POWERFUL AND VULNERABLE (BUT REMEMBER IT CAN BE RISKY)

Be a 'vulnerable observer' (Behar, 2007) of the self, the personal and cultural experiences of institutional life as you explore less conventional forms of writing. You might think of these as being subversive in their pursuits of social justice and within these engagements, you can delight as you *layer* these into forms of storytelling. Accept that there will be moments of vulnerability, however, as you may encounter some unsettling places. In the words of Vicars (2010) as you "fracture the disciplining forces of procedural orthodoxy" (p. 1), be aware that some consider this as 'risky' (Sikes, 2006). This 'risky' nature of research/writing has been described as dangerous by some. Yoo (2019) documented her experiences of a 'year of writing dangerously' as an academic in order to challenge the barriers she encountered when seeking more personal and creative forms of expression. There were revelations as she discovered her *transgressions* "opened the floodgates as words flowed when no longer stifled by pressures to conform..." and declared that "my only regret was that I did not start on this path sooner" (p. 354). Carpe diem.

⟶ BE (RADICALLY) HOPEFUL

As you research and write you might produce counter-narratives as a response to the ways in which the vulnerable experience injustices in the world of schooling. Writing of a "radical hope," Toohey et al. (2020) propose researchers construct "different questions and think-with different concepts" (p. 2) to "bring forth a world distinct from what we already are" (Colebrook, 2017, p. 651). In this radical hope is a capacity to work towards the cultivation of equitable, joyful learning environments for children. Hansen and Nilsson (2022) note that storytelling can be a means to advance this 'radical hope.' They suggest that "by daring to tell our stories, we enter into a process that is larger than ourselves" (p. 1). In my research I have sought to remain hopeful, despite the recollections that at times created much despair. Many questions emerged that leave me incredulous at how issues of injustice are resounding in plain sight. I retain a hopefulness, however, that in the creation of alternative practices and spaces we can breathe *life* to imagine differently.

AS YOU HOPE, YOU CAN *SPECULATE*

Hackett (2022) notes that scholars across the social sciences have employed 'speculative storytelling' as a method that allows us to "explore other modes of thinking that might gesture towards the multiple immanent possibilities for literacies yet to come" (p. 141). In these ways, we are able to unsettle and disrupt ideas about what is true (de Freitas & Truman, 2021). Speculative writing and research in postfoundational inquiry can "make room for the new" (Mikulan & Sinclair, 2024, p. 139) as it emphasises the "permanently contingent" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p.1) nature of knowledge production. Think, tentative. Revisable. Impermanent. "Irreducibly unstable" (Lury & Wakeford, 2012, p.2). Speculative propositions disrupt the hegemony of foundational knowledge. They challenge the oppressive *universal* generalities that are laid out (unquestioned) and replicate unjust practices. As you write to speculate, illuminate the forces of signification that keep us mired in the *expected* and contest these. When we speculate we might fall in and out of love with ideas that propel us into other worlds. That might confuse and confound us, yet invite us to contemplate the possibilities for living, being, researching, writing and teaching differently. Escape the already known, embody an openness to being creative by taking account of the more than human elements that are entangled with/in our [teaching/learning/research] lives. Explore what our speculations might mean for the creation of more socially just learning spaces that *liberate* children who are persistently positioned as *fixed* subjects, labelled and contained. Movement is key to our research speculations as we imagine otherwise. These movements enable us to unsettle traditional boundaries.

CONSIDER EXPERIMENTING

Honan and Bright (2016) suggest we imagine thesis writing differently. Among several propositions, they urge researchers to eschew the conventional thesis structures that work against acts of experimentation and the creation of thought. They follow Deleuze (1994) who states, "the problem is not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist..." (p. 147). Sure these are complex ideas, yet they can invite us to research and write in ways that go beyond the *already known*. To (re)story our experiences as entangled in complex personal, emotional, material and critical relations that are excluded from traditional

accounts of life, can profoundly affect how we *see* and thus (re)create our classroom worlds. Lesko and McCall (2023) argue for experimental forms of writing. They suggest that when writing "rather than following in a straight line [take] detours... that open up the possibility for digression" (p. 60). I encountered these ideas with/in the world of postfoundational theories that seek to transgress conventional ways we approach our research and writing. It is vast, no doubt and we are challenged to find our own locations. Yet, they propose ideas that open us to engage in *wandering* and *wondering* encounters. They *insist* that "uncertainty, speculation, and curiosity displace conventions that rest upon a search for knowability, linearity, and solutions" (Osgood, 2024, p. 101).

BE OPEN TO PLAY

As you "think beyond the stable, the eternal, the identical and the constant" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 361) reproduction of ideas, be open to unexpected lines of flight as you research and write to *experiment*. As you experiment, remember to play with ideas that can incite newness. The notion of 'playful writing' is suggested by some as an integral part of experimentation. Medina et al. (2022) encourage researchers to embrace play, the imaginary, and improvisation. They propose we incorporate these important concepts into the field as research methods in order to engage people, materials, spaces, and imaginaries that are inherent in every research encounter. There is a deeply critical edge to these playful ways. Be prepared at times to work your way into the subversive. These researchers strive for writing that unapologetically celebrates its playfulness but at the same time revels in its scepticism, at times cynicism, healthy or otherwise. I have found doses of sarcasm have the capacity to pierce the apparent ease by which injustices continue. Those that produce inequalities in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning propagated by persistent neoliberal directives.

These Performative Speculations express many of the key ways in which I imagined and enacted processes of writing throughout my research. These became imbued with traces of theories and concepts that entangled with my analysis as I theorised the literacy classroom world. I now turn to explore specific theories and concepts I used to think and write with that are conceptualised as Postfoundational Enactments.

Opening up thinking
Emergent encounters
Theories and concepts
(Un)Thoughts-Entangled-Plugging in
Mobilising alternative propositions
Knowing/Becoming/Doing
A radical rethinking

It has been proposed in academia, when we 'stay in the lane' of our own disciplinary boundaries, knowledge is cordoned into separate, hidden realms. Gullion (2018) advocates we dismantle silo knowledge by engaging in "intellectual promiscuity" (p. 20) in order to be able to *see* differences, diffractions and entanglements. This shifts our view from questions of correspondence that seek to discover stable, universal meanings, towards specific practices for which "the world is differentially articulated and accounted for" (Barad, 2007, p. 149). Throughout this chapter I explore the key postfoundational philosophies, ideas and concepts I used to 'think with theory' during my research. Although these are mapped out 'linearly' under headings for the purposes of discussion, they became inextricably entangled throughout the processes of research and writing.

-Scratch-

What might we learn from paying close analytical attention to the 'more than human' world of the literacy classroom? To think with concepts that contest knowledge production concerned with measuring 'the order of things' (Foucault, 1994) - that reify universal 'truths' as foundational? What could it mean for examining the ways in which these open up or our capacity to generate knowledge? To investigate entanglements that cause us to question how theories and philosophies might enter and shape educational practice (Malone et al., 2020) can help us to imagine otherwise.

The notion of thinking with theories is entangled with postfoundational concepts. Originally introduced by Jackson and Mazzei (2012; 2023), it involves a practice in qualitative inquiry that puts all aspects of the research process in conversation with a range of concepts and theories. The purpose of which is to produce new insights by expanding analysis and thinking. This process works against conventional ‘data analysis’ and forms of representation that they argue are reductive (e.g., coding). Rather, it opens up possibilities for the creation of new knowledge by emphasising the complexity and entanglement of human and more than human relations in research practices and how these can invite more creative thinking. They state:

> Plugging in is a product of the new: *the assemblage in formation.* This is a dramatic, profound shift from social science knowledge with its hierarchical, empirical demands for recognizable representation to an ontology in which experimentation is privileged. *Thinking with theory* then emerges as an assemblage attaching itself to philosophy rather than the dogmatic image of thought in qualitative research (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 2 italics in original).

In privileging ‘experimentation’ in research and writing, the practice of thinking↔writing with theory occurs during processes of 'plugging in' to different texts. Jackson and Mazzei (2012; 2023) explain that they have based this idea on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who wrote, “When one writes the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (p. 4). These ‘literary machines’ might include philosophical concepts, research literature, artefacts, memories, feelings, writing, literacy practices, questions, affects and other relations that might emerge throughout research processes. In this way, “all thought, writing and creation assembles through connectives and relations,” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 11). It is suggested that:

> In writing, in plugging in, we enact something new that is a constant, continuous doing. It is attuning to how lines [..of flight] respond to each other, how they fit together...to see an assemblage at work we have to ask not only how doings and

> lines are connecting and co-functioning, but also what territory might be claimed in the resulting arrangement (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 2).

In enacting the new, the notion of 'plugging in' can be described as a "re-turning as in turning [thinking, ideas, concepts...] over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetimematterings), new diffraction patterns" (Barad, 2014, p. 168). Movement is key to these 're-turnings' in writing, researching and imagining otherwise that defy the separation of time and space. As I engaged in thinking with theories, I became aware that I was no longer seeking to discover what things 'meant' (in any *certain* sense), but came to recognise the notion of 'spacetimematterings' that proposes "an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling...[and] as such, there is no moving beyond, no leaving the 'old' behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then" (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In this way, I became less concerned with using 'past' data to think of what it means now, but engaged in *re-turning* as a "dynamic and generative process of invigorating past/present/future connections" (Fairchild et al., 2022, p. 10) with the key theories and concepts I was thinking with. Ingold (2011) recognises these non-linear movements and manifestations as *wayfaring*. He suggests that this type of knowledge creation (as *becoming)* happens, 'along' paths that take people from place to place within the matrix of their travelling" (p. 160). Lenz Taguchi (2010) suggests that in these entanglements:

> our meaning-making and the learning we do is dependent on the material world around us [as it] acts upon our thinking just as much as our thinking acts upon it...what is new and familiar to us is to start thinking of all aspects of learning – including the material – as being active and having agency in the construction of knowledge (p. 49-50).

Thinking↔ writing with postfoundational theories thus became imagined as intra-active spaces where, as the researcher, I became "reorientated toward what is *unthought*, not yet becoming" (Mazzei & Jackson, 2023, p. 2). I now turn to explore the key philosophical theories and concepts that emerged throughout the research process as I 'plugged in' to examine literacy classroom life.

The process of thinking with theories and capturing thoughts in *motion* finds an affinity with the figure of the rhizome which was introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The notion of the rhizome considers, "knowledge constructed as non-hierarchical, without the root, trunk and branches (like the tree metaphor of knowledge) but as something that shoots out in all directions" (Murris et al., 2022a, p. xxvi). This conceptualisation shifts "the production of knowledge away from procedures that guarantee uniformity, standardisation and normalisation" (Vicars, 2012, p. 468) toward more open, imaginative and relational spaces. To counter the reproduction of thought and representation that reflects a fixed essence or "*telos*" (Braidotti, 2010, p. 309), the rhizome opens up possibilities for thinking/research/writing that has the potential to produce new forms of knowledge in "a different kind of academic voice" (Lather, 2006, p. 44).

Specific *principles* of rhizomatic thinking are proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). These areas are strongly interconnected and include:

- Principles 1 and 2: *Connection and heterogeneity*: "...any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6). These "relations bring different elements and registers into play" (Fullagar & Kuby, 2022, p. 114).
- Principle 3: *Multiplicity*: Rhizomatic thought may be reached through a consideration of the potential of multiple and relational ideas and bodies (Colman, 2010) that "connect with other formations to effect change...that form and rupture unity" (Fullagar & Kuby, 2022, p.114).
- Principle 4: *Asignifying rupture*: a rhizome may be broken, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. In this way thought is generative and defies being pinned down as it pursues new lines of flight.
- Principles 5 and 6: *Cartography and decalcomania*: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model; it is a "map and not a tracing." Lines of flight are constantly being transformed, written over, recreated (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12).

Thinking with the figure of the rhizome and its underlying principles inspired me to take diverse lines of flight throughout the research↔writing processes. I was oriented to multiple (un)thought locations from "a middle from which [ideas] grew and overspilled" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21) as I sought to think of the various entanglements in my research. Conceptualising research in this way can be considered as an *immanent* doing (Gale, 2022) as opposed to mapping out steps in advance. In this way, my research and writing took diverse lines of flight. I imagine these now as a kind of 'methodological eclecticism' as I became entangled in thinking with theories that produced playful, poetic, theoretical and affective writing forms and expressions.

-Scratch-

There was a time in our classroom life, when the necessity to share our experiences - the joys, challenges, heartbreak even (at times) of becoming and being 'us' was a mandatory inclusion in our daily lives. I lament as to what happened in the current clinical, 'evidence based' climate - how we rarely desire a love of the possibilities of worlds and words that remain unexamined and could be the means for us all to thrive. Instead, classroom literacy life has become constituted by reductive, levelled texts and predictable practices that simplify learning – diminish it. Any sense of connection to our emotional or affective worlds is constantly deferred. Erased are opportunities to examine who we are, how we live, who we could be in the quest to be constantly evaluating – assessing – diagnosing - fixing...and it goes on.

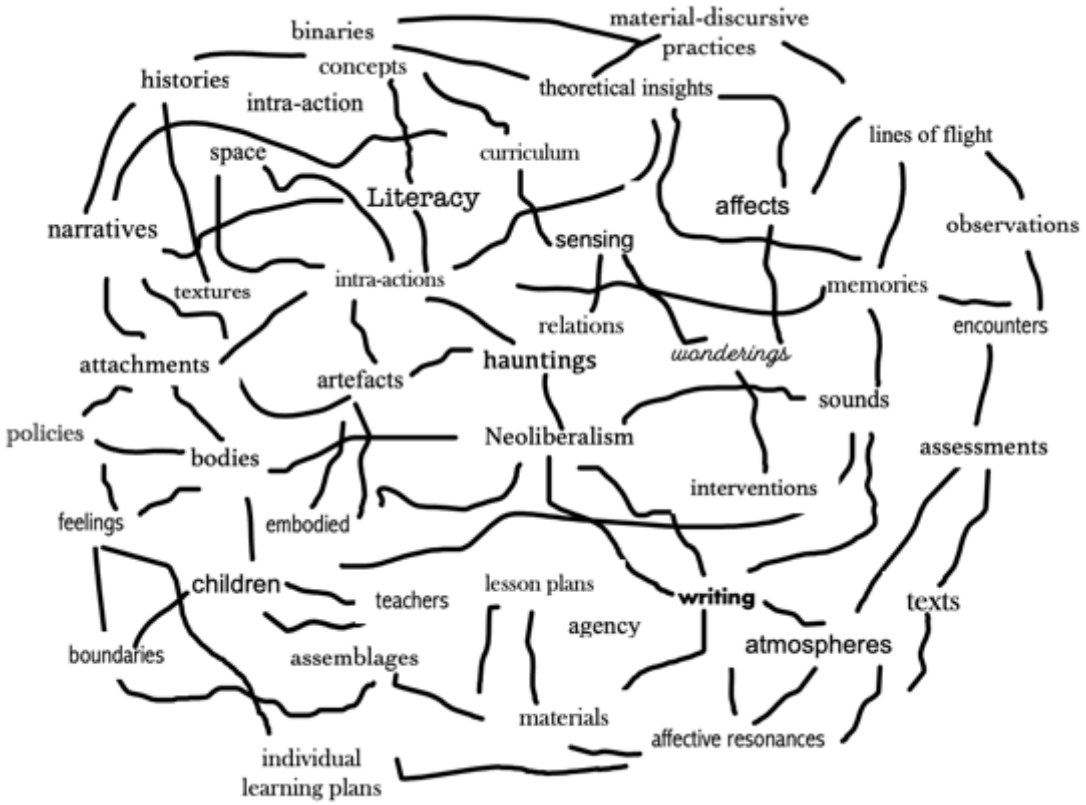
Researchers who use postfoundational concepts and ideas to think, write and research differently have used the rhizome as it "enables a different, multidimensional system of thought different from unidirectional, binary logic" (Sellers, 2015, p. 7) of conventional qualitative research. Several have expanded its use as an analytical tool to engage in what many have termed, 'rhizoanalysis' (Honan, 2007; Masny, 2013; 2016, Sellers, 2015; Strom & Martin, 2013; Vicars, 2012) enabling a multiplicity of rhizomatic pathways and assemblages. The non-hierarchical and non-linear approach that underpins the rhizome invites an openness to experimentation that give rise to concept creation (Masny, 2016) which disrupts conventional linear thought. In analysing Grace's experiences of literacy learning, I was able to think with concepts and theories in relation to an expansive array

of human, non-human and more than human elements. This enabled me to move beyond "habitual normative readings...[to] spread thought in unpredictable patterns" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742). Furthermore, using the figure of the rhizome can help to de-territorialise 'dogmatic images of thought' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) perpetuated in the neoliberal world of literacy learning. To shift from *fixed* meanings to more open pedagogical spaces and relations which dissolve the sedimented boundaries between knowledge/knower. We can thus imagine a world where research and pedagogy becomes immersed in multiple ways of coming to know - to learn. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose:

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction "and...and...and..." (p. 25).

Guided by principles of the rhizome, throughout my research, I used specific concepts to analyse a diversity of entanglements (see Figure 2). Rhizomatic processes of 'plugging in' enabled me to think of how these might come into relation in the everyday world of literacy practices, and significantly how these can be understood in terms of issues of equity. Recall the principles of the rhizome. Throughout my research I explored the heterogeneous elements in classroom life, considered *bodies* as more than human, and pursued new lines of flight between these 'bodies.' These processes constantly transformed my analysis and writing, 'rupturing' these to produce new ways of thinking and how I could represent these in textual forms. Rather than rely on purely representing (verified) meanings, I sought to use the conjunction, 'and...and...and' proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to keep 'thought on the move.' Instead of thinking of literacy learning, e.g., *as* individual lessons or tasks, I imagined these as being *entangled* using concepts such as intra-action, material ↔ discursive practices and posthuman agency to open up different ways to analyse and think about classroom life. Recording reflections and key emergent questions continually moved my thinking and writing into different spaces as I imagined how Grace and the children experienced literacy learning. Questions such as, What role do the materials play in how Grace engaged in her literacy learning? What kinds of literacy practices did Grace experience as a learner? How did these *affect* her? What kinds of *exclusions* were produced? Reflecting on these emergent questions whilst 'plugging in' to diverse theories and concepts opened up my analysis and thinking.

Figure 2: Rhizomatic Map. Areas that became entangled when thinking with theories in the literacy classroom.



> Consciously or not, we educators and educational researchers are used to looking at schools as places where humans dwell together to learn what it means to be human and to accumulate the kinds of skills and habits required to participate in human societies as adults. This occurs in spite of the fact that schools are connected with the nonhuman world in so many explicit and implicit ways…we are not the centre of the universe. Indeed, we should not be the centre of conversation (Snaza et al., 2014, 39–40).

So much of contemporary educational discourse, practices and policies are centred on the individual, autonomous *human* subject which, as Snaza et al. (2014) suggest have become naturalised. Haynes and Kohan (2018) ask, what differences might appear in our commentaries when the non-human is included? What possibilities might be imagined

when we take account of the entangled physical and material world - of the "experiential, corporeal and sensory feelable matters" (p. 214)? These enable us to expand what is made possible in mapping classroom life. To examine and contest everyday practices by questioning, e.g., the persistence of narrowly assessing and measuring the human subject/child who is then labelled according to their literacy score. These in turn then rely on (humanly invented) psychological models of learning that determine *normal* milestones that need to be achieved by the child (usually at set ages of development). Most significantly, (and perhaps the most harmful of all) is the positioning of knowledge as dependent solely on the (human) realm of cognition, separating the child from the knowledge they 'acquire.' Kuby et al. (2019) believe that most theories in literacy education are human centred even if they discuss materials and texts. A key argument made by these researchers is that although approaches such as sociocultural theory and critical literacy have made substantial contributions to theories of power and knowledge, they predominantly adhere to humanist centred notions of agency and subjectivity. As being detached and viewed only from humanist perspectives. They propose four reasons to adopt posthumanist orientations to literacy research which are of concern to this study. These include:

- *Posthumanism builds on the linguistic turn in education* to explore the material↔ discursive entanglements in literacy pedagogy. In this way humans are not privileged in a 'hierarchy' but are considered to be "intra-active agents in the world's becoming" (p. 8).
- *Posthumanism shifts what counts as literacy* – we begin to resituate our inquiries from being centred on *human* knowing to embrace questions that engage us to recognise the entanglements of knowing/becoming/doing in relation with a host of non-human and more-than human entities. This calls us to reframe literacy teaching and learning as being enmeshed with/in assemblages.
- *Posthumanism focuses our attention toward ontologically new ways* of relating and *becoming* literacy learners. This view shifts attention away from literacy learning as being the sole epistemological pursuit of more (literacy) content, more (literacy) skills that are required to be recalled/remembered by the autonomous child, to questions of *how* our entanglements with/in the world of the classroom can produce new insights and enable new becomings.

- *Posthumanism focuses on ethics and justice*. Our attentiveness to the assemblages of human, non-human and more-than human entities in the world means that we all have a response-ability (Barad, 2007) for the consequences of our research and pedagogical choices for the marks they leave on bodies. In our relations, we thus recognise "ethics is a praxis" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 92) closely attuned to the fragility of our world and the injustices committed that affect our most vulnerable.

-Scratch-

I have come to understand that writing/researching in the ruins of humanism (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) can be vital, inventive places of exploration. Places that release researchers from demands to generate findings - those that are 'reliable', that can be verified (proven) feeding into even more neoliberal desires that sanction all that can be known and imagined. Keeping the world the same. Unimagined. Stale. Unjust. We must find the 'cracks' - to defy the standardised world that decimates children's learning lives that are devastated by neoliberalism. Possibilities to be lively; to be vital in our everyday research and learning worlds. Knowing differently. Feeling differently.

From these concerns, posthuman research practices in education thus engage a radical critique of some of the fundamental (human) assumptions that question a multitude of ways in which knowledge is produced, who in fact constitutes the human of '*humanism*' and shifts ontologies towards relational processes. For Braidotti (2019), striving toward the creation of a posthuman subject requires us to re-define the subject of knowledge and power without reference to the "unitary, humanistic, Eurocentric masculinist subject" (p. 43). She states that her posthuman subject is a more complex assemblage of relations, "neither unitary, nor autonomous, subjects are embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics" (p. 45-46). Furthermore, Taylor (2016) suggests posthumanism offers educational researchers:

> ... different starting points for educational research and new ways of grasping educational experience than those afforded by humanism...[as it] calls into question the essentializing binary between human and nonhuman on which humanism relies. These different starting points are located in a different set of

> epistemological presumptions...and in different ontological presumptions about the modes of being... more than that, posthumanist research practices offer a new ethics of engagement for education by including the nonhuman in questions about who matters and what counts in questioning the constitutive role played by humanist dominant paradigms, methodologies and methods (p. 5).

Different starting points.

Different epistemological assumptions.

Different ontological presumptions.

A new ethics of engagement.

Key concepts in agential realism

Several posthumanist theorists use Barad's (2007) agential realist framework to frame their postfoundational inquiries, as it shifts the epistemological, ontological and ethical possibilities from the limited structures of humanist thinking to more open, relational and non-linear frames (Mills, 2017). Barad (2007) notes that their agential realism framework is not only a *theory* but a "continual re-turning, further elaborating, interrupting and continuing to put into conversation with other crucial insights, projects and practices" (cited in Juelskjaer et al., 2020, p.134). This radical posthuman rethinking of the ways in which we engage in knowledge production is reflected in Barad's neologism 'ethico-onto-epistemology.' This term recognises that "practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). As such they argue that:

> What is needed is a robust account of the materialization of *all* bodies—"human" and "nonhuman"—and the material↔ discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked. This will require an understanding of the nature of the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena, an accounting of "nonhuman" as well as "human" forms of agency (Barad, 2003, p. 810).

The term 'body' in thinking with agential realist frameworks recognises that "all matter, human, non-human, more-than human as a *body* ...one does not need to be made of flesh to be considered a body. Pens, paper, tables, chairs, walls, floors, windows, doors, trees,

birds, squirrels, fences [are] *all* bodies too" (Zapata et al., 2018, p. 487). In a similar 'more than human' way, Deleuze (1988) states that "a body can be anything: it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an ideas; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body a collectivity" (p. 127). Furthermore, Hardt (2015) highlights that "essential to a body is the relation: the body lives as long as that relation is maintained. Instead of thinking in terms of unities, then, we need to think the relation among multiplicities" (p. 216). This posthuman expansion of meaning, brings into play an innumerable cast of *actors*, or as suggested by Latour (2005) 'actants' that has implications for the ways in which we understand our world. Barad's notion of intra-action can assist us to understand how agency is theorised 'beyond the human'.

In Barad's (2007) agential realist framework, the concept of 'intra-action' reflects the entangled nature of bodies. They theorise that ontologically, human, non-human and more than human entities in the world are not determined as existing 'individually' but are deemed to be inseparable – as 'intra-acting' in diverse relations. Barad (2007) explains that "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 ongoing intra-activity" (p. 184). With/in these entanglements, boundaries and binaries are dissolved and "relations of difference and how they matter" (p. 71) are reframed. These ideas provoke questions of how *agency* is posthumanly reconfigured through the process of intra-action that:

> signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction" which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede but rather emerge through their intra-action. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements" (Barad, 2007, p. 33).

In Baradian terms, we can think of intra-actions as relational processes where two or more bodies are materialised and their ability to *act* emerges within the relationship (not outside of it). This rethinking of agency beyond the human realm sees these relations as emerging in mutually co-constitutive ways.

-Scratch-

In reimagining more ethically oriented literacy classrooms, these perspectives have the potential to reframe how we understand social justice issues. If notions of agency are considered as 'more than human' what does this mean for the ways in which we understand children's literacy learning experiences? What roles do the various 'bodies' play when imagined as co-implicated in what becomes materialised in the literacy classroom world? How do these shape each other in inseparable relations? We can become more attuned to inquire as to 'what else' might be implicated beyond the business as usual humanistic frames of thinking. To see the inseparability of all that might come into relations and how these can produce specific exclusions (or conversely 'inclusions'). This capacity to decentre the human can also open up other ways to redress issues of inequity beyond simply blaming the individual for their own self-made oppression, as is conceptualised through deficit theorising. Widening our analytical gaze to the non and more than human relations in our classroom world enables us to pay attention to the intra-active flows and forces that become materialised (Barad, 2007).

Affect theory: Provocations and possibilities

Thinking with theories of affect enable the generation of new insights into classroom life that make visible ways in which literacy can be conceptualised as being imbued with 'more than human' intensities – energy, vitality and "a felt-force" (Hollett, 2021, p. 369). There is a sense of *movement* in this way of theorising as it brings into relation a host of dynamic entities that are "generative of different ways of knowing and modes of becoming" (Fullagar & Bozalek, 2022, p. 26). Sampson (2023) conceptualises affect posthumanly as he states, "affect does not just pass from human to human but becomes a nonconscious *force of encounter* with a dynamic materiality that possesses an autonomous nonhuman capacity to act and be acted on" (p. 298, italics in original). In these ways we can imagine affect as it "feeds forward to consciousness" (p. 299) becoming embodied in "everyday movements, rhythms and rituals" (Ivinson & Renolds,

2013, p. 708) that significantly shape the atmospheres of classroom life. Stewart (2017) proposes:

> affects [are] the registering of life as an assemblage thrown, in the course of events...[highlighting] sense and sensation, materialities...in a world that is not simply anchored in the consciousness of the humanist subject or its categories of thought ...for the affective subject, there is always the weight of the world in what can be hoped for and what must be feared in what flourishes and what matters (p. 194).

In this world that Stewart proposes are implications for how we can analyse daily life. Of significance to my research is how these engagements produce tracings of what are often deeply *felt* yet remain erased in conventional accounts of literacy teaching and learning. These open up ways of imagining our affectively charged world/s 'beyond the consciousness of the human subject...where what can be hoped for...what can be feared...what flourishes...what matters...' become deeply ethical matters. Considering these visceral forces and flows as affecting classroom life, can shed light on how entanglements become formations of atmospheres that create affective conditions (Anderson, 2016).

Researchers have argued that classroom atmospheres have a capacity to shape our experiences and significantly what we become affectively 'attached' to in these "zones of contact" (Dernikos et al., 2020b, p. 87). The notion of 'affective economies' (Ahmed, 2004) describes atmospheres where "emotions do things [as] they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments" (p. 119). Furthermore, we can explore how within these, specific affective attachments accumulate over time. These greatly matter to issues of justice for children who experience alienation throughout their school lives. What then do they become attached to or conversely detached from? To what extent do our learning environments accumulate the kind of affects that cultivate vitalities that may ignite children's passions for learning? For living? For being connected to others? These ideas invite new questions in literacy education that pay attention to how bodies move and feel and how specific material ↔ discursive enactments can leave a mark on us (Ehret & Leander, 2019) that greatly affect our capacity to thrive.

-Scratch-

What are the possibilities from affect theory to theorise literacy classroom life? We can imagine the circulation of affects, in posthuman terms, as exerting a kind of agency in their intra-actions with/in our everyday literacy learning world. In their capacity to provoke desires and create intensities – we can imagine that they 'teach' us. They enable us to consider what is made possible as children come to know the world and themselves as being co-constituted with/in the circulation of affects in daily classroom life. How profoundly they assemble and have implications for what is produced. What might this mean then for how we 'see' children in the literacy classroom as they intra-act with materials, objects, spaces and affects that assume performative roles? What could this mean for the ways in which we 'see' literacy as we design our everyday classroom practices?

Affect theory in literacy enables us to examine questions that draw attention to the ways in which intensities move in our classroom spaces and how these shape practices and relations. As previously discussed, a posthuman perspective acknowledges the human as a relational being and affect theories bring into how assemblages of materials, objects, feelings, texts and bodies produce specific qualities. These 'qualities' are elusive, fleeting and difficult to describe, however, are *felt*. The classroom can thus be conceptualised as an "affective field where [literacy] entities (animate and inanimate) emerge in entangled relations" (Wolfe, 2021, p. 39). Of significance, however, is *how* these affectively charged relations can enhance or constrain our capacity to thrive. Leander and Boldt (2013) propose an analysis of affective relations in literacy education:

> ...not as projected toward some textual end point but as living its life in the ongoing present, forming relations and connections across signs, objects, and bodies in often unexpected ways. Such activity is saturated with affect and emotion; it creates and is fed by an ongoing series of affective intensities that are different from the rational control of meanings and forms. It helps us to keep the distinction between description and prescription sharp and to begin imagining what else might be going on (p. 22).

To begin to 'imagine what else might be going on' requires an understanding of "affect's doings" (Seigworth & Pedwell, 2023, p. 2). These 'doings' draw attention to the ways in which children 'feel' literacy learning as they are moved by and move in the affective and material spaces (atmospheres) of the classroom. These are of intense interest when exploring issues of social justice. Boldt (2020) argues for "the benefits of conceptualising classrooms as spaces in which we may affect one another, initiating and supporting one another's capacities and potentialities in ways that never come into conscious representation" (p. 231). This insight points to the need to understand how children come to *know* and *do* literacy and how our classroom atmospheres affect these. Examining the affective relations in the social world of the classroom can help us frame our analysis as being imbued with dynamic, emergent and shifting relations that "trouble the current era of standards and accountability, largely marked by techno-rational approaches to education" (Dernikos et al., 2020a, p. 14).

Affect scholars have theorised the role of "affect as a potential – where a body's *capacity* to affect and be affected" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2) can enhance or transform our daily functioning (or conversely constrain our capacities). In conceptualising classroom worlds 'posthumanly' Strom and Mills (2021) suggest that we engage in "defamiliarisation, distancing ourselves from rational, Eurocentric, human-centred ways of knowing and being, and practice thinking in affects and relations and multiplicities" (p. 195). Niccolini et al. (2019) are in agreement as they emphasise how insights from affect theories can bring attention to the forces and entangled relations that produce specific ways of knowing and becoming a literacy learner. They believe that:

> "becoming literate is part of an affective encounter of standardized curriculum, levelled reading materials, an individual student's desires for interesting, real books and a teacher's sticking to standardized accountability measures. This irreducible set of material and immaterial forces produces literate students; neither discourse nor human intentionality nor structural context alone suffices. This thrown-togetherness animates and makes meaningful the concept of *struggling reader* and affect theory helps us consider the histories, intensities and materialities and feelings involved in early literacy" (p. 168).

Using ideas from affect theory enabled me to "critique the overemphasis on logic – to achieve already known end goals" (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p.28) in literacy teaching and learning and analyse the productions of affective forces that profoundly shape literacy practices. They opened up questions that challenge what is overlooked in more conventional research methods and invited me to consider, "What is afforded if the usual status of things, meanings and significations become unsettled?" (Holmes & Ravetz, 2024, p. 701). Seeking to understand how affect theories can help with analysing classroom life enabled me to disrupt the technical, over instrumentalist forms of teaching to embrace the learner, the *feelings* of being/becoming a learner that entangle with the materials, objects and the atmosphere of the classroom. Imagining affect as forces, intensities, energies and flows that register with/in/across bodies to produce and shape personal emotional experiences, meant paying analytic attention to the fleeting affectively charged moments of the everyday. Those that elude us in the rush to observe, quantify and produce only the visible, the *measurable* as evidence that *learning* has actually occurred.

Affect's potential.

Literacy that *moves* us.

Flows and forces circulate in our classroom lives.

Histories, intensities and materialities shaping our atmospheres.

Diffraction: A concept and a practice

> Knowing does not lie in the establishment of a correspondence between the world and its representation, but is rather immanent in the life and consciousness of the knower as it unfolds within the field of practice set up through his or her presence as a being-in-the-world (Ingold, 2011, p. 159).

A key question expressed by Barad (cited in Juelskjaer et al., 2020) which significantly informs their orientation to research is, "What methodology might there be for putting different insights into conversation with one another that does not belie a relational ontology?" (p. 122). The use of diffraction thus became a significant component of their

agential realist framework to pursue the generation of difference. Originally proposed by Donna Haraway (1991a), the concept of diffraction was developed to "displace the terminology of reproduction" (p. 299) and further expand reflexivity as a critical practice. These concerns stemmed from her belief that reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, "setting up the worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real" (Haraway, 1991b, p. 16). Countering knowledge production beyond positivist oriented research, diffraction, seeks to understand "another kind of worldliness" (p. 16). It is suggested that:

> The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean. Knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention (Haraway & Goodeve, 2018, p. 36).

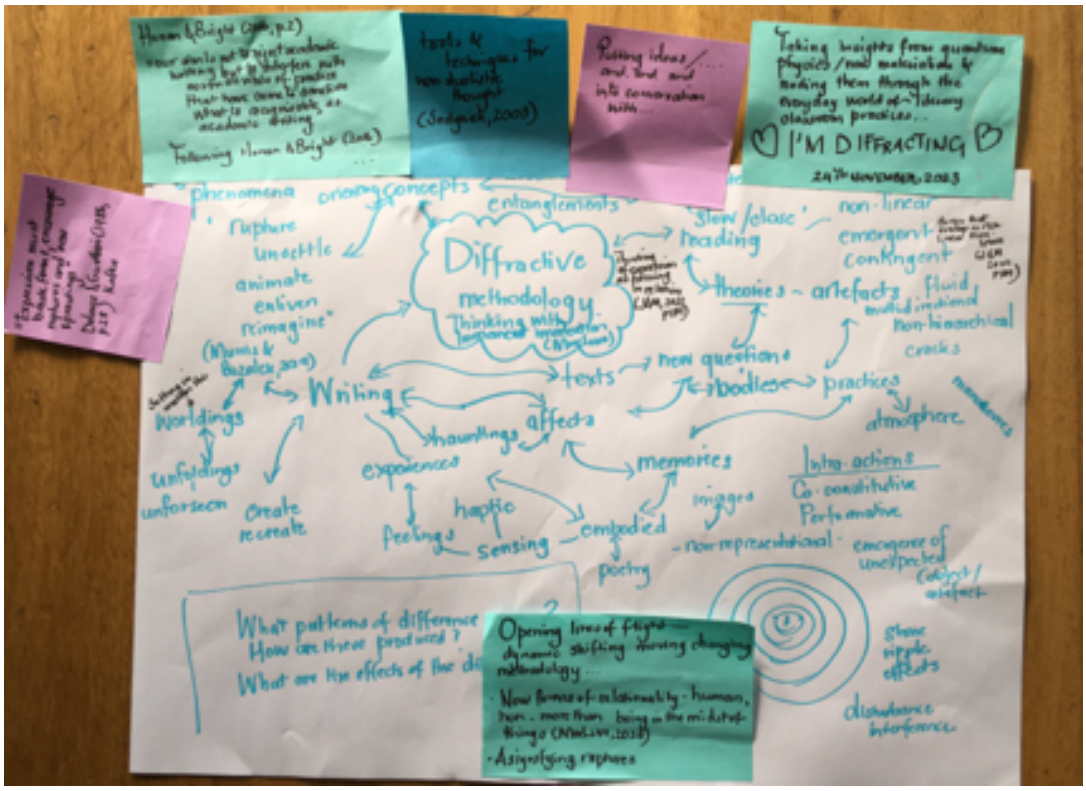
To imagine knowledge production beyond the 'human only' realm, Murris & Bozalek (2019) suggest that diffraction "as a methodology troubles humans' epistemic arrogance of locating knowledge, intelligence and meaning-making in the subject and only in the human subject" (p. 1506). This sentiment is similarly expressed by Ceder (2018) who states that "knowledge in this way cannot be created from an outside position looking at the world, but from being entangled with the world" (p. 50). Lenz Taguchi (2012) also recognises the entanglements where the researcher is inseparable from knowledge production. She states that a "diffractive analysis relies on the researcher's ability to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities...beyond those produced by processes of recognition and identification in reflexive interpretations (p. 267).

Using key ideas from diffractive methodologies opened me up to a multitude of concepts and theories to produce knowledge *differently* - to be entangled - to "get inside" (Davies, 2021, p. 8) my professional materials, artefacts of practice, memories, and theoretical insights. To consider what differences might be produced in these entanglements that critically question and reimagine more ethical ways we work with children. Davies (2014b) describes interferences that are created throughout research when using the concept of diffraction. She suggests that "in a diffractive analysis, research problems,

concepts, emotions, transcripts, memories, and images all affect each other and interfere with each other in an emergent process of coming to know something differently" (p. 734). Reading insights from key theories and concepts in agential realism, posthumanism and affect theory diffracted with my reflections, artefacts, memories and writing. In these processes, I became attuned to the interferences these produced which affected how I created connections, noticed differences and theorised these (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Enacting Diffraction

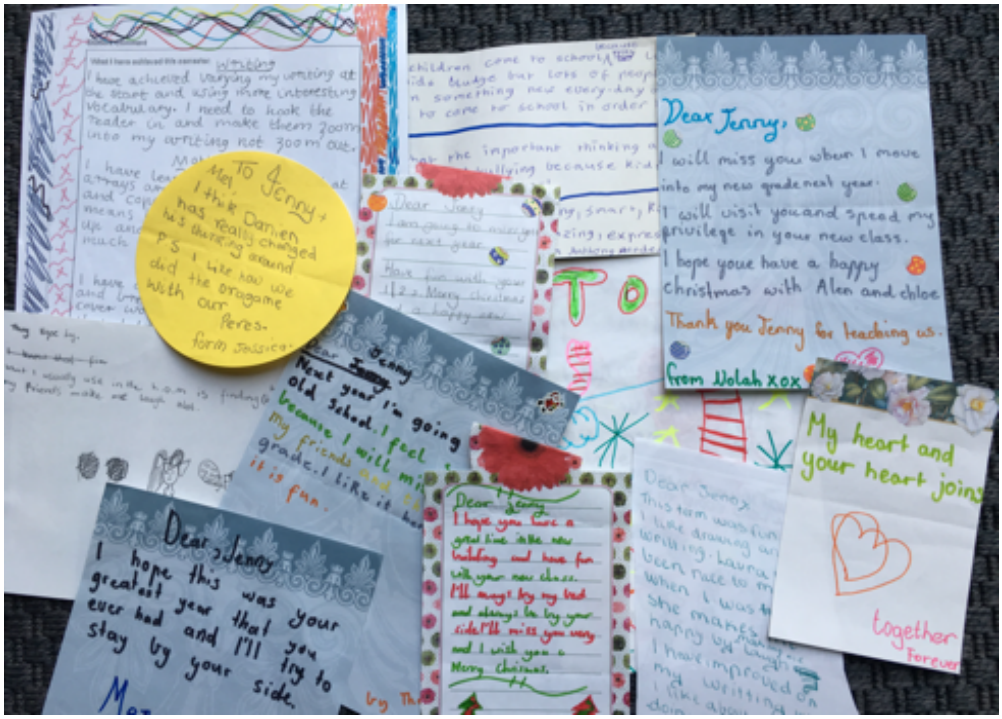
A "constant reengagement with a thing, story or situation, where we read, reacquaint ourselves and reconsider meaning, affect and relationships from different perspectives" (Malone et al., 2020, p. 241).



Mazzei (2014) suggests that the process of 'thinking with theory' is "a kind of diffractive analysis that involves reading/writing of data through multiple theoretical concepts that has the potential to spread thought and meaning in unpredictable and productive emergences" (2014, p. 742). Furthermore, she describes the process as rhizomatic as it leads in multiple directions that keep thoughts and knowledge production on the move.

The researcher too is inseparable with/in these movements. As a "praxis of analysis that foregrounds differentiality" (Kaiser & Thiel, 2014, p. 166), they are attuned to the material affects/effects on emergent ideas that are constantly being modified by what is read and encountered in the research event (Truman, 2023). Barad (2007) states that diffraction does not fix in advance what the subject or object 'is' but rather proposes research engagements that attend to entanglements where texts are dialogically read "through one another" (p. 30). In these acts of knowledge production, there is not the outward rejection of ideas that have come before but rather these are being "re-used to think anew" (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2021, p. 175). Rather than (only) contemplating the meaning of texts or data, there is a concern with what these phenomena *do* and how they are entangled, co-constituted (Bozalek & McMillan, 2016) and produce new thought.

Figure 4 Diffractions create interferences.
Affects, practices, words, and memories blur boundaries of time and space.



-Scratch-

How do the 'more than human' materials and artefacts of our professional lives become so deeply entangled with/in us? That affect us. That propels us to think differently about

our lives. Children's words kept on pieces of paper have a resonance, an intensity still felt (see Figure 4). They come from the "collective assemblage of enunciation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, 18) that cross time and space. That speak from their inner worlds, their histories, from disparate yet entangled contexts that reflect profound feelings, absences and hauntings. Bell (2012) provokes us to consider how an 'image' might come to rival the text as we engage in sociological research. She believes that images can "be understood as intervening in the social world, circulating and partaking in its arrangements" (p. 147). Diffractions. Why can't I bear to part with these?

Data reimagined

Massumi (2015) proposes:

> Our experiences aren't objects. They're us, they're what we're made of. We are situations, we are moving through them. We are our participation – not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking in at it all (p. 14).

The ontological inseparability of the researcher, experiences and meaning making processes reflected in the above quote indicates its *entangled* status. With/in postfoundational writing and research, data is reconceptualised as emergent in the production of knowledge. In this diffractive, *posthuman* way, data is reimagined as 'lively' with/in research assemblages. It is viewed as emerging through diffractive readings of theories, writing that leads to rhizomatic lines of flight, unanticipated research questions, theoretical insights and a range of affects and encounters that can be felt and imagined. These entanglements are described as 'movements' according to Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2017) who argue that "data practices are in flux and responsive... [they] obstruct the fixed horizon of anticipated knowledges and fixed forms... what happens to data where and when it cannot be predicted must be *lived*...living data in turn supposes rhythm, patterns and irregularities"(p. 66).

In these entanglements, Arndt (2017) similarly conceptualises data as existing across time and space; as "complex encounters with pasts, presents and futures [...] imagined in non-linear, blurry im/possibilities" (p. 93-94). These perspectives connect once more to the

neologism, ‘spacetimemattering’ (Barad, 2010) that describes “the ongoing rematerialisings of relationalities, not among pre-existing bits of matter in a pre-existing space and time, but in the ongoing reworkings of ‘moments’, ‘places’, and ‘things’ – each being (re)threaded through the other” (p. 268). These ‘reworkings’ of data processes are conceptualised as *diffractive* by Hultman & Lenz Taguchi (2010), who view the researcher as existing in “waves of relational intra-actions between different bodies and concepts” (p. 537). In this way, the researcher is constantly engaged in iterative cycles of thinking with “ideas, concepts and practices... [that] actively changes the way things are and perceived to be...and [affects] the meanings made” (Davies, 2014a, p. 3).

-Scratch-

*The world of education continues to propagate terms like data AS ‘evidence’ as though they have a neutral universally understood meaning. Far from a stable 'reality' out there we forget that there are alternative, more complex and nuanced ways we can conceptualise literacy teaching and learning. Teachers are repeatedly required to churn out verifiable 'evidence' that a child can demonstrate an observable skill at a point in time. What comes to matter in the seemingly uncomplicated (read: inherently positivist events of collect external data, diagnose, intervene and remediate...) renderings? The present narrow conceptualisations privilege the pursuit of representational knowledge that categorises, labels and limits possibilities. Ethical uses of ‘data’ as matters of social justice demand that we cease with the endless implementation of data collection processes that unproblematically purport to represent who children ‘*are’ *as learners. To embrace data as entangled with a myriad of relations that come into play each day.*

Entangled with/in postfoundational approaches that reimagine the role of data is the use of artefacts employed in autoethnographic studies (Brogden, 2008; Fox, 2021) as a way to both recall personal experiences and to diffractively engage in research inquiries. Given that autoethnography is centrally concerned with critically examining the layers of self and the cultural aspects of life, memories and self-reflections captured in journals and research diaries, which comprise an assemblage of material fragments (Fox, 2021) diffracted as I re/storied my experiences. Reimagining analysis as *entangled* taught me

important lessons about what we as researchers pay attention to. Of significance was the notion of attuning to what St. Pierre (1997b) has conceptualised as 'transgressive data.' These call us to account, e.g., our emotions, dreams and other categories that are usually labelled as irrelevant or unworthy of 'serious' research endeavours. Making room for the unexpected emerges with/in diffractive processes. It might go something like...

Persistent gnawing... How's that for data?
Bodily agitations...feelings in my bones
Dreams and hauntings that never leave
Pushing me to define, describe, interpret
Analyse what things mean
and ...and... and
Rather – be propelled into ways
to be open to different lines of flight.

These ideas inspired creative ways of working *with* data and expanding what actually constituted data. As I engaged in thinking with theories, I conceptualised 'data' as being made and remade (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020) and inseparable from a host of relations that come into play. As discussed, rather than conceptualise data as separate from the researcher, in thinking with theory, Jackson and Mazzei (2023) recognise these relations as 'performative accounts.' These accounts do not seek to represent any correspondence between data and 'true' life but rather "express assemblages that 'speak life' with powers of becoming...[which enable] an opening up to difference to engender the unthought when plugged into various concepts" (p.3). This notion of 'unthought' is similarly captured by Somerville (2008) who reflects on alternative ways of writing/researching that often leaves us in a chaotic place of unknowing. She proposes an ontology of postmodern emergence that "emphasises the irrational, messy and embodied process of becoming-other-to-one's-self" (p. 209).The *ontological* requirement in this configuration is that we pause in reflective moments, "when a particular assemblage of forms and meanings come together as a moment of representation, a temporary stability within the dynamic flux of meaning making in (re)search for new knowledge" (p. 209).

In more conventional qualitative research accounts, these processes would be termed 'data collection and analysis' - where the researcher is detached from the collection and analysis of data and seeks to find what the data 'means.' In contrast, when research is conceptualised as being entangled, the researcher intra-actively 'creates' data. In this way, "matter and meaning are mutually articulated (Barad, 2007, p. 152). A sense of the unexpected is embraced. Seemingly disparate phenomena that might be dismissed in more conventional qualitative projects as not reliable or valid become elevated when we reconceptualise data as in relation with the creation of alternative knowledge. MacLure (2013) writes of being attuned to the capacity to wonder with data. She suggests that these "moments confound the industrious, mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes, or themes; but at the same time, they exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought" (p. 228). These ideas resonate with my own previous efforts to transgress conventional research/writing approaches and experiment with ways we might open up new techniques to write and produce knowledge differently (Sesta & Vicars, 2024, forthcoming).

-Scratch-

Challenging the limitations of thinking and writing with/in "the stable, the eternal, the identical and the constant methods" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 361) has enabled me to be open unexpected lines of flight in which to speculate, to write into and to teach into spaces of uncertainty. In these movements, research and writing became performative, rhizomatic, diffractive, embodied acts enmeshed in a multiplicity of relational forces, in their multiplicity, that act on semiotic, material and social flows simultaneously (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 23). Knowledge generation thus seeks the speculative, the experimental possibilities of producing alternative ways to think.

Putting concepts and theories to work

Thinking with philosophies and concepts from agential realism, posthumanism and affect theories opened up my research to unexpected insights from which I was able to re-think the materials and spaces of the literacy primary school classroom. It inspired me toward

a range of potentialities and new engagements as I explored alternative ways of thinking about the everyday literacy classroom as "entangled with/in human, more-than-human and non-subjectivity(ies), relations, ethics, methodology(ies) and practices in education" (Kuby, 2018, p. 413). Thinking with/in/about/through the interconnectedness of literacy events, practices, relations, backgrounds and affective resonances required that I contest human centred perspectives that give prominence to agency as residing in the individual, autonomous self. Ideas from Barad's (2007) agential realist framework, especially the notion of intra-action, performative agency and the role of affect offered me new concepts and theories to reimagine processes of research and writing as being entangled with materials, objects, histories, affects and institutional life.

With/in these shifts to posthuman research and writing, Fairchild (2023) states that there are no prescriptions (e.g., linear steps to follow) as the emphasis is on the process of knowledge production and importantly, how this can influence our understanding of the social and material world. It is with/in these justice oriented ethico-onto-epistemological orientations, that we are able to "reframe subjectivities, open up possibilities for enacting different ways of knowledge making that contest humanist understandings of position and power" (p.135). Being guided by posthumanist theories and concepts, enabled me to step out of the boundaries that constrain what we are able to research and write and use concepts to expand how we 'see' everyday literacy practices in order to imagine more socially just worlds.

These concerns are fundamental to Barad's analysis of the world (2007) as they suggest that "the primary units are not things but phenomena" (p. 141). As such, I was able to reimagine the epistemological division of things (e.g., binaries such as child/adult, subject/object and observer/observed) as being ontologically entangled - as intra-acting agencies that are inseparable (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 94). In recognising that concepts and knowledge production are more than representations of a stable 'reality,' de Freitas (2017) notes that "Barad stands apart from psychological approaches that posit concepts as mental constructs in human minds, and aligns herself with the contemporary turn to various kinds of realisms and materialism across the humanities" (p. 746). Similarly, Heckman (2010) argues that as researchers we need to define alternative approaches that bring the material in. She states, "it must describe the complex interactions of language and matter, the human and non-human, as well as the diverse

entities we have created in our world. [Importantly] it must be able to explain the interactions and even agencies of these entities without retreating to the modernist mirror of nature" (p. 4).

-Scratch-

I have come to appreciate the inseparability of material↔ discursive relations that entangle in classroom life. Mazzei (2013) argues that "in the process of examining how discourse and matter are mutually constituted in the production of knowledge" (p. 776), different kinds of questions emerge. These gesture toward concerns with, 'What kinds of intra-actions materialise in the literacy classroom? How do they produce specific configurations of literacy opportunities for children to learn? Or conversely, might constrain or dis-able potential becomings? What impact can these imaginings have for social justice concerns? Within these relations, issues of ethics and justice become central to our daily pedagogical choices.

It is important to note that posthuman approaches have been accused of "drawing attention to the micro, in the in-the-moment contingent and situated nature of children's subject positions...[and as such] have separated the child... from the political, historical, biographical and intersectional elements with which we are all, always, inextricably tangled" (Hackett et al., 2020, p. 4). As I thought with theories throughout my research, I ensured I opened up my thinking to the broader political implications of how neoliberal ideologies come to be entangled in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning and theorising the ways in which issues of injustice come to matter for Grace (and children generally). As stated above, I sought to think '*with* and *beyond*' the human' to use ideas that can map relations of neoliberalism that are entangled with the production of the 'at risk' literacy learner. Blyth (2022, p.71) advocates for mapping intra-actions within assemblages. She states that these allows us to "engage with deeply political and deeply affective relations within the assemblage of place with children, teacher, materials and practices that govern literacy pedagogy, government and school policies and procedures and so much more" (p. 71).

To counter knowledge as being 'contained' in the individual, agential realism challenges the idea that we stand outside the world, as observers who discover knowledge that is external to ourselves. In other words, knowing is not a practice *apart* from the world, we know because we are *of* the world. Barad (2007) argues that representationalism continues to locate humans as outside the world, emphasising knowledge creation as a reflection of that which is *real*. They rather "insist on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being" (p. 133). These provoke us to imagine otherwise in our literacy classrooms as suggested by Kuby and Rowsell (2017) who ask:

> How might we think of the entanglements of children, teachers, books, digital tools, communities, families, languages and so forth intra-actively producing something differently in/with/for the world, today? Or new ways of knowing/becoming/doing literacies? How might these changes produce (effects) new and different relationalities? Different affectual ways of being? (p. 288).

In this chapter I have explored in depth several key philosophies, ideas and concepts that informed my postfoundational research enactments of thinking with theories. Processes of 'plugging in' invited me into ways to "conceptualise the interplay between human and nonhuman elements as they make themselves intelligible to each other" (Hackett & Rautio, 2019, p. 1019). The role of data thus becomes significantly reimagined in these entangled ways. As stated by Medina et al. (2022), "these spaces rarely include ultimate moments of resolution or final answers, but rather [provide] glimpses into ongoing processes and dynamics" (p. 45). In the following chapter I put these concepts and ideas to work as I engage in thinking with theories to examine classroom life through Grace's experiences in the year she was assigned to a low ability group.

Chapter 5: Posthuman Mappings of Literacy Classroom Life

Thinking-with-Writing-with-Plugging-in
Literacy classroom life - theorising relations
Traces and Hauntings
Entangling Writing-Thinking-Becoming
Mapping intra-actions (and and and...)
Experimental and speculative creations
Immanent propositions
Human-non-human-more-than-human entanglements

In these imaginings, what productions of thoughts are made possible?

About Grace

The following posthuman mappings draw on the literacy learning experiences of Grace, a seven-year-old child who was assigned to a low ability group after having undergone standardised assessments that assessed her as below expected benchmarks. Grace spent each morning of the year with a teacher's assistant and a group of three boys for whom it had also been decided required close supervision and intensive literacy support. This group met each morning during the allocated two-hour literacy block.

The school was situated in a community with a large population of low socioeconomic and CALD communities. I shared a double open classroom with Grace's teacher and would often observe Grace working in this small group. She presented as a very timid and gentle child who experienced difficulties making friends and she was often observed on her own, inside and outside of classroom spaces. Grace's experiences awakened in me a passion to explore and contest what I have come to term, 'the ravages of rituals' that children experience when placed in low ability groups. Grace's institutional literacy experiences have been reassembled as layered analytical mappings that are theorised using concepts from agential realism and posthumanism.

Introduction

This chapter explores the entanglements of children, literacy and materials through thinking with posthuman theories and concepts. Throughout these mappings, I put multiple concepts and ideas to work in order to think ↔ write with theories from Barad's agential realist framework and concepts from posthumanism. These are used to story the material ↔ discursive practices in the literacy classroom, that produce what came to *matter* in Grace's learning life in light of the current climate of neoliberal priorities. From these overlapping conceptual and speculative mappings, "bodies, objects and space as material entanglements" (Taylor, 2013, p. 688) are highlighted as I seek to make visible "the multiplicity of participants, merging of bodies, the continual movements, open ended possibilities and unanticipated transformations" (Phillips & Larson, 2013, p. 722) that posthuman concepts can inspire. Underpinning this is the belief that "humans are never autonomous beings who act against an essentialized natural world; instead, the human is only realized by and through its relations with other entities" (Giraud, 2019, p. 1). These mappings follow Ringrose and Coleman (2013) who suggest:

> Mapping connections is not only a task of investigating what there is, then, but is also concerned with unpacking what might be. It is a methodology of looking differently at connections, and possibly a methodology of tracing how these connections might be made differently (p. 125).

Smith (2016) argues that new theoretical approaches to literacy are necessary for making visible the affective, embodied, and noncognitive domains of textual meaning making that are often obscured in traditional approaches. Similarly, Hayes and Comber (2018) argue that the enduring nature of the problem of inequality in education suggests that new ways of understanding and ameliorating it are needed. They turned to non-representational ontologies to "attend to inequality as a specific material effect of practices of knowing, rather than a social, natural, or discursive reality requiring representation" (p. 387). In a similar vein, these mappings of Grace are offered to produce new images of thought, to enable more open and diverse ways of relating and understanding the complexities of literacy classroom life and matters of social justice. They are experimental and speculative as they explore alternative ways of 'being-in-the-world' of the classroom; "reflecting a desire to map what might have been and therefore

perhaps could still be" (Wood, 2009, p. 4). Underpinned by St Pierre's (2021a) recommendation that we use philosophical concepts to "re-orient thought, to experiment and create new forms of thought and life" (p. 163), they seek to examine "the boundaries and meanings that are differentially enacted and produced" (Kuby et al., 2019, p. 14).

Posthuman mappings have the potential to provide us with insights into how differences get made, and significantly (in line with the aims of this thesis) can be '*unmade*.' We can think of how specific phenomena become entangled entities in the relations, events and practices that assemble in classroom life. We can speculate as to how these produce ways of being and becoming in our literacy classroom. In these processes, we can explore the differences when we re-think the dissolution of boundaries and binaries that limit what can be thought and the possibilities that might be produced when we are attuned to more than human relations. Kuby and Crawford (2018) suggest that we can expand our analysis of the literacy classroom to reimagine and redefine the social. These alternative ways to analyse shift the attention toward "the intra-active ways that humans and nonhumans (i.e., materials, space, time and the environment) entangle in producing new ways of doing/being/doing literacies" (p. 21). Critical to these ideas is an understanding of the complex ways in which intra-actions produce and re-produce inequalities (Fox & Alldred, 2022) in the literacy classroom.

A new politics of attention

The use of posthuman ideas can provide the tools to untangle and examine the persistent inequalities that children experience in the neoliberal literacy classroom – demanding us to engage in a new politics of attention (Snaza & Sonu, 2016). We might ask, what human, non-human and more-than human entities become entangled in literacy teaching and learning assemblages and how do they help us to examine issues of ethics and justice? There are significant shifts to what is made possible as we explore classroom life beyond the search for pure representation (e.g., what does '*it*' mean?) to generate inquiries that become concerned with, 'What can concepts *do?* 'What knowledge can be *produced* using posthuman ideas and concepts?

Using posthuman concepts provides an insight into new ways to theorise classroom life - to examine our human relationships with each other, with matter, with material, nature

and discourse. Significantly, it makes possible the creation of alternative understandings of literacy classroom worlds that imagines our lives as enmeshed in learning that is 'on the move' - as shifting and changing. In this way, we can attend to the dynamics of our relations and how they unfold. Pedagogically, we can engage in more complex readings of literacy learning - to examine issues of social justice, especially those hidden in the world of school that are entangled in the reproduction and maintenance of socially unjust practices. Pickering (2008) suggests that we should strive to elaborate, articulate, and assemble ontologies of *becoming* that presently live in the margins of our culture, with the goal of contesting the Cartesian hold on our imaginations. He believes that "such a gestalt shift in our ontological awareness would inevitably lead to shifts in our ways of conducting ourselves in the world" (p. 13).

How might we imagine the everyday literacy classroom world as entangled in assemblages of intra-activity? What else is happening that can be mapped onto classroom life in order to resituate our once privileged *human* (only) analytical gaze to zoom in and out, take diverse lines of flight into the spaces of the often ordinary, unseen relations to expand our insights beyond the *human*? How can we rethink classroom literacy life when the processes of learning as *becoming* are conceptualised in relation to a heterogeneous host of ever shifting human, non-human and more than human assemblages? Murris and Bozalek (2022) remind us that,

> Working with intra-action, researchers avoid trying to have an 'overview' of fields, literature or bodies of knowledge. Instead they pay attention to the entangled nature of the particular, the everyday, by disrupting binaries between for example, public and private, world and thinker, inside and outside...being part of the world ontologically means that there are no determinate boundaries between humans and non-humans....all [classroom] life is dynamic, fluctuating, vibrant and constantly on the move (p. 70).

In mapping classroom life, attention is shifted from centering the *human* as the only site of agency, to produce different encounters that posit subjectivity as "constituted in the inseparable relations with human and non-human bodies, the linguistic and the discursive and the material" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 93). The child, Grace, in these mappings as literacy learner becomes the product of material↔ discursive relations in the literacy

classroom that can be considered "processes of worldmaking and mattering" (Bozalek & Kuby, 2022, p. 82). Using concepts from posthumanism and agential realism enables an exploration of how Grace became constituted by both the material (e.g., literacy objects, texts, etc.) and the discursive (the ways in which language and ideas produce meanings) without privileging one over the other (Mazzei, 2013). In other words, the material and the discursive aspects of literacy learning are entangled and continually shape literacy practices and meaning making. This perspective moves away from thinking in terms of individual entities toward an "intra-active exploration of the ethics of such encounters" (Van de Putte et al., 2020, p. 60). It invites us to think differently and research differently. Davies (2021) describes these processes as:

> ...the conceptual and practical means of freeing ourselves from the isolating Cartesian-Enlightenment version of ourselves as bounded and ultimately unknowable in our separation from the world. That freeing dissolves boundaries and opens up the extraordinary singularity of knowing-in-being- or being-in-knowing, of intra-active, multiplicative, emergent subjects (p. 47).

Mapping Grace

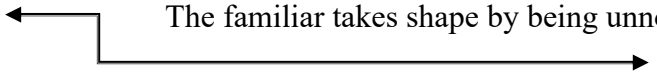
What comes to light when using posthumanist ideas? What becomes materialised intra-actively in our daily classroom literacy worlds? Using posthumanist ideas urges us to rethink how phenomena such as the materialisation of power, discourse, subjectivity and agency can be theorised in more complex, relational ways. This counters the role of knowledge as solely residing in the realm of the human to embrace the entanglements of relations and phenomena that often stay hidden from view. These might include a multitude of considerations for analysis, e.g., histories, discourses on literacy, department policies, educational institutional life, subject positions of teachers, school leaders, our image of the child, accountability measures, the collection of children's data of literacy learning, the impact of neoliberal mandates, testing regimes, lesson goals, selection of specific texts, sequences of expected objectives to be taught and assessed, and other innumerable 'bodies' that entangle with the production of literacy teaching and learning. Significantly, it is what *becomes* materialised through these intra-actions and how these come to leave their mark, on children like Grace that is of interest in these mappings.

What traces remain from our experiences as literacy learners that are produced in the material ↔ discursive practices of educational institutional life? Perhaps these materialise as excesses, as residuals in our bodies, haunting presences, that remain as affective resonances entangled with/in our everyday relations. What becomes of the child when haunted by the ghostly spectres of a learning life that has excluded her? How might the presence of ghosts that have materialised in/through bodies affect our children throughout their literacy learning lives? How do these activate a sense of wider relations as children experience the world of the literacy classroom? To what extent do we consider the residues of learning that greatly impact on a child - the 'marks' left of their learning life? Drawing on Derrida's (1994) notion of hauntology, Barad (2017) writes "hauntings are not immaterial, and they are not mere recollections or reverberations of what was...hauntings are an integral part of existing material conditions" (p. 74). Consistent with these beliefs is the view expressed by MacLure (2016) who draws attention to the materiality of language and its posthuman entanglements in classroom relations. She states that

> a-signifying semiotics do not disappear as the child grows up and becomes more adept and embroiled in the "order-words" of conventional language...rather, they persist as affective "blocks of becoming" which can befall us and carry us off in unforeseen trajectories at any age" (p. 173).

Using concepts from agential realism help us to understand how the present is full of ongoing intra-actions that continue to be in/formed by "ghostly casualties" that trouble time (Romano, 2021, p. 34); the absent yet viscerally felt presence of entangled relations. We can think about the materiality of language as shaping Grace's sense of belonging that resonates not only intellectually but also somatically; those that may comprise the "blocks of becoming which can befall us..." as MacLure (2016) suggests. Hauntings are felt viscerally through the presence and absence of the specific language that materialises in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning. We can imagine the ways in which it becomes enmeshed in the intellectual, academic, material and politically entangled world of knowledge in Grace's literacy learning. Language that becomes a material actor through its capacity to affect future experience (Leander & Ehret, 2019, p. 23).

The continuous material↔discursive practices that created the social realities of Grace's learning life and the classroom generally, can provoke us to think about the ways language becomes entangled *performatively*. A series of provocations come into play. What might these materialisations produce? How might these leave traces on Grace's body that *haunt* her throughout her (learning) life? We can bring into analytical view a host of relations as we map how these might be imagined in Grace's learning world. These might be the adult directions *to* children, the labels assigned to different streamed groups that were publicly displayed on the walls (The Whales, The Kangaroos and The Wombats...), the nature of learning activities, the different texts and their accompanying vocabulary and language structures that are made available differentially to the groups. We might ask specifically, what kinds of vocabularies and literate *performances* thus become materialised if one is assigned to the Whales, the Kangaroos or the Wombats group? How are these implicated in the institutionally sanctioned literacy norms and routines? How do the creation of boundary making processes become entangled with issues of participation as they establish, *who* becomes constituted as a Whale, a Kangaroo or perhaps a Wombat? *What* is the nature of the knowledge they read/write/speak? *How* are these words, sentences and utterances made intelligible in these assemblages of ability groups and *what* do they produce? These issues become of interest when we consider that "words position bodies as particular things" (Hargraves, 2019, p. 190) and come to *matter* considerably as they become entangled with/in issues of power, access and justice.



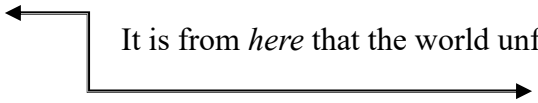
The overlapping and intersections of material↔discursive practices in Grace's literacy learning and the classroom world become of interest and greatly impact on what becomes materialised. Myers (2019) states that "at the heart of an intra-active pedagogical orientation is a posthuman relationality—that of mutual constitution and intelligibility" (p. 10). Similarly, Lenz Taguchi (2010) states that when think with the concept of intra-action, "learning is not something an individual child achieves isolated from the material discursive pedagogical space" (p. 39). Knowing in this way is conceptualised as intra-activity - as being constituted by the multiple performative agents that intra-act (human, non-human, more than human) to create worldings. We might then reimagine through this 'posthuman relationality,' how our classroom realities are made *intelligible* through multiple intra-actions that entangle and produce what/who/how we *become*. These might

be the ‘at risk’ reader, the ‘bright’ learner, the literacy program, the literacy lesson or the ‘low’ ability group.

Grace excluded

> Most of the time when people think of literacy, they imagine a disembodied reader and a text, understood to be a collection of signifiers...literacy understood as a discrete set of skills that can be acquired and assessed, which in turn allows assessment of literacy to become a driver of state biopolitical control. Literacy here, assumed to be a good or useful or necessary skill, functions as a marker of proper citizenship and even humanity (Snaza, 2022, p. 35).

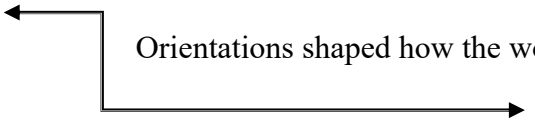
Visualise Grace each morning being called away from the classroom group to occupy her seat at the withdrawal table. On this table sits a range of low levelled texts, worksheets and lists of high frequency words. Think of the ‘disembodied’ reader referred to by Snaza (2022) above. During that time, her literacy learning included completing various tasks that were simplified compared to the rest of the class. Positioned on a table in the centre of the classroom, it was determined that Grace required close, intensive supervision, frequent directions from the teacher’s assistant and constant monitoring of her capacity to read simple sentences. Grace, ‘a collection of signifiers’ that marked her as ‘at risk.’



What material↔ discursive practices came to constitute Grace’s experiences of being/becoming a literacy learner? What did this mean for the kinds of access, participation and literacy experiences that were produced? Children who are determined to need ‘additional assistance’ are often separated in the classroom space away from the larger group to undertake tasks that are “exclusively occupied with individual children’s cognitive knowledge constructions” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 35). As such, the use of specific assessment/testing items and materials become entangled. Those that assume that the human brain is little more than for the storage of information much like a computer

or file cabinet (Downey, 2007, p. 222) disconnected from the body. Or, as a brain on a stick (Murris & Haynes, 2020). These reflect an ontological vision where we are not so much *in relation* to the world but rather as both detached from it and *dominating* it from outside; what Pickering (2008) has described as "freestanding human agents in a passive material world" (p.1). In these neoliberally driven assemblages we become ultimately *unknowable*, to each other; to ourselves. The stratified, unjust separations in the Cartesianally divided literacy classroom world meant that Grace was to experience a segmented literacy life (Blaise, 2013). She became immersed in policies, practices and the ensuing categories that sought to measure, quantify children into arbitrary divisions. Those that reduce the possibilities for democratic literacy practices (Hall & Pulsford, 2019).

Using posthuman theories, we can think of the human, non-human and more than human elements that assembled in Grace's time in her low ability group to understand more specifically, the nature of the tasks the children were required to undertake. Sharing the other end of that classroom space, at times I would visit to observe what actually constituted *learning* in that group. The literacy materials used were usually lists of high frequency words (i.e., the [apparent] *most* used words), an assortment of low levelled texts and a variety of blackline master colouring in worksheets with outlines of images and labels that required children to match words and pictures (or sometimes initial alphabet letters or phonemes). What I became concerned with, however, were the less examined notions of *what else* was happening in terms of the ways children became constituted in their 'at risk' configured world and how oppressive they were to become for Grace and for the children generally. Bodies *marked* academically, socially, materially, discursively and emotionally. It makes me wonder now how little we ever consult with children about what matters to them in the adult dominated world of literacy learning. How tightly regulated their bodies and spaces are as they are physically removed away from their regular class. The 'teacher sanctioned' larger group who were deemed to be *able* to participate in the regular literacy program. Rethinking these critical issues in a more than human world and all of its imaginings urges us to engage in what comes to matter. These questions become deeply ethical as we imagine orientations toward "response-able" (Barad, 2007) literacy pedagogies.



Orientations shaped how the world cohered around Grace (Ahmed, 2010).

Critical issues of justice can be expanded when we consider what becomes constituted as 'literacy' in Grace's low ability group and how these are produced in material ↔ discursive practices. These issues come to light, especially if we consider the children in the rest of Grace's class who receive the *regular* literacy program. The kinds of literacy they were taught comprised learning to compose writing in different genres, using a variety of different vocabulary and learning to vary language structures. These differential literacy experiences are noteworthy, compared to Grace whose literacy tasks were based on the use of decodable texts that required minimal language and literacy skills. Minimal engagement. The effects of these material↔discursive engagements are described by Leander and Boldt (2013). They suggest that an important shift in theorising the agency of materials in literacy learning is a concern with what materials and texts are understood as *doing.* Specifically, they argue that "texts are not about the world; rather they are participants *in* the world" (p. 25).

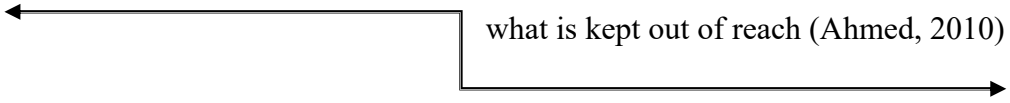
Objects are the furniture of the 'room of one's own' from which the world is observed (Ahmed. 2010).

From these insights, we can thus imagine what the simplified, low levelled texts *do;* the performative role they played in Grace's learning experiences. How, when entangled with other elements, they enacted a capacity to *reduce* Grace's intellectual engagement given their simplified and repetitive language structures. These were also entangled with low expectations that she repeatedly read these *independently before* she was able to (then) read other ('harder') texts. Expectations that her cognitive resources be used to essentially memorise high frequency words (rote learn) and identify these. A host of relations can be theorised as emerging including minimal reciprocal human interactions, highly regulated bodily movements (sit still in your chair) and limited *affective* engagements (discussions rarely included how she might be *affected* in processes of learning). For Grace, "language and literacies as a function of representationalism [became] employed to confirm facts of the world" (Hargraves, 2019, p. 188). In this way, Grace was constituted as an independent (human) learner required to *master* these 'facts of the world' as sequenced (external) literacy skills deemed necessary to improve her reading attainment.

Turning to Barad (2003), the notion of posthuman performativity brings our awareness to the practices, doings and actions of human, non-human and more than human elements. What might these 'practices, doings and actions' produce in Grace's everyday literacy learning that expand beyond Grace as the *individual* learner? Cirell and Sweet (2020) suggest that it is from "continuous co-productions between human, non-human and more than human entanglements [that] social reality then becomes an ongoing performance of *posthuman transformations*" (p. 1187 italics in original). These transformations that produce Grace's 'social reality' can thus be imagined through an analysis of Grace, the literacy materials and the nature of what constituted the literacy curriculum for the 'at risk' learner. The materiality and agency of curriculum is described by Eaton and Hendry (2019) who state, "curriculum can be conceived of not as a product, but as a phenomena or process in which educational systems and subjectivities are living, breathing systems constituted through intra-actions" (p. 4). Agencies, in this case pedagogical practices, are performative as they are always entangled, relational, dynamic, emergent, indeterminate, and living; not absolute.

Theorising the inseparability of diverse elements and their 'performative' potential, we can further contemplate the material effects of language in terms of exerting a kind of agency that can open up or conversely constrain what Grace was able to know/be/do. Lenz Taguchi (2010) describes the ways in which our words become materialised in the classroom. She argues that words can be assigned an *agency*, that makes possible what is produced intra-actively. Thus, it is important that as teachers we understand that what comes to *matter* in our everyday literacy learning worlds "is dependent on what we say to children, how we encourage them or limit their possibilities...and what materials we offer them " (p. 38). Jackson and Mazzei (2023) believe that we can think of these relations in terms of how they "create conditions of possibility and impossibility when intra-actions happen at a given time" (p. 90). Imagining what comes to be included and conversely 'excluded' in terms of Grace's access to specific language and literacy experiences in the low ability group becomes a social justice matter.

We are touched by what comes near...



A further insight into the specific types of language and literacy relations that materialised in the *remedial* support Grace received each day is of concern. Her learning world was entangled with the provision of specific levelled vocabulary and texts, the allocated high frequency (easy) words, a book box marked with her name that contained (easy) levelled decodable texts to be repeatedly practiced, various worksheets often with deleted high frequency words to be *found* and inserted. These can be considered as 'machinic assemblages' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that produce the 'at risk' performances required by Grace each morning and are markedly different to the experiences of her peers. Intra-actions of *words* limited in letters, *sounds* to be made/imagined in their various phonemes – required to be recalled, recorded and represented as 'truths' on the page by Grace as directed by the teacher's assistant. Acts of representations resembling mostly what could be observed and verified. All enacting a kind of agency in this assemblage, as Grace became entangled with/in these intra-actions. Being consistently assessed to check on her level, frequently directed by the teaching assistant to "Recall this... Say that...Get your mouth ready...Look at the first letter...What is that called"? Endless repetitions of monological directions from the (human) teaching assistant and/or the (non-human) worksheet demarcating the linguistic and bodily boundaries in which Grace was to perform. The *absent presence* in full swing as Grace's chance to become anything other than 'at risk' is erased in universals and generalisations (Toohey et al., 2020) that sedimented her status as 'struggling.' No opportunities for Grace to imagine, to wonder, to move, to be curious, to be affected by anything other than the "devastating dividing material↔ discursive practices of the dogmatic image of Cartesian thought" (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 99). Conditions of (im)possibility profoundly materialised in the exclusionary everyday (Rausch, 2022) of deficit assemblages.

Grace demarcated

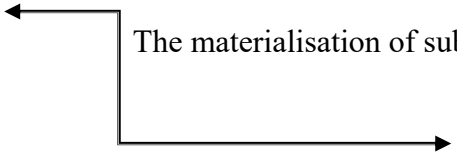
The concept of agential cuts developed by Barad (2007), offers insights to understand the ways in which we create divisions and boundaries in our literacy classrooms, most notably through practices such as ability grouping. The ethical and political implications of these *cuts* thus come to the fore as they can materialise different phenomena that produce different marks on bodies. We can think of the potentialities and limitations created and ways in which boundaries may manifest specific exclusions and inclusions.

Kuby et al. (2019) describe how our pedagogical decisions made in the literacy classroom can be considered forms of 'agential cuts'. They state:

> This cut brings together people, materials, time and space in specific ways. It makes certain happenings possible and not others. Power and agency are produced through the relations enacted through cuts. Posthuman theories of literacies shine on the institutionalised habituated cuts that we have made as a field and how in many cases those cuts have been too small, particularly for poor, minority and immigrant children (p. 3).

The use of standardised assessments and how these are implemented in daily literacy teaching and learning can be considered 'agential cuts' that have implications for what becomes materialised. The daily testing of Grace's reading and writing skills became entangled in her daily literacy experiences that were to determine (external to her; the learner) which specific texts she was to read and the actual words she was to learn (that were also 'levelled' from simple to complex). These 'datafication' (Roberts-Holmes, 2021) processes for Grace, took the form of counting the number of high frequency words she could write or noting the specific words she could read in a decodable text. These were all set alongside externally created benchmarks that mapped out specific standards she was to achieve.

Barad (2003) reminds us that "an accounting of the non-human as well as the human forms of agency" (p. 810) can enable insights into what becomes materialised for Grace. From this perspective, the notion of agency is imagined as "diffusely enacted in complex networks of relations" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 13). Once more, agency comes to be re-conceptualised as being an emergent relation that is distributed intra-actively in assemblages. It is thus considered as a capacity to *act* that emerges from within the relationships not outside of it. This posthuman resituating of agency, "is not a matter of human power *over* the world, but of non-human and human bodies' emergent capacities to affect and be affected as becoming parts of the world" (Ehret & D'Amico, 2019, p. 148).



The materialisation of subjects is inseparable from objects which circulate to create specific encounters (Ahmed, 2010).

So, in what ways might we consider the *agency* of assessment processes that assemble in Grace's literacy learning? In agential realist accounts, according to Barad (2003), children's assessment data can be said to exert an *authoritative* agency as it enacts a performative role. One that becomes entangled in a range of pedagogical practices that create specific boundaries and exclusions in Grace's literacy learning. These become implicated in the kinds of texts and tasks Grace would then be assigned based on her assessment results. Data then can be said to perform a *representational* role when used as a means of diagnosis and remediation unproblematically. Often assessments in early literacy take the form of children's knowledge of alphabetic and phonological skills that are easily measured and teachers are thus required to develop specific pedagogical practices for children based on these results. We can further imagine how these become entangled in the increasing policy requirements that teachers engage in frequent data collection activities and the impact on the kinds of pedagogical relations these produce. What did Grace, and children generally, learn about what it means to become literate in these relations?

For Grace, what might we theorise about the nature of her pedagogical relations that were entangled with/in data assemblages? Given that the *only* close encounters she had with the significant adults in the room were centred on endlessly *testing* her literacy skills, we can wonder in what ways could these *soulless* encounters make marks on children's bodies. Those that are carried as traces throughout one's life. Will Grace ever be afforded an opportunity to be immersed in anything other than the reductive forms of literacy assessment practices created in the neoliberal world of literacy teaching and learning? Blackman (2019) explores 'data' as a ubiquitous presence in our lives – especially its capacity to *haunt* us. In the neoliberal literacy classroom this ubiquity is felt as a force that regulates and directs teachers into narrow, simplistic practices and deficit views that have significant material consequences for the *marks* left on the bodies of children like Grace.

Insights from Hackett et al. (2020) suggest a cautionary tale. They explain that literacy practices that are "uniquely human, rational, pre-designed, and guided by human mastery and intent... significantly all carry the trauma of the Cartesian split (p. 5). Persisting with perpetual enactments of these 'Cartesian splits' are realised in the forms of narrow data collection used to determine a child's level and then determine practices such as ability

grouping. These pedagogical decisions, designed as interventions, become entangled in what Rose (1999) has described as modes of perception, practices of calculation, vocabularies, inscription practices, types of authorities and forms of judgement that are "imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of achieving certain [stratified] effects" (p. 52).

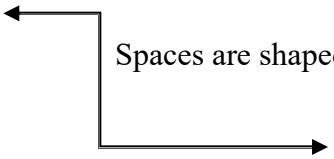
Grace 'matters'

In further theorising the role of materials as 'performative,' we can turn to Bennett (2010) who argues that "a lot happens to the concept of agency once non-human things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors; as vital materialities" (p. 21). From this perspective, we can therefore imagine how these non-human 'vitalities' emerge in heterogeneous assemblages that become implicated in what comes to matter. In further imagining entanglements in the literacy classroom, these non-human actors might include; literacy posters displayed, digital devices and their use, particular reading programs, school literacy policies, data walls that publicly display children's reading levels (which Charteris, 2022 interestingly describes as "post panoptic"), the 'mobile' assessment trolley that contains levelled texts to be used to benchmark children, being wheeled in and out of the classroom, and so much more. All entangled, these become implicated in knowledge production and significantly, what *counts* in literacy.

Furthermore, we can consider displays of 'good work" that invariably lined Grace's classroom walls as a kind of psychic skin (Davies, 2009a), exerting agency as it becomes entangled in productions of what is *desired* in literacy. Cue possible familiar teacher instructions that also come into play, e.g., "Make your handwriting neat... Do your writing first before your picture... Use lots of colours... Finish your work" and so on... that Grace's class were subjected to. We rarely regard the power, indeed the potential *vitalities* these human, non-human and more than human elements create in the literacy classroom. Or significantly, ways in which their performances can *affect* us, our spaces, our orientations in the everyday literacy classroom as they circulate and come to govern and regulate issues of participation and access. Thiel and Pelling (2020) believe that "physical boundaries create habituated understandings or embodied literacies...[that] teach us something about how to perform, how we are read by others and [significantly] who we are allowed to be in any given space at any given time" (p. 98).

These issues are of concern to St. Pierre et al. (2016) who argue that an emphasis on the agency of matter and materials becomes deeply *ethical* matters of justice. They state, "if humans have no separate existence, if we are completely entangled with the world, if we are no longer masters of the universe, then we are completely responsible to and for the world and all our relations of becoming with it" (p. 101). We thus cannot ignore how the materials we use in our literacy classrooms become co-implicated in issues of social justice, access and participation. Especially if these are imagined as "completely alive, becoming with us" (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 101). This resituating of agency has implications for how we reframe our daily literacy worlds toward matters of justice.

We can reimagine then, the capacity of literacy materials and objects in Grace's learning life as more than the *mere* backdrop of her classroom life, but rather as an exerting a capacity "to shape individuals and spaces" (Potter, 2022, p. 100). They can be mapped as qualities that emerge in between bodies (Moss, 2019), "forming dynamic collectives and unexpected partnerships" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 15). In these processes are the creation of entangled performative affects. Dahlberg and Moss (2010, p. xiv) draw attention to how assemblages of humans, non-humans and more than humans create our sense of being, and we can also add our *becoming*. More significantly, however, are concerns with how these can be either empowering or disciplining.



Spaces are shaped by the bodies that tend to inhabit them. They give them their tendencies (Ahmed, 2010).

Grace signified

Grace constituted as the 'at risk' child with/in the assemblages of predetermined curriculum outcomes that are mandated and implemented via literacy policies, materialised Grace's subjectivity; one who has an *in-ability* to read/write. These configurations create boundaries that excluded her from fully participating in 'regular' classroom experiences as previously discussed. Furthermore, these can be reimagined as intellectual, social, academic and *spatial* exclusions as she is placed on a table away from the regular class to perform simplified, repetitive functional literacy tasks. These entanglements assemble with a host of material↔discursive relations that materialised

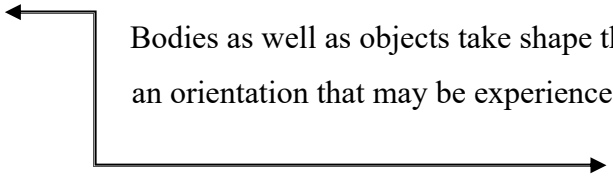
her identity as *fixed*. In dramatic contrast, posthuman theories emphasise the plurality of subjects. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) state:

> the subject can no longer be understood as a fixed being, but rather a 'way of being' – a verb rather than a noun. The subject is an effect of multiple encounters that entails the history of previous encounters, the present and the potentialities of the future encounters that might take place (p. 532).

The potentialities of multiple subjectivities are a far cry from Grace in the neoliberal world of the classroom. As discussed above, narrow forms of literacy assessment data collection produced Grace as an *object* of measurement to be compared and categorised. We can learn powerful unjust lessons that are amplified in the world of the 'at risk' learner. Being denied anything other than restricted forms of literacy, materials including texts that are based on learning alphabetic principles *prior* to the possibility of any more complex ideas (if at all). These are reflected in linear progressions of benchmarks that are expected to be achieved in a sequence of stages. Denied movement from these pre-determined trajectories, and any sense of experimentation (Olsson, 2009), children's pedagogical worth, their sense of belonging to something *more,* to something *different* is erased.

Concerns with the harmful effects of standardisation and their effect on teachers' pedagogical practices can be found in the research by Spina (2019) who found that the use of ability grouping based on standardised assessments had become commonplace in Australian primary school classrooms. Concerningly, however, was the comment by one Principal in the study who stated, "once upon a time teachers didn't speak about it (ability grouping or streaming) but now, we don't hide it (p. 335). Blaise (2013) argues that instead of being curious about childhood and difference, teachers in this educational narrowing seek to know and fix children and their literacy problems. Similarly, Phillips and Larson (2013) suggest that limited perspectives on how the child can be imagined in the literacy classroom ignores the multiplicities of subjectivities that the child might *become.* They describe a "discursive narrowing" (p. 734), that leads educational policy to search for a 'fix' and a 'cause' while ignoring the wider intra-actions that might discern another image and possibilities for the child.

In agential realist accounts, material ↔ discursive practices give meaning to specific concepts and in the process, exclude others. Bozalek and Kuby (2022) explain that "concepts are not abstract and free floating but specific material arrangements [that] are agentic, dynamic, in/determinate and temporary. They are imbued with an endless ability to change and reconfigure and are contingent upon conditions of possibility and impossibility" (p. 83). From these perspectives, we are called to reflect on the ways in which we think about and conceptualise our daily literacy teaching and learning practices that greatly influence what materialises each day. Our image of the child, beliefs about young children's literacy learning, educational department policies, literacy programs, school priorities of how children *should* be taught (and so on) powerfully entangle and shape what are made (im)possible with/in our daily practices.



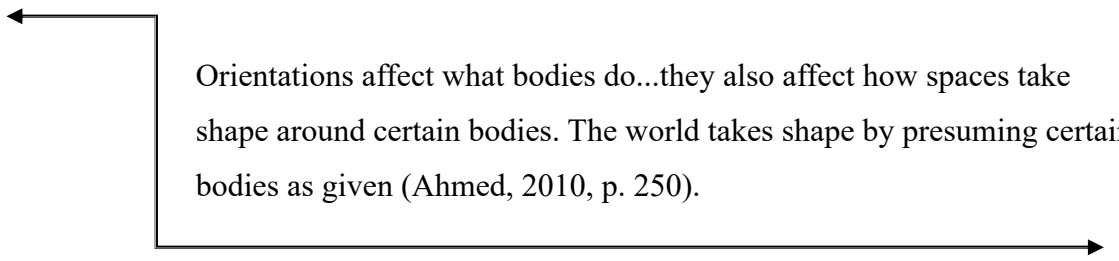
> Bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other; an orientation that may be experienced as the co-habitation or sharing of space (Ahmed, 2010, p. 245).

Grace affected

We can ask, how do the material↔discursive practices entangled in Grace's learning affect her capacity to *act*? This question can be posed by considering an innumerable range of assemblages that entangle in her learning world. We can imagine the affects/effects on bodies when materials, expectations, routines and levels of engagement are deemed to be *categorically* different (Davies, 2009b) for children who are deemed to be 'low' achievers. Barad (2007) reminds us of our ongoing response-ability for how we engage with others as being entangled in what comes to *matter*. Mulcahy (2012) echoes this belief in her own research noting that she seeks to account for how "materials participate in pedagogic practice and considers what is *performed* through this participation" (p. 9). We can therefore argue that the material assemblages of 'risk' (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022) that were produced, significantly limited Grace's capacity to *act*. She was unable to know/be/do anything other than enact her role with/in the boundaries created by 'at risk' learning assemblages.

Recall Barad's notion of posthuman performativity – where agency is *distributed* in processes of intra-actions. Where we are able to rethink agency *not* as something that resides inside of the individual human – awaiting to be developed from an external source (usually a significant 'adult' in a child's life) but as *emerging* intra-actively and co-constituted in concert with literacy materials and objects. The notion of agency is thus no longer considered a solely 'human' quality – but rather as being enmeshed in "relationships of mutuality" (Moss, 2019, p. 147) and are associated in power relations and change. In this way, *all* bodies have the capacity to enact agency. In what ways might we deterritorialise our neoliberally governed literacy pedagogies? In what way might we create the conditions for Grace to have a capacity to *act* in epistemically just ways? What might become assembled in these re/creations?

Attending to the more than human relations in literacy is seen as a project of emancipation for Snaza (2022) to escape the "hyper-restricted concept of literacy captured by the state" (p. 38). He theorises that "supposed neutral measures of literacy exist only to facilitate the movement of bodies at checkpoints in a highly stratified social formation, and this version of literacy is a material part of (settler) colonialism and state racisms" (p. 38). With/in these entanglements are practices that sediment the *fixed* identities of children. Those of the *struggling* reader, the *poor* speller or for some, the *bright* learner as reflected in stratified versions of literacy teaching and learning. Core binary modes of reasoning (notably able/disable) also become entangled in material ↔ discursive practices. These can be considered as *agentic* as they assemble with psychological models of development that prescribe 'normal' literacy progress and thus, *who* is considered to be 'able' to make progress. Entanglements that profoundly affected Grace, and children generally, as they establish striated territories of which children will be in, e.g., the *high*, *middle* and *low* ability groups.



A significant concern threaded throughout these mappings, is the belief that there is much to learn about our literacy classroom worlds that can be envisioned beyond the human only gaze. The underlying assumption that "posthumanist accounts call into question the givenness of the differential categories of "human" and "nonhuman," [by] examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilised and destabilised" (Barad, 2003, p. 808) has largely driven its aims. In this way, we can imagine knowledge production as less about seeking correspondences (Massumi, 1987) typical in representative modes of conventional qualitative research and more about how we can think expansively. Haraway (2016) describes this as 'thinking-with' which "enlarges the capacities of all players (human and other-than-human) beyond inherited categories and capacities, in homely and concrete ways" (p. 7). In the following discussion, I further imagine these 'players' whose capacities became enlarged in Grace's literacy learning life.

When theorising injustices that are experienced by children in the literacy classroom, Barad (2010) explains that a different understanding of matter and the material *matters* because it is only in this ongoing response-ability of the entangled other, that there is the possibility of a justice-to-come. They suggest that "viewing entanglements as irreducible relations of responsibility involves the dissolution of fixed dividing lines between self and others, past and present and future, here and now, which can undo the unjust Cartesian cuts that are made" (pp. 264-265). From these concerns with justice we can think of Grace, her time spent withdrawn from her class (spatially; arguably spiritually) to work at a designated table with specific 'special' literacy materials designed to keep her learning simplified and her body regulated. Using Deleuzeguattarian thinking we can also consider that Grace's body has been "stolen from her to impose a history, or prehistory upon her" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 276).

Once more, in consultation with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), are possibilities for movement, for changing all that has been configured in Grace's learning life. The concept of 'deterritorialisation' is useful to consider (literacy) life as being conceptualised as being imbued with 'movement.' As having the capacity to *change*, to be transformed and to transform children. Colebrook (2002) suggests that we can think of how "life creates

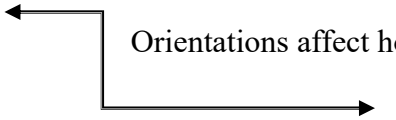
and furthers itself by forming connections or territories, noting that everything from bodies to societies is a form of territorialisation, yet alongside these there is always the power of deterritorialisation. These are "the very connective forces that allow any form of life to become what it *is* (territorialise) can also allow it to become what it is *not* (deterritorialise)" (p. xxii). Imagining what comes to be assembled in Grace's narrow literacy learning world as the 'at risk' child has profound implications for issues of equity, her right to fully participate, to be immersed in an intellectually, affectively rich array of experiences. It urges us, or more accurately, compels us to imagine otherwise for Grace. To deterritorialise all that she had become. To deterritorialise reductive literacy practices.

The current emphasis on narrow phonics (only) programs, as a means to *fix* children's literacy challenges reflect simplistic (and harmful) cause and effect explanations. Turning to Barad (2007), we can re-think the issue of *causality* in the concept of intra-action as constituting, "a radical radically reworking of the traditional notion of causality"(p. 33). In other words, individual entities no longer *cause* actions independently of a host of other relations. This calls into question incessant rhetoric and mandates in the neoliberal world of early literacy teaching and learning that comprises mostly of simplistic formulaic arguments vis a vis, 'effective teacher uses evidence based practices = children's achievement of expected literacy levels.' From a Baradian concept of 'causality' we can think of a *phenomenon* from the literacy educational world, e.g., the literacy lesson or the specific practice (event/practice/doing etc.) as not merely an individual entity with a clear beginning and ending, but as being *entangled* in a multitude of relations with humans, non-humans and more than humans actors that emerge in pedagogical encounters. This assemblage of human, non-human and more than human actors have the capacity for *agency* and as such, produce specific material affects. And with/in those infinite assemblages of relations are also other emerging unpredictable entities that come to matter in the diversity of our world. These complex ideas are greatly removed from simplistic cause and effect relationships that are manufactured in the reductively configured 'effective teacher = (creates) ideal student' as previously suggested. They enable us to deterritorialise simplistic notions of literacy teaching and learning.

Moreover, from an analysis of these justice and ethically oriented concerns, as teachers we become entangled in the need to critically understand what comes to be materialised when literacy policies and practices create harmful social exclusions for children. There

is a need to critically *deterritorialise* narrow versions of literacy and simplistic pedagogical responses that perpetuate literacy as a limited body of knowledge that exists outside of the learner. This is significant given the increasing demands of neoliberal policies and increased accountability and regimes of assessment. Critical questions become concerned with how we might re-design/reterritorialise children's opportunities to learn literacy. A consideration of how materials (the types of texts, the nature of vocabulary, topics of interest from children) intra-act in children's daily learning can engage us to recognise that specific *agencies* can be produced or conversely denied.

The Deleuzian notion of 'difference' can be enlightening in these wonderings. Stagoll (2010) suggests that in theorising difference as it is experienced, we are able to overturn the primacy accorded to identity (e.g., *the* struggling reader, *the* bright group) and representation (e.g., *the* suitable levelled text, the sequence of phonemes to be learned) in our neoliberally configured literacy worlds. This conceptualisation of difference does not rely on comparisons and sameness and can challenge the ubiquitous and damaging effects of the establish tendencies to narrowly assess and label children. I am reminded of Manning and Massumi (2014) who state that 'rationality' acts as "subtractions from the fielding of a much *richer* event" (p. 12). In terms of daily classroom life, this 'rationality' can be akin to the endless assessment of children's literacy skills. Erasing time and space for more ethical pursuits that seek possibilities for 'richer events' in our classroom worlds. These 'acts of subtraction' dominate.



Orientations affect how subjects and objects materialise or come to take shape the way that they do (Ahmed, 2010, p. 285).

These mappings sought to bring to light expanded analysis of classroom life beyond the 'human' only frames of thinking. Key to these imaginings are our capacity to "discern and intervene within the material conditions...[in our classrooms] that begin from an ethical determination that current exploitative relations are untenable and we cannot bear the weight of them anymore" (Kuntz, 2022, p. 145). I now take a 'detour' to the final Interlude, The Power of 'Things' that comprise texts to imagine the performative agency of the non-human and more than human materials and affects that become entangled in our classroom literacy lives. I offer these as provocations to consider what role they might play in our 'more than human' literacy classroom worlds.

> There are no objects that are neutral: the pencil, the chair, the clock, and the intercom, for example, are all material-discursively formed; all are recognisable as the particular tools of ‘school’
> (Phillips & Larson, 2013, p. 726).

So...we can imagine the spaces, places and objects in which we become entangled have implications for how we feel, act and participate in the classroom world. On the edges, in between, inside and out...

Space is felt
It is material
Within these spaces are
Structures rhythms repetition continuity and
discontinuities
Being ushered here and there
Ontological orientations
From human
Non-human objects
More than human
Affects
Assembled
Pointing us toward
This and that
Here and there
Fair and unfair
Right and unjust

When big is small and small is big…a pedagogical conundrum

In the classroom world, the status of "data" can be big and small depending on your perspective. It can be considered as lively – as exerting an agentic force in our everyday worlds.

Data that divides, conquers and decimates keeps the status quo unperturbed. It is said to 'speak for itself' and rarely contested. It is retrieved from the brains on sticks that attend each day. It seeks to brand, label, and name the world into fixed categories with no escape. It seeks to dazzle, confuse and exert its authority in the form of perplexing graphs or effect size tables that frighten, judge and threaten when they are re(a)d. Very few question the authority these practices produce even though they leave most who seek to understand it perplexed. As they dutifully perform their work of "coding us to smithereens" (Perry, 2019, p. 190), we continue to carve up our learning worlds stratifying and ensuring the segregation of the have and have nots.

Data that might be conceptualised as small (*ah…"small data" she delights*…) for her is the biggest of all, it is elusive, captures the extraordinary, the ephemeral, the difficult to name (yet incredibly powerful). It requires a capacity to imagine - a space into which we must enter with our children with loving care. It seeks to open up, invite yet importantly create possibilities. At times we must invent new ways for this small data to live. To find ways to create and name worlds and identities that could be made possible. Endless variations.

Shelf life(less)

The [decodable, mostly] texts occupy a straight line
as ontological actors
performing high enough
even low enough
to suit their purposes
calling out to all to consider their use,
"Level 3 perhaps?"
With permission
calling on levelled bodies,
"Hey brains on sticks! Sample our offerings"
across the straight lines they sit
adorned with numbers
denoting much signification
perhaps affects [but which?]
words might be few as one goes down low
images and fonts loom large to simplify
all made to produce the repetitive *uncomplicated*
requiring little more than activation of minimal cognition
[no body, imagination or
movement required!]
other than the use of an index finger to point to a word
or maybe turn a page
[if allowed]
just recite ["get your mouth ready..."]
decode and recall
perhaps *even* express what it *means*.

Books that move - Trolleys that assess

They have wheels
They move
They are moved
They move us
Inside and out
Create categories
Create certainties in their ways
Hurriedly call the children
"Over you come!"
"What do you *know*?"
"What can you *do?*"
Assemble the sheets
Get the checklists
Even a laptop
Well, we are *all* digital
[Apparently]

Productions of the ordinary (Ahmed, 2004)

Just imagine,
The withdrawal table
Level 2 text
The lesson plan
The literacy policy
The lists of non-negotiables
Data Wall (*Who* is *where*?)
[spatial elements too....!?]
Sedimented desires for *higher and higher*

Literacy as a “thing”

A protagonist?
Manifested each day
Assemblage of sorts?
A haunting presence
Felt - Moving us - Moved by us
Affecting us all

Having agency- what can it be?
A data wall
Progress wall
Levels high - Levels low
Shelf life
Unknown
Assessment trolley

Tables charts *this n that*

Together apart
Multiplicities
Carving us up
Shaping lives
For what is next
[BUT *next* is now!]
Pushing and pulling
Away and toward
Cruelly disregarding
Keeping hidden
Hearts and souls
That come for fun
But are made to *endure*.

[Un]Happy Objects

The Behaviour Chart
Ah, I remember it well
It's force
Complicit in ludicrous acts of rewarding children
Meanings assembled in the flows of messages
Forces of compliance
Governance
Regulation
The power of that chart
Its agency felt
Multiplied
Assembled with its compatriots
[but never realised]

Telling the world is who good and bad
and who is neither
One of many "unthinkable practices"
(de Certeau, 1988, p. 190)

What materialises?

If books could speak –
If walls could talk - What would '*you*' hear?
Would you be all literal like;
Adore the neatness that is there
Fuss over its representational forms?
Enforcing desires for 'neat work?'

Or maybe rage against what *isn't* there?
Rage against the perpetual exclusion
Of all that is deferred
In hearts and minds
The absent present
Screaming at all who will listen
Felt in the bodies of so many

The agency of desire

Can we contemplate? Research and writing that strives towards forms of intervention, as desires to expose what feels so unjust, yet at the same time seeks to experiment with new theories and concepts? This could be raising questions, proposing ideas, generating provocations to rethink our everyday literacy classroom worlds - but never assuming the "answers" are out there as simplistic solutions. How might we research and write to wonder, in ways that that might ignite inventions through inquiries of everyday practices using different theories that call for more complex ways to help us see anew? That might find that light in dark times (Greene, 1997). Are these momentary pauses to help overcome the persistent anxiety that is produced in neoliberally directed school worlds? Those that emphasise individuality, competition and other positivist pursuits of efficiency that attend only to the MEASURABLE. My desires materialise as acts of resistance against the endless erasure of alternative knowledge that may inspire a hunger, a curiosity for pedagogical/methodological moments that can nourish our souls. Nourishment.

These desires urged me towards acts of refusals and towards possibilities and inventions; to continually question the normalised (and *normalising*) limitations of traditional qualitative approaches. I was curious to pursue methodologies that brought attention to the restrictions inherent in rigid traditional methods towards more unconventional ideas that were situated in different theories. This led to me to understand how writing could be a form of praxis. In this way my desires embodied a form of critical pedagogy that pursues social justice aims and also one which requires researchers to experiment - to TRANSGRESS the *business as usual* models of qualitative research that keeps us replicating the known. Or in the words of Braidotti (2014) "engage in forms of academic writing that has to challenge and destabilise, intrigue and empower" (p. 166).

Yes please.

Intrigue and empower.

Fast forward one year.

Grace is now with me.

Reaching for affect

> Grappling with affect offers much to an activist agenda through engaging with what matters as meanings get made...it sensitises literacy educators and researchers to the feeling that drives those they work with and prompts us to imagine how we might work *with* feelings in generating more empowering and equitable literacy provision (Burnett, 2019, p. 207).

Throughout this thesis, I am coming to understand how teaching and meaning making practices no longer reside solely in the disembodied mind of the researcher/teacher disconnected from the world in which they live. What could this mean ontologically for how we conceptualise the everyday world of literacy pedagogy? As I argued in the previous chapter, we can embrace literacy research and teaching as *expansive* – as an openness to the human, non-human and more-than-human entanglements that assemble in our classroom worlds. From this expansive view, we invite new ways to reimagine literacy as material ↔ discursive practices that significantly shaped Grace's learning experiences. I now further develop these ideas to explore the affective intensities and visceral sensings (Koro & Cannella, 2024) that became entangled in mapping classroom life. Roelvink and Zolkos (2015) suggest that affect theory aligns with posthumanism as it explores the "non-cognitive and non-volitional expressions of life, including feeling, animation, tactility, and habituation" (p. 1). From these ideas, I continue to pursue alternative ways to produce knowledge that has significant implications for issues of social justice in the literacy classroom.

Thinking with theories of affect can "transform and reinvent" (Lehmann et al., 2019, p. 140) ways of understanding literacy teaching and learning. To achieve this, I continue to weave personal and professional experiences of literacy classroom life that draw on three vignettes from the year I taught Grace. These speculate the affective encounters that

Grace and I became immersed in (and the children generally), as I wondered how pedagogically, it might be possible for Grace to know differently; to *feel* differently as she learned literacy. I follow Burnett (2019) who suggests that by activating affect, we are moved to strive towards imagining more "empowering and equitable literacy provision" (p. 207).

Wozolek (2020) suggests, "everyday affects in our lives are always already complex, from the moment they are experienced in one body until the moment they stick on, between, and through other beings" (p. 83). I wonder, in thinking with theories of affect, what *sticks* to the bodies of children from their early literacy experiences? What comes into view from the moment they stick on, between and through other beings in the literacy classroom? How might we then pay attention to the affective intensities that create a sense of vitality and consider, "What world could be made? Where could life go?" (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 8) especially for children who have experienced marginalisation in their learning. I am reminded that "affects' critical potential can only be realized if the systematic oppressions of social and institutional structures are always in view" (Dutro, 2019a, p. 90). After telling me of the loneliness she had experienced, of her desires to feel that she belonged and to have friends, I wondered how to conceive of the relations in our literacy classroom world where Grace could feel a sense of connection, of being engaged in something more than the reductive literacy practices that did little more than assess, measure and try to 'fix' her. Evidently these had left her with an emptiness that was palpable in its manifestations; these reverberated in the after echoes (Niccolini, 2019a) of her life as an 'at risk' child.

-Scratch-

Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means making with. "Nothing makes itself...sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with in company" (Haraway, 2016, p. 60).

Stewart (2014) notes that researchers have "turned and re-turned attention to forms emergent in the conduct of [classroom] life... [where] the forms and forces immanent to ordinary ways of living are taken as intimate registers of knowledge and power" (p. 549).

As ‘intimate registers of knowledge and power,’ we can imagine the possibilities of affect as emerging with/in literacy pedagogical encounters which further propel us into other ways of learning and understanding classroom life. Massumi (2015) suggests that “with intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging with other people and to other places” (p. 6). What emerges of interest in light of Massumi’s ideas, are ways I sought to pedagogically create experiences for Grace to ‘feel a sense of being embedded in a larger field of classroom life.’ Uncannily Grace became my teacher that year. Listening to Grace’s reflections on her learning history, recounting her experiences of being placed in the low ability group, revealed critical lessons that inspired me to imagine new ways for Grace, for us all to *become* differently affected. What might these processes involve? Seigworth and Gregg (2010) suggest that,

> Affect arises in the midst of the in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise) on those resonances that circulate about, between and sometimes stick to bodies, to worlds (p. 1).

It is in the ‘midst of this ‘in-betweenness’ that theories of affect can compel us to find alternative ways to understand and theorise classroom life. Williams (2022) suggests that conventional approaches to qualitative research creates knowledge that is grounded in ideas of detachment and representation. She believes that most scholarship “tries vigorously to elide, or even erase, the intensities of our bodies and experiences in the midst of our research” (p. 54). These sentiments can be equally applied to the neoliberally configured literacy classroom, especially in light of Grace’s experiences. They suggest the need to pedagogically *slow down* for moments that can incite us to notice the potential intensities in our classroom worlds that greatly shape our children’s becomings. Those that arise in the ‘midst of the in-betweenness’ and have a capacity to shift how we think about literacy learning spaces and bodies as entangled. Of significance is how we are able to (re)story these in new ways (Kuby et. al., 2019) as we consider children’s meaning making “not as inherent to internal experiences...but as composed and recomposed in sets of affective relations” (Boldt & Leander, 2020, p. 515).

-Scratch-

Shortly before my mother died, I took time away from teaching. My children all wrote letters to me. They said that they knew my mother needed me but for me to remember that they needed me too.

Vignette # 1: Reading entangled: literature affects

To now engage in what might be affectively charged ways to *read* the world. To be readers together. To run a mile from the practices that define reading as the endless (individual) repetition of decodable texts like, *The cat is on the mat.* Yes, it is O-n *the* (get your mouth ready...) *Mmm*-A– T and has evidently been for what appears like a lifetime. Children need *practice*; they need explicit instruction; they need to learn alphabetic principles – these issues are crucially important in being able to proficiently read, write, speak and listen. BUT. There is so much more that can be *imagined* in this beautiful world, that many children may not ever come to know, to *feel*, or to imagine as they are increasingly erased in the dry, predictable learning spaces that our overdetermined neoliberal everyday literacy worlds have become. Spaces "bereft of enchantment" (Hudson, 2017, p. 8) was all that Grace had experienced. Her life at school immersed in "standardised literacy interventions, interventions consisting of easily codified, easily implemented strategies designed [ultimately] for a quick catch up" (Burnett & Rowsell, 2022, p.xxxii). There is nothing *lively* about learning in mechanical ways through repetitive reading and writing tasks each day. Aside from activating boredom and anxiety and creating deficit affects that stick to children's skin; that are carried as markers of the 'types' of learners/people they 'are.' Then we wonder why children *fail* to learn to read. What else is at play? Where is their body? The Cartesian split that dominates much of schooling created devastating affects throughout Grace's literacy learning life the year she spent in the low ability group. Her body, her life, immersed in the 'fickle literacies' that Comber and Woods (2016) inform us become the staple diet of children deemed to be low.

There was a sense of urgency I felt that year that inspired me to imagine other ways for Grace to un/re/learn literacy. These became subtle, yet powerful *small* moves to enable all the children to understand that reading could be so much more than isolated individual acts of word identification and limited comprehension tasks. Each morning, we read *together* as a class. We shared literature to bring Grace, to bring us all into close connection with each other. Opportunities for us to be immersed in discussions where we could all express ideas, listen to others and importantly *feel* how these reading acts can affect us. These were simple, ordinary moments in our everyday learning lives. Yet in time these became a *vital* source of learning. Together, listening, expressing, imagining and *becoming* readers. I now think of these as pursuing what Boldt (2021) argues are "vitality rights: the basic rights of all students to experience themselves as vital members of a classroom community" (p. 207).

-Scratch-

So many moments in the 'ordered' classroom assemble to produce the habitual/habituated (expected) roles and practices that regulate classroom life. Those that are unquestioningly routinely repeated day after day saturating the consciousness with sameness, restricting movements of any kind (mind, body, spirit...) Pedagogical forms of sleepwalking that rarely stop for a contemplative breath. As an antidote can we imagine that something (else) might happen? Things that elude 'capture' but are felt intensely, that can push us, nod us, propel us into different directions with forces of intensities and vitalities to enliven our classroom world. A sense of joyfulness that might erase all the cruel ways we label, divide and persist in privileging only that which can be seen and measured. Intensities that are rarely acknowledged but nonetheless deeply felt.

As I reflect now, a desire to deterritorialise reading as a solely individual act underpinned these pedagogical moves. To "find ways of being dialogic in relation to the texts we read together; reflecting, opening, to one another upon the texts of our lived lives" (Greene, 1995, p. 116). These desires to engage our collective imaginaries engendered the *vitality* Boldt (2021) describes. I was unable to articulate these insights at the time, namely because I did not have a vocabulary for it. But I could feel it. The children could feel it.

Being entangled with the characters from our stories we became charmed, enchanted and fascinated. These productions of affects could not have materialised in individual reading pursuits. Ehret and Leander (2019) state that affective intensities are not merely experienced by an individual but are rather experienced in the twists and bends of movements "involving multiple actors of people and things as they become affectively charged associations" (p. 6).

In what were to become 'affectively charged associations' as suggested by Ehret and Leander (2019), we explored a wide range of literature including Charlotte's Web (White, 2014) and Stellaluna (Cannon, 1993). As readers, we became moved by their stories that made us laugh, cry, wonder, speculate, imagine and empathise. We studied their actions, their choices, and their predicaments. We imagined their lives, cried at their heartbreak and cried at our own heartbreak, as there was no separation between them and us. Our emotions, questions and embodied responses emerged in relation. My mother became gravely ill in the midst of Charlotte's impending death. The children knew there was little chance that I would be able to read that part of the text out loud so one of my boys, asked me, "Would you like me to take it from here Jenny?" We became affected by the ways in which bodies, words, images and thoughts intra-acted with our feelings, our lives, the texts, our histories, what we might come to care about as they travelled, defying time and space. Charlotte's impending death diffracted with my world and when Stellaluna became lost from her mother, our concerns for her became enmeshed with the stories Grace had shared about her experiences of loneliness. All these things past, present and absent, most beyond our perception and realm of consciousness, but nonetheless came to *matter*. These generated desires to imagine otherwise, entangling our worlds and the "emergent expressions of affective intensities" (Boldt, 2020, p. 234) produced.

-Scratch-

Affects register something in us and something in the atmosphere of the classroom. They affect our capacity to act. They stick to us in various ways across our lives. They make us fragile. Haunt us. Confound us. Compel us. Move us. Powerful intensities that greatly matter for children as they learn to be literate.

Conceptualising reading in this way, draws our attention to how we occupy spaces - a kind of thrown**together**ness (Massey, 2005) that produce affects in their intra-actions with us, the stories, our lives, our histories and what we might imagine in those moments. Over time, the children came to understand that reading could be so much more than the decoding of words – as we also learned to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Being drawn into spaces and places we could never imagine - words, images and ideas colliding in and across bodies as they *affected* us. We were learning to pay attention to important issues in our lives as we became opened up to possibilities for spontaneity and improvisation and these created spaces for the unexpected to emerge. We were making "sophisticated language moves" (Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018, p. 207) where our ideas became infused with personal stories that intersected with bigger issues. These changed our thinking, our relations and our ways of learning. Change. Movement. Forces. Flow. Grace, we can *imagine*, reading can *move* us, our bodies, minds and hearts, especially yours that brimmed with nothing but kindness and a desire to belong, but was cruelly kept from you. From us. From the world.

-Scratch-

"We have to be articulate enough and able to exert ourselves to name what we see around us – the hunger, the passivity, the homelessness, the silences. It requires imagination to be conscious of them" (Greene, 1995, p. 111).

Cultivating these moments means, however, that as teachers, we need to work on our capacity to relax the muscle of judgement (Stewart, 2020) that we have become accustomed to in what feels like eternally evaluating what children *know*. Enacting teaching duties that neoliberal governance had intensified. *This is not reading (only) for information. Reading (only) to recall facts. Reading to be able to (only) identify a phoneme, regurgitate the main ideas dreamt up in my teacher brain for you to 'read my mind' and respond correctly.* This was something more. So much more. I had *affective* work to do. Well, we all do as teachers. Sharing beautiful literature that could slow down the craziness of what had become chunks of carved up literacy explicit teaching time, fifteen minutes - *this*, twenty minutes – *that*, and so on. Every moment requiring a

predetermined objective to be met (external to ourselves). This was beyond reading as the act of discovering singular, certain meanings, to spaces where we could be open to "the creativity of social life beyond our [individual] desires to control and reign in children's thinking" (Ehret & Rowsell, 2021, p. 205).

The intensity of affects and the resonance that can be produced in these outwardly *mundane* moments cannot be taken for granted especially when I reflect on Grace's positioning of the 'at risk' reader. Notable were the ways in which she had come to know that reading was akin to the constant assessment of her skills by an adult coupled with her removal away from her peers. Thinking of how these affects had been embodied by Grace emerged as a significant catalyst for reimagining ways in which she might become *other* than the struggling child. Research by Jones (2016) is significant here as she reinforces the powerful ways that material ↔ discursive practices in the literacy classroom "produce material affects on the body through the production of physiological and affective response" (p. 81). The significance of these insights become heightened, especially when children are subjected to traditional authoritarian pedagogies that position them as vulnerable and powerless. She explains:

> ...reading is fully embodied, a full body production of corporeal and affective performance that may or may not be repeated again; a fully embodied response to not only the words on a page, but also to the material and discursive practices surrounding those words – the power relations and subject positions produced in those practices – and the reader's specific historical experiences within those discursive practices [are...] memorized through and by her body (p. 87).

Reading as a highly complex, embodied process that is entangled with a diversity of experiences, histories and practices, begs the question, what becomes 'memorised' on children's bodies as they learn to read? What affects do these produce? These concerns led me to create spaces where the reading of literature became entangled with collectively activating a sense of wonder, a capacity to be curious and to care about something more (than *us* as individual, separate beings). Nichols and O' Sullivan (2020) conceptualise these as opportunities for 'mutual flourishing.' In striving for moments of 'mutual flourishing' learning does not begin or end in individual pursuits, but "partakes of a dynamic affective force" (de Freitas & Curinga, 2015, p. 249).

There are those who want a text...without a shadow, without the 'dominant ideology' but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text. The text needs its shadow: this shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro (Barthes, 1975, p. 72).

The use of carefully selected literature became the perfect catalyst to generate these 'dynamic affective forces' given its potential to evoke embodied responses. Those that circulate to create atmospheres in the classroom and profoundly shape children's (pedagogical) lives. Simonsen (2010) writes of an "affective space, which is the space in which we are emotionally in touch – open to the world and to the different ways it affects us" (p. 227). Our reading lives and practices entangled with/in these spaces each day as we imagined other possible lives and ways of knowing that produce understandings of life in *motion*; in "continuous variation" (Roffe, 2010, p. 299). Being immersed in complexity, of the 'yet to come' that explorations of literature can provoke. Literature has this magical quality to fill the air with something difficult to explain, but nonetheless, intensely felt. It is with/in these beautiful, often unexpected moments that powerful narrative threads emerge - entangling us in time and space. Once more we are called to recognise the performative agency of inanimate objects; the *vibrancy* (Bennet, 2010) created as texts, words, stories and intensities entangled to enact a capacity to greatly *affect* us.

Throughout our discussions we became deeply affected by what we read. These can be imagined as embodied transactions that emerged as "affective assemblage[s] of material, moral, cognitive, rational, historical, discursive, physical and spatial elements" (Dernikos, 2018, p. 24). I am reminded of Rosenblatt's (1994) ideas about different transactions readers have with texts. Significantly, she asks, "What does the reader *do* in these different kinds of reading?" Describing 'aesthetic' reading, Rosenblatt (1994) states, "in aesthetic reading, the readers' attention is centred directly on what [s]he is living through during the relationship with that particular text...[of concern] is the qualitative living through of what we derive from the text..."(p. 25).

In this quality of 'living through' the texts with children, we can expand our thinking to "delve deeply into the affective role of collective bodies" (Dernikos, 2018, p. 24) that intra-act during reading. We can think of these as producing specific *atmospheres* as children come to understand that acts of meaning making live beyond the printed word. With/in these atmospheres, the affective qualities that have the capacity to shape children's desire to participate became significant given "every encounter among bodies produces affects and is shaped by the affects that circulate" (Snaza, 2020, p. 114). Over time, Grace and the children (especially many who had previously been labelled as 'disengaged') actively shared their ideas. They were no longer passive as they brought elements of stories to life. I now wonder if these emerged from the atmosphere created when harmful boundaries are dissolved and reading is transformed to *feel* a sense of being otherwise - to cultivate our children's capacities to act. With/in these openings all children were invited and all accepted the invitation. All that was required was a heart, an open mind and a desire to belong to something more than the incessant preoccupation with our *individual* abilities.

As I sought to dissolve the usual teacher/child hierarchy to co-construct knowledge *with* children (Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018), I am reminded of the belief by Barad (2012) that "agency is about response-ability, about the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to the power imbalances. Agency is about possibilities for worldly re-configurings" (p. 55). Our affectively charged encounters in reading were connected to possibilities for 'mutual responses' that could certainly not be found in the official 'documented' curriculum. Acts of learning together created reciprocal relations that countered the "power imbalances" (Barad, 2012, p. 55) that infuse our (business as usual) literacy worlds. Worlds that stubbornly insist on literacy practices that separate us from our bodies and from each other.

Figure 5
Grace's portrait of "us"
Being together – becoming entangled

As I imagine us now, we are huddled together. Being drawn into affective entangled spaces in intrinsic relations with stories, our histories, myriad non-verbal expressions, smiles, eye rolls, laughter, looks of concern all enmeshed in the vitalities when we read for *feeling* as well as meaning. Together. Stopping at moments. Following our hearts and wonderings. Points of intensities. Feeling critically and affectively *moved* to challenge ideas. To be affirmed. To contest. "To remake meaning, past, present and future" (Wolfe & Rasmussen, 2020, p. 184). To desire worldly re-configurations of what reading could be(come). What we could (be)come. These powerful threads kept us open to unexpected lines of flight that often took us into spaces of uncertainty. Engagements with literature became ways to agitate for difference, "to complicate what we think we know and provide children with opportunities to hear new voices" (Lewison et al., 2015). Hope infused those encounters that desired difference. Acts of deliberate radical refusals.

Together. Entangled. Affected. Embodied.

Vignette #2: Letters entangled: writing affects

> We are turned toward things. Such things make an impression on us. We perceive them as things insofar as they are near to us, insofar as we share a residence with them. Perception, hence, involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located which gives us a certain take on things...the object is an effect of towardness; it is the thing toward which I am directed and which in being posited as a thing, as being something or another for me, takes me in some directions rather than others (Ahmed, 2006, p. 27).

Understanding how affects entangle and create atmospheres that orient us in "some directions rather than others" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 27) can open up our thinking and attune us to the emergence of empowering pedagogies. In the words of Davies (2021) "such an openness enables the letting go of the desire for "identity" (of one and self) and opens instead the possibility of experiencing oneself as a vital materiality, and as such one of many things in intra-action in a world of things" (p. 26). Where might these encounters with openness take us - orient us? As Ahmed (2006) suggests, in these spaces, "orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from "here," which affects how what is "there" appears, how it presents itself" (p. 8). Throughout the year with Grace, I

constantly reflected on how most of my pedagogical responses seemed to counter all that I felt had been unjust in her learning life, her fixed *deficit* identity and who she was/is becoming. Following Ahmed, these pedagogical desires sought to orient her away from the limited (and limiting) objects and affective spaces that had been materialised in her 'at risk' learning world. I believed that essentially Grace needed to *unlearn* all that had come before, a kind of pedagogical undoing or a 're-orientation' as Ahmed (2006) might suggest. Acutely aware that affective spaces have "profound implications for educational equity...[that] empower students or to render them vulnerable" (Nichols & Coleman, 2020, p. 317), I wanted to ensure that children felt safe as we experienced new ways to be together. I began by creating regular opportunities to meet with Grace, to engage in 'Interesting Discussions,' a simple speaking and listening routine I had set up for the whole class; where we were close. These were structured times for us to be able to be together in small groups or with partners where we could discuss ideas that mattered to the children, often in response to our reading of literature. Becoming reoriented in our spaces the children began to theorise ways they could help each other throughout these discussions. These desires emerged in a practice that we called 'Learning Partners' where the children became attuned to ways in which they could support each other. Many began to record 'tips' that they displayed (see Figure 6).

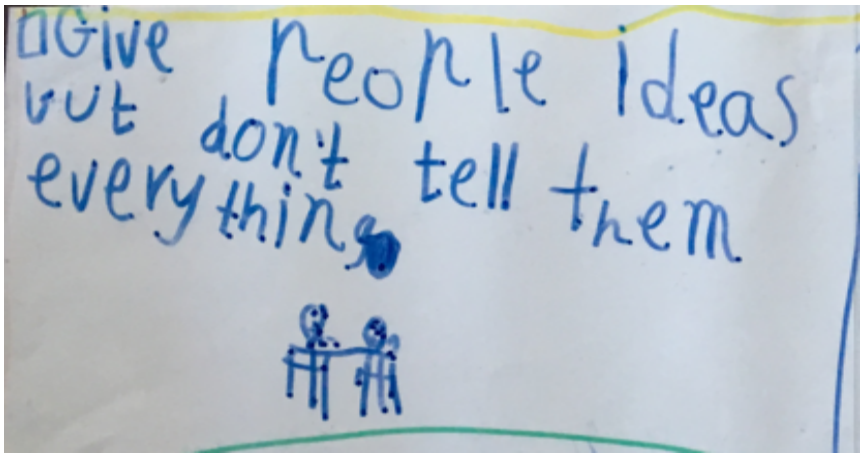


Figure 6

Becoming affected. Affecting others.

Within these emergences, I sought to reorient Grace towards more empowering and embodied meaning making and wondered what could be made possible through writing. Perhaps I was hoping that together we could write our way out of the uninspiring places I felt she had inhabited – to propel her into new experiences of learning that enabled her to make personal connections. What kinds of affects might be produced if writing were conceptualised in new ways? In response to these wonderings, I set up what I termed, 'Our Thinking and Reflecting Journal' in order to write a letter to the children each week,

from which they could then write back. This reciprocal writing practice was intended to move children into pedagogical spaces that redirected our attention away from the regular, more restricted writing forms. To create approaches to writing that "augmented our capacities to act" (Dernikos et al., 2020a, p. 5). The actual journal, a writing exercise book, came to exert a 'thing power' (Bennett, 2010) that produced intense affects in our classroom atmosphere. We were able to experience writing as so much more than the application of *technical* skills that children had come to learn.

A refocus on writing as being *embodied*, engaged us in reciprocal writing encounters where we were able to learn about ourselves and our lives. If affect theory can be described as being attuned to forms of relationality (Niccolini et al., 2019), then we can imagine the everyday materials in our literacy lives such as writing books in terms of their generative capacity to "create new ways of knowing, relating and doing" (Fullagar & Bozalek, 2022, p. 26) literacy. Our writing became what I now consider diverse forms of *storytelling* that greatly affected us. Seemingly ordinary letters became productions of rich dialogic exchanges as children shared their personal stories, questions and theories about the world. These became important sources of information, that were seeds from which to *grow* our literacy curriculum further (as suggested by Amy in Figure 7 and in the following 'Scratch' below).

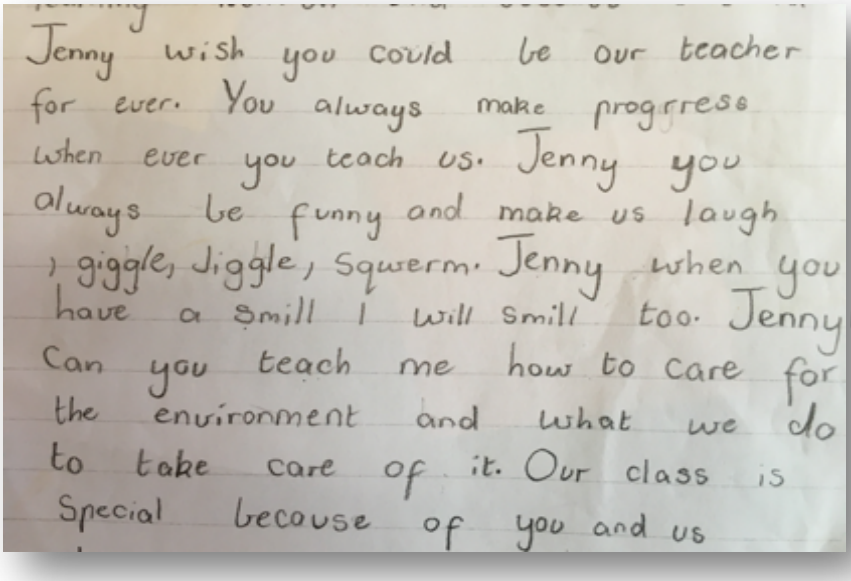

Jenny wish you could be our teacher for ever. You always make progress when ever you teach us. Jenny you always be funny and make us laugh , giggle, Jiggle, Squerm. Jenny when you have a smill I will smill too. Jenny Can you teach me how to care for the environment and what we do to take care of it. Our class is Special becouse of you and us

Figure 7

Amy has an idea.

Jenny can you teach me how to care for the environment?

The more conventional aspects of children's writing (that is usually the *only* focus of early literacy teaching) was also greatly enriched. Children's ideas became thoughtfully considered as they *played* with new vocabularies and expressions. At the heart of this new literacy practice, was the need for Grace and the children to be positioned as capable

communicators whose insights were valued. It also set in motion levels of dialogue I had not anticipated, from the aesthetic to the personal to the critical. How their ideas soared! These became acts of uncontrollability that "emerge in part, through glimmers of letting go" (Ehret & Rowsell, 2021, p. 204).

-Scratch-

Disparate – Fragmented – Uncontrollable – Emergences –

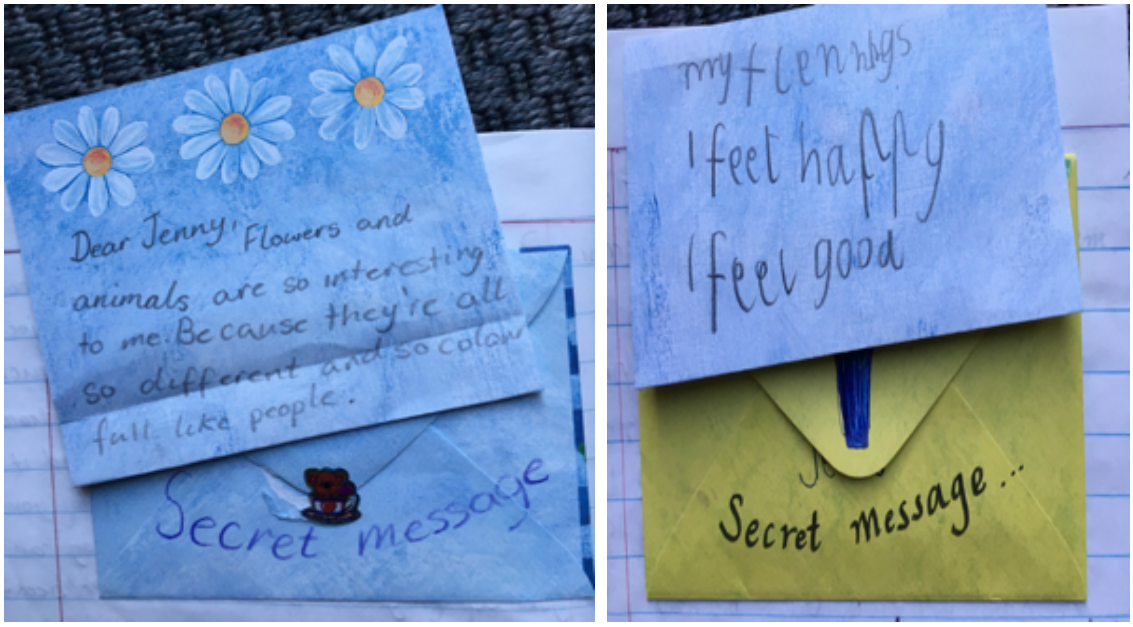
Children theorised in many ways about their world in their letters.

Dear Jenny, I want to keep teaching other children what I know. It helps my confidence and we learn from each other. It decreases my fear bubble.
Dear Jenny, Who is your favourite designer?
Dear Jenny, why do people just grow up and live their lives and then in their old ages just die?
Dear Jenny, are you proud of the way we did our mind maps?
Dear Jenny, on Monday I could see tears in your eyes. Was it because something beautiful happened in your life or was it something that didn't?
Dear Jenny when I read your letter it puzzled me!
Dear Jenny, why did Monet and Rousseau paint so many gardens?
Dear Jenny, I like emperor penguins because they are social animals.

With/in these moments of 'letting go,' the reciprocal nature of these writing processes seemed to also affect the volume of children's ideas which flowed. In these 'flows' were approximations of more sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure often prompted by the open ended questions and provocations we wrote to each other. Their entries also reflected a desire to inquire. Activating their imaginative capacities deeply engaged them and (unsurprisingly) also came to positively affect their reading and comprehension levels (from conventional assessments). I smiled as I regularly observed children who (I was previously informed) were 'reluctant' or 'poor' writers (including Grace) expressing their desire to write and/or draw in their journal every day. We layered in the use of colourful

envelopes and paper that were to contain little ‘secret messages’ we wrote that added a sense of intrigue, surprise and a heightened curiosity about what might be contained on the little pieces of paper. Of course they were hardly *secret* but became little messages with profound resonance. They ranged from small provocations that were personalised to feelings that children were mulling over at a point in time and desired to share (see Figure 8). Regardless, they “produced effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett, 2010, p. 6).

Figure 8 Diverse expressions of difference



I now understand from that year how important it is that we recognise how powerfully children become oriented to what the system demands they *become* as literacy learners, and as such what we become as teachers. How deeply implicated materials, objects, spaces and affects are in these desirings. Seeking to know the children ‘differently’ provided opportunities for them to experience literacy as an affective social, critical and material practice. Propelled by the relations created with/in their journal, these writing exchanges became like affectively charged sources of nourishment for our bodies and minds.

Researchers such as Dutro (2019a) recognise the critical potential of affect in working toward social justice outcomes. She believes that personal affective moments are erased in the current focus on high stakes testing, bottom-line priorities and policies that are steeped in surveillance. She argues that “the expectation of feeling something and the

stakes of response are tangibly present and politically charged when the personal is invited into the literacy classroom and children take up the call" (p. 76). As we delved deeper into our reciprocal writing, 'taking up the call' as suggested by Dutro, an infinite world of possibilities were opened. We could say/do/be/live in our writerly bodies untouched by the incessant requirements that our writing was neat, spellings correct and edited before 'published.' It was with/in the affectively charged *mess* that generated the most intensity. These enabled us to take diverse lines of flight in our writerly engagements.

-Scratch-

"Sentences and words always lead elsewhere to the place we were expecting them. Neither the reader nor above all the author knows, foresees, commands, calculates, anticipates, prepares for the event of revelation. This incalculable is the text's promise and taste of triumph" (Cixous, 2005, p. xii). The text's promise.

I now consider these approaches as forms of 'reterritorialising' (Masny, 2012) the school version of writing that children had come to know which was focused on more technical pursuits concerned with, e.g., how to structure genres such as recounts. These were often broken into stages over the school week where children learned how to write an introduction...then their first idea (and so on) until the writing piece was considered *ready* to be edited and *then* published. Children learn in this stubbornly linear mode that the aim of writing is (only) to strive for a finished correct product. In theorising posthumanism and children's writing, Zapata et al. (2018) argue for literacy educators to "be less concerned with definitions of what constitutes "good" or "bad" writing/writers and more concerned with what those discursive labels produce for literacy practices and the lively potential thereafter for all matter, human and otherwise" (p. 482).

In line with Zapata et al (2018), our writing journals seemed to embody a 'lively potential' throughout our writing exchanges. I now perceive these as re-orienting Grace as a literacy learner to become 'differently' affected. These imaginings were so starkly removed from the material↔ discursive practices that produced her fixed position as the struggling learner. Grace became able to share a range of ways in which she was "animated towards

new relations and potential, connections and disjunctures" (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 12) from her 'at risk' status. She was empowered to "author herself" (Blackburn, 2016, p. 173) into different *becomings* which belied the limited identity and performances she had experienced. She theorised deeply emotional moments throughout our writing exchanges that I now reimagine were opportunities for her to enact multiple subjectivities. Possibilities for an infinite array of becomings were materialised in the letters she wrote to me. The creation of these affective spaces had significantly impacted on Grace's sense of belonging - what she was now being *oriented* toward as a literacy learner. As I revisit her letters now (from an infinite array of possibilities), I now imagine she was:

Becoming-deeply emotional
It's not easy to be alone. When I feel alone, and I want to have a friend, I find other people who are alone.

Becoming- expressive about her learning life
Every day I be with you I feel confident and happy. I love the words that come out of your mouth, they are very interesting to me like 'metaphor,' 'gesture' and 'strategy'. I just want to say thank you for your help. Don't worry about me. Just be happy.

Becoming-connected to others
Everything has changed now Jenny. I am so excited. I love it. In this classroom many people help me, they are so so so helpful. I have never had that many people helping me. Thanks for helping me understand.
Deep down in my heart I believe that there is nothing more than friendship and happiness. You know I say this Jenny because being yourself is not easy.

Becoming-more strategic as a learner
When I read, I talk to myself and say, 'I can do it' I say, 'Come on Grace don't stop, keep on going and don't give up'. Now I am happy because I am confident and not scared.
I know now that I don't need to put my hand up Jenny, but I can talk into an empty space where I can share my learning. I can ask for help. I can walk around the room to see what I can find.

Becoming-curious

I really connected with the drawings in the book Don't Worry be Happy because it was like the primary colours from the Mondrian paintings we looked at. I loved those pictures. I liked learning that Mondrian got ideas from his dreams. I want to learn more about these.

Becoming-moved

When you are alone, do you think it is easy to be yourself? What do you think about when you talk to me? Do you start to remember when you were little and you talked to your teacher and when she taught you?

I am going to miss you. I have loved learning and I am going to cry and you know what? I am going to miss this. I have never had someone like you and I will never forget this. I feel so much different to the old times.

Through our journal writing, the *affects* that were produced were impossible to be cultivated in the business as usual banking model of education (Freire, 1970) where children are required, in essence, to do work for the teacher. To demonstrate – *display* the skills they have internalised. In contrast, our reciprocal writing became a critical affective practice (Dutro, 2019a) reminding me that "affect is not the meaning of an experience but the response it prompts" (Colebrook, 2002, p. xix). In posthuman terms, I now imagine how collectively, these became affective 'responses' that emerged from the entanglements of the journal, Grace, me, the words, the other children, practices, diverse bodies and an array of feelings. They all performed a kind of agency that produced affectively charged atmospheres enabling Grace to become *different*. For all the children to experience learning and themselves *differently*. This engages me to think about "the small but consequential differences" (Barad, 2007, p. 29) that can be made in the everyday literacy classroom and how these deeply *resonate* with children. What responses are produced in literacy classrooms where tasks dominated by the retention of disconnected facts - the mechanical 'output' if you like - is all that young children become affected by? All the while denying the deeply embodied ways of knowing and feeling that are so much more important in a world that has become less concerned with empathy and more about productivity, consumption, commercialism predictability and division. Ellsworth (2005) argues against prevailing educational approaches that view the student "as an identifiable

self....[that is] already presumed. diagnosed or assessed" (p. 7). Instead she draws attention to the power of the process of 'knowledge in the making' that recognises how our sense of self becomes "invented in and through its engagement with pedagogy's force" (p. 7).

From these relational perspectives, 'pedagogy's force' can be reimagined as affective qualities of sensations, movement and intensities that circulate and have a capacity to affect us. This notion calls into question the overemphasis on the 'individual' learner, as separate from all that comes into relation in the literacy classroom. Instead, it invites us to consider our pedagogical relations as constantly being entangled with, and produced through our intra-active engagements. In this way we can recognise that "with each encounter we affect the world and are affected by it...[our children, our teachers, our materials, objects and and...] we affect change, however minute, and are changed" (Davies, 2021, p. 2). I now conceptualise these ideas as learning in *motion* as we became propelled into the vitality of meaning making that is collectively produced in our human and more than human classroom world.

Children bring diverse histories, desires and passions that become enmeshed in our classroom worlds, our expectations and curriculum demands. These assemble to create diverse pedagogical conditions of possibilities. Merchant and Devender-Kraft (2020) believe that "diversity in all its forms is a formidable resource, weaving together different identities, perspectives, and cultural practices which all add to the liveliness of the everyday" (p. 116). How we cultivate this 'liveliness' became significant as the affects on Grace seemed to take hold. Grace, and the children generally, were becoming *unstuck* from the neoliberal world of education that is "imbued with individualism"(Kuntz, 2024, p. 280), observations, surveillance and measurement. Reimagining each day, I became concerned with how we might liberate children from the official *schooled* ways of doing literacy that narrowly position them as "individually psychologically driven human agents" (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015, p. 91).

Together. Entangled. Affected. Liberated.

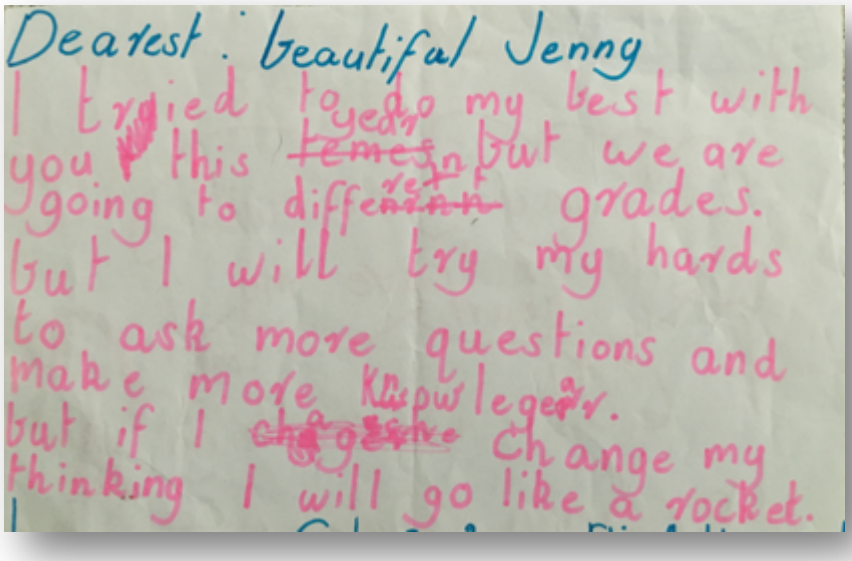


Figure 9

Goodbye Grace.

Her last letter to me that year.

Vignette #3: Looking entangled: art affects

> A bloom space is pulled into being by the tracks and refrains that etch out a way of living in the face of everything. These refrains stretch across everything linking things, sensing them out – a worlding. Every refrain has its gradients, valences, moods sensations, tempos, elements and life spans (Stewart, 2010, p. 342).

Goodbye to printed words as the *only* means by which we might learn to read the world. In seeking to diversify our daily experiences, I wondered how an *infusion* of looking at art might produce affective attachments in our literacy learning. In what ways could we continue to open up our literacy learning worlds, or as suggested by Stewart (2010) create worldings - to 'etch out ways of living.' Hickey-Moody (2016) believes that artworks "create a new sensory landscape for their beholder" (p. 260). One which has the capacity to "construct new organised patterns of affect" (p. 261). What affects then might be produced in these new 'sensory landscapes' as we observed art? My desire to create these spaces became almost acts of *sacrilege* as pressure to prepare children for the national testing was mounting at that time (aka 'teaching to the test'). I constantly sought opportunities for children to be able to articulate and *apply* their knowledge with insight and intuitive awareness (Rendon, 2014). Relatedly, was the desire for children to use their reflective intelligence (Perkins, 1994) that we gain from "a rich range of knowledge and a multitude of [pedagogical] encounters with diverse aspects of life" (p. 82). Areas that rarely receive attention in early literacy classrooms, yet for me were ethically imperative.

In seeking to further expand ways in which we could 'read the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987), our 'new' literacy practices became entangled with processes of learning to *look*, to *articulate*, to *contemplate*, to *sense*. Young children are such robust theorists! As we looked at art during the year, we imagined other lives, other worlds, digging deeper to wonder about these. Places and times outwardly so *different* - yet paradoxically intimately connected to our own lives even though some were lived over one hundred years before. Cue processes of intra-actions and the notion of "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2010, p. 6) as were felt through the 'inanimate' artworks we observed. We became attuned to the entanglements of colours, moods, wonderings, the artists, us, literacy, learning, our lives and experiences.

These moments became refrains that created 'worldings' as suggested by Stewart (2010) that 'etched out' new pedagogical sensings. In these moments, many qualities emerged affecting us and *us* affecting the classroom atmosphere. These qualities seemed to take on a *performative* agency as they became entangled to shape our encounters. At times these became 'sound productions' of "*Ah, wow...oh..?*" especially at the sight of the distorted face of The Weeping Woman, painted by Picasso. I became delighted as these sounds emerged, inciting us *act* - to invent new vocabularies, modes of expression that were differently felt. Or to just look, absorb and feel without words. We were moving and were *moved* into different bloom spaces (Stewart, 2010). These productions became moments where we were open to being affected by the new and unexpected – we were no longer individual learning containers expected to provide correct responses to pre-set tasks that were external to us. In these moments, "multiplicities co-exist and are never a matter of either/or [but] always *and"* (Davies, 2021, p. 33). We sought to learn in ways where we could know/be/do literacy otherwise (Kuby et al., 2019). Bring on the "and" as we could never be finished.

Observing artworks such as The Potato Eaters by Van Gogh (Figure 10) were selected to provoke open ended conversations that entangled with areas such as colour, mood, resonance, affects, atmospheres and storytelling. We used simple, open ended questioning routines to stimulate and expand our discussions. Over time, children then began to find specific artworks that spoke to them in different ways and to further investigate a range of areas as they made connections to their world and beyond These encounters with

artworks honoured a form of 'living literacies' (Rowsell & Pahl, 2020) that is grounded in emergence; "processes [that] are embodied and involve people's affect and stories and seeing literacy events through new eyes" (p. 15).

Figure 10 We looked at art.
How do the colours make you feel?
What connections might you make to your life?
Why do you think the artist painted this?
Does this remind you of anything?
What affects are created by this painting?

In many ways we were learning to express our theories in response to issues that affected us. Those that *registered* affects in us. These became materialised as we pondered social justice matters such as poverty when we looked *closely* to read The Potato Eaters. Although painted so long ago, time and space appeared to dissolve in our discussions. It enabled us to experience history in the present and construct meaning together. We generated various questions that did not need immediate answers. As we expanded the artworks we observed, we listed our questions and comments on charts which were displayed. These were left *untouched* for the moment as we resisted the quick jump (Stewart, 2020) to explain what we thought things 'meant.' This act of waiting prompted us to generate further questions such as, Why does Mondrian only use primary colours? Why does he paint everything in straight lines? Why was van Gogh so lonely? Why did Picasso make that woman's face weep? Why does she have two faces? and so on. Our questions, our pauses all appeared to enact a performative agency (Barad, 2007) that were intra-actions of words, ideas, affects that invited us into ways of unknowing (Vasudevan, 2011). The (non-human) charts were teaching us as they enacted a capacity to provoke us. The questions generated a greater resonance than the answers themselves as their *openness* created a space of inclusion where all children were afforded a capacity to imagine. These experiences produced opportunities to challenge children's beliefs that learning is usually about being able to *know* (more) content on demand and as such (be first) to provide correct answers to the teacher.

These became pedagogical acts of refusal that I now conceptualise as a "politics of describing the world" (Hackett, 2021, p. 37). An alternative that could (momentarily) erase the tightly regulated 'pre-determined' literacy curriculum that demanded we keep our brains continually primed to recall disconnected facts. That kept us *stuck* in striated spaces of certainty; of emptiness. In repeated acts of *this* means *that*. At the time, I recorded a reflection where I described the process of us looking at art as an antidote to 'free' many of my children, notably Grace, from the '*boredom and repetition of reading instructional texts for the teacher for purposes of assessment.'* When the number of correct responses becomes the means by which we understand our children, erased are any other opportunities there might be for us to see them differently; as *capable*. As theorists who possess deep insights of the world. Where I could respond authentically to these with comments such as, *I am fascinated by this idea...can you say more?* I wonder, how many of our children could say that they remember their teacher being 'fascinated' by them or by their ideas?

-*Scratch*-

Encountering the recent scholarship of Ingold (2022) helps me frame so profoundly what I believe are sadly absent from children's literacy learning worlds. He asks, what could it mean to pedagogically cultivate beauty? He theorises that "the apprehension of beauty resides within a relational ontology that accords primacy to processes of growth and emergence rather than to the things to which they fully give rise"(Ingold, 2022, p. 115). In this way, "beauty is attentional as it is attuned to the variable conditions suspended in the tension between opposed forces of stretching forth and holding back...beauty is in the unity of affects in ways that open us up to others...beauty is enchanting as it calls us to be spellbound as we are caught in a mesh of affective relations...beauty is in hearing and seeing as we become enchanted entering into visual and aural movements that register in us...beauty is sensed along a path of presence where we sense our world through active looking, listening and feeling as we judge through perception rather than evaluate in retrospection" (p. 128). Sensings. Movements. Attunements. Perceptions.

The understandings that emerged throughout our encounters of looking at art, I now conceptualise as 'wildly disparate' (I amuse myself now that this could actually be a beautiful aim of curriculum knowledge generally!). Although Grace had certainly been the catalyst for the ways in which new pedagogical spaces became opened up for literacy teaching and learning, I was able to observe the benefits for all the children. Significantly was how Grace and the children were enabled "to be open to becoming different from themselves" (Davies, 2009b, p. 19) as they engaged in deeper dialogic exchanges with me and with each other. I am moved (still) many years later by the ideas and questions that such young children are capable of expressing -if we just go *there*. One of our exchanges included a letter expressed in our writing journals which reinforces how astutely children are able to generate theories of the world - if provided with opportunities, spaces and structures to support their emergences. After much discussion and inquiry into our adventures of looking at art, Ava wondered:

Dear Jenny,

Did Picasso paint historical events? I wasn't sure. What kinds of symbols did he use? Did he use peace symbols? Why are male artists more popular than female artists? Why are Joy Hester and the other artists you said are your favourite, your favourite? I want to research these artists and more! I want to research whether artists had a happy life or a lonely life? Did men have more rights than women in the olden days? I did not know that there is a lot about this issue. Did Joy Hester have a happy life or a sad one like Van Gogh?

Love Ava Together. Entangled. Affected. Fascinated.

Affective lines of flight

As I reflect on the ways I endeavoured to create more empowering literacy spaces for Grace and the children, I now situate these as 'critical affective' practices (Dutro, 2019a). I am drawn to how affect can be theorised to understand its 'more than human' agentic capacity to *stick* to bodies especially when considering issues of knowledge, participation and access. According to Kuby and Rowsell (2017) these are political, ethical and justice oriented matters in the literacy classroom. Entangled throughout our new ways with

literacies were reorientations that enabled us to become critically attuned to ethical *matters* in our world (Barad, 2007). Boundaries were dissolved as our literacy pedagogies became politically and ethically entangled with issues such as animal rights, children's rights and homelessness. Children made suggestions for areas they wanted to learn more about, often initiating the topics, questions and ideas they became interested in. They were moved to act, to be deeply *affected*. Sedgwick and Frank (1995) suggest that because affect is "inherently brief, it requires the conjunction of other mechanisms to connect affective moments with each other and thereby increase the duration, coherence, and continuity of affective experience" (p. 179). Cumulatively, these affective encounters profoundly shaped how children learned literacy that year. It also profoundly shaped how I was to understand my role as their teacher.

In consideration of the 'duration, coherence and continuity' of the affective encounters during that year, I consider how these, in posthuman terms, exerted a kind of agency as they 'grew' into a number of emergent practices that were lead mostly by the children. How they were to take diverse lines of flight! Reading gradually *flowed* into modes of 'performances' where children began to show interest in Readers' Theatre. This enabled them and their ideas to be 'on the move' to stand, sit, walk – express themselves through their bodies as well as their minds. These then *flowed* into becoming part of our small group sessions that children actively planned with each other. With me. We would look through, select and 'try' different scripts. Many children then expressed a desire to write their own short scripts together based on their experiences and our readings of literature. These then entangled with a whole host of possibilities for decision making vis a vis, who their characters might be and the kinds of experiences they might have. They also needed to consider any props they might create/use which flowed into other spaces and areas of learning as they sought specific materials and objects. These experiences dissolved the (usual) boundaries between reading, writing, thinking, creating, speaking, listening and questioning. As our reading pedagogies expanded, I explored the potential of using the Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) model that had been developed for older readers, however, could be modified for my children so that they could actively take on various roles as readers. Dialogic reading encounters. Together. This proved to be incredibly powerful as fundamentally the children *needed* each other to be able to plan and participate in a session. They organised themselves and the texts they needed in order

to prepare for the role they were required to take on, and as such constantly needed to negotiate with others how they were going.

With/in the entanglements of our busy literacy engagements, I observed the *power* of these collective forms of meaning making. The social, emotional, critical and affectively charged nature of these encounters entangled as a force. In the middle of these 'forces,' was the allocation of more structured 'Learning Partner' time for the children to connect with each other and their materials. The *affects* created during these sessions seemed to elevate their 'status' as literacy learners as they increasingly became learning resources for each other (see Figure 11). During more formal assessment processes, I closely monitored the children's areas of literacy development yet these encounters emerged in situ 'with' the children. We designated specific times throughout each day where we structured our 'Learning Conversations' that were directed toward their literacy skills, confidence and/or any *challenges* that could be addressed. As much as possible it had to be 'WE.' 'US.' Yes, *I* was their teacher with pedagogical expertise - with knowledge of the 'official' curriculum yet *they* were the experts of their learning lives. As such, I believed it to be ethically imperative that they were core to these conversations. Powerful learning did not start with finding out how many disconnected alphabet letters, phonemes, chunks of words that were required to be chanted on demand, but resided in meaningful inquiries into their/our learning *lives*. Early literacy concepts were explicitly taught and assessed but our learning lives did not begin and end there.

Our daily questions became directed towards matters such as, *What resource/s do you think might help you spell that world correctly next time? Can you go and check whether that text could help you practice reading the word/s you were having trouble with? Can you think of a learning goal you/we could set and how you might achieve it? Do you think it would be a good idea if you were to practice reading with Ava as I noticed she was having trouble with understanding that part of the text too....?* This was more than doing assessments *to* children. We became ethically entangled in matters beyond our own individualistic pursuits of 'higher' reading levels (as promoted in neoliberal mandates) but to care for each other. For a long time, this was very challenging work but we soon *relaxed* into spaces where our 'Learning Conversations' became entangled in our daily lives. The children became able to articulate a range of expressions about their learning lives, themselves and their peers. To be provoked into new ways of being affectively and

critically *moved* to learn. These ideas are imbued with what Ehret and Leander (2019) refer to as a kind of literacy that is about "being moved, being connected and finding new ways of becoming together and apart" (p. 8). I now understand that these can be considered as emergent pedagogical ethico-onto-epistemological adventures (Blyth & Aslanian, 2022), where ethical responses in the *moment* are imperative to what we might *become.*

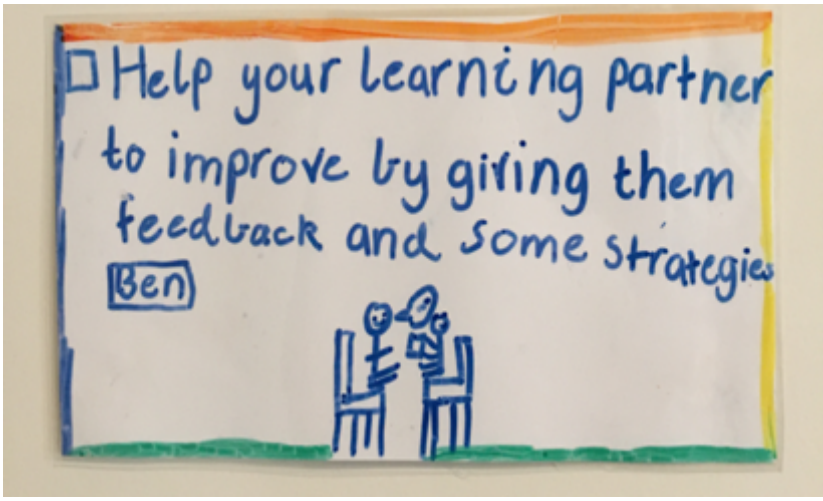


Figure 11

Ben affecting. Ben being affected. Becoming learning partners.

Hickey Moody and Malins (2007) reminds us that "the production of affect has both ethical and political implications because affect determines the way in which a subject is approached" (p. 8). These ideas have resonance as they raise ethical questions about the ways in which children are *affected* as learners by the relations they become entangled with/in each day. Barad (2012) argues that "ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materialisations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities. Even the smallest cuts matter" (p. 67). From this perspective, it becomes vital that 'we take account' of the ways in which children are enabled (or constrained) by the 'cuts' created in their literacy learning lives.

-Scratch-

What is made possible when boundaries of space and time are dissolved in our daily literacy worlds? How can we imagine the accumulation of the affects that assemble in our encounters in-between the child/materials/time/space? We can consider the infinite number of possibilities that can be created when boundaries become dissolved and literacy practices are open, ethical and emergent. How might a teacher perceive their role in these ethically charged imaginings?

When we think about how affective attachments come to significantly *matter* in posthuman terms, we are critically attuned to how the human, non-human and more than human entanglements of bodies, spaces, objects, materials become implicated in daily literacy worlds. We can consider how particular affects accumulate when literacy becomes *vital* in our (classroom) lives and how these come to greatly affect our children. These require us to pay attention to the impact of neoliberal affects (Anderson, 2016) that privilege epistemology over ontological concerns and continue to reinforce knowledge as individualised acts of mastery. In addressing the need for greater attention towards ontological concerns, Thomson and Hall (2019) advocate teachers implement more ethical approaches for working with children who are marginalised in mainstream schooling. They specifically suggest teachers adopt an 'equitable ontological orientation' that recognises that all young people "are equally capable of having worthy and interesting ideas" (p. 77), provided there are explicit opportunities created. They ask, "What would we do differently if this were our starting point?" (p. 78). To this question, we can add Barad's (2007) notion of response-ability as we become ethically compelled "for the ongoing configuring of the space of possibilities for future enactments" (p. 391) of socially just literacy pedagogies.

The analysis and discussion using theories of affect throughout this chapter sought to bring to light ways in which we can imagine the 'felt-force' of literacy (Hollett, 2021) - the kind of literacy that is imbued with intensities and how these produce affectively charged atmospheres for children to thrive. Literacy in this way became ethically oriented ways of learning to be together, to become *different* and to enable a range of affective attachments that are deeply attuned to social justice matters. This was a far cry from the ways in which Grace had experienced her learning life as 'at risk.' I have illustrated through classroom vignettes how these possibilities became realised through small, yet powerful changes to everyday pedagogical encounters. These contested the hegemony of early literacy discourse and practices that are only concerned with producing the valorised individual (Mills, 2018) learner who is expected to do little more than recite limited alphabetic principles. In engaging in literacy research and practice, Dutro (2019b) profoundly reminds us to question:

> How is a child positioned in this space, beyond this space, around us, and *by* us? How can the visceral dimensions of the classroom deepen our connections? How

> might affect attune to the subtle, consequential ways children are honoured, derailed, drawn in, painted out, spotlighted, overlooked? (p. 385).

It is the work of the final chapter to expand ideas that address important questions such as these. Throughout the discussion, I bring together several interconnected key themes that have emerged throughout this thesis. I offer provocations of ways to reimagine our literacy classroom worlds as oriented toward our entangled relations in order to become attuned to matters of social justice.

Spectres of Neoliberalism

My research sought to examine: *What do children learn about the world, themselves and what they may aspire to in the neoliberally configured world of the literacy classroom?* It also was followed by my desire to understand: *How can these ideas inspire us to reimagine more socially just literacy pedagogies?*

The spectres that continue to haunt me from my professional life with Grace and my children taught me so much about what we pay attention to in the literacy classroom world. More significantly, it taught me ways in which we can become critically attuned to the innumerable human, non-human and more than human entanglements and how these become implicated in who, what and how we learn. For better or worse. This process has strong resonance with Gordon (2008), who proposes:

> If we want to study social life well, and in addition, if we want to contribute in however small a measure, to changing it, we must learn how to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts, [we] must learn how to make contact with what is without doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling." (p. 23)

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the entanglements of materials, objects, humans, affects, flows, ideas and forces that assemble in our classroom worlds and have argued that they can enable us to examine issues of social justice when we consider how they *shape what children learn about the world, themselves and what they can aspire to*. I wonder now if these are research desires to address the hauntological relations of inheritance (Barad, 2010) that can propel us to 'reckon with the ghosts,' of neoliberalism as suggested by Gordon (2008). To be aware of "the echoes and murmurs of that which is lost but which is still present in the forms of imitations, hints, suggestions and portents" (p. x). Imagining the need to 'reckon with the ghosts' of neoliberal policies and practices has been of much concern. Of note has been the ways in which these create *marks* on the bodies of children as literacy learners - those especially from low socioeconomic and

CALD communities who experience marginalisation. Researching my experiences with Grace has inspired me to more deeply examine the impact of neoliberal mechanisms on daily classroom life and how these are co-implicated in the reproduction of inequalities. I have come to understand that there is much more to learn when we *see* our classroom worlds more expansively - to *reimagine more socially just literacy pedagogies.* To consider the new images of thought that can be produced by analysing the entanglements of humans (children- teachers- leaders) non-human bodies (literacy materials, objects, worksheets, levelled texts) and more-than human affects (feelings, vitalities and sensations) that have profound implications for issues of justice and equity. Along with Moje and Lewis (2012), I believe that this demands we are ethically attuned to how learning in our everyday classroom worlds "leaves a residue...makes a *mark* on a participant as it goes beyond the moment of participation to constitute a history and shape future acts of participating" (p. 16, emphasis added).

In this chapter, I discuss significant themes that have emerged throughout my research that I conceptualise as the 'Spectres of neoliberalism.' These are imagined as *haunting* the early years classroom. I then turn these concerns to map out provocations in order to rethink our literacy classroom worlds otherwise using concepts from agential realism, posthumanism and affect theory. Within these strongly interrelated areas, I explore the possibilities of 'Rethinking classroom life as assemblages', 'Dissolving boundaries and binaries' and 'Rethinking learning as emergent.' These are seen as provocations that seek to not only dwell in what has been *lost* but also "reanimate utopian" (Gordon, 2008, p. xiii) possibilities for children to thrive as literacy learners that are founded on ethically and socially just pedagogies.

-Scratch-

As I think about Grace, I also think about the children who come and go in our teaching worlds. Their beating hearts all with desires to belong, to be part of something, yet our classroom world pays such little attention to what cannot be seen, measured let alone, felt. I recall so vividly Grace's loneliness during the year she spent in the 'low' group. Withdrawn from her regular class. Withdrawn from Others. I would observe her on yard duty – her loneliness seemed to circulate around the playground compounded by

absences; a friend to play with, to laugh with, to desire with. Rather her life became that of an onlooker where her time was spent observing others. Children surrounded Grace - hurriedly mobilising their play, their movements zig zagging from one area to another as Grace was still. Sounds of chanting, yelling, laughter – all mangling, creating atmospheres. For her it was silence. She smiled at others, I imagined that she keenly awaited the ringing of yet another bell. An opportunity where she might feel a connection with others as she rushed to line up.

Holding patterns

'Reckoning with the ghosts' throughout this thesis has meant contesting the ways in which neoliberal priorities have *marked* our classroom worlds as being sites for the continued stratification of young children who are "positioned as a burden" (Rausch, 2022, p. 183). I now imagine the entangled world of the primary school literacy classroom as an apparatus of accumulation and distribution of energies, resources, attention, assessment levels, mandated policies, grades, test scores, bodies, habits, and life chances (Snaza, 2022). These are but a few of the human and more-than human entities that greatly affect literacy teaching and learning. Assemblages that make school literacy intelligible (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013) by territorialising it as one which relentlessly pursues the assessment and levelling of children in standardised English. Hackett (2022) encompasses these problematic assumptions. She suggests:

> Young children's literacies, have for many years (in western thought at least), sat near the beating heart of anxieties about the "proper" development of young children, believed by many to evidence children's ability to rationalise, problem-solve [...and] make abstract connections...the emphasis is on acquiring as many words as possible [as well as...] the rarefication of special middle class western child socialisation practices as essential or natural (p. 132).

Contesting the notion that "the school not only anticipates the kind of people it will produce, but enjoins such production to an a priori image of life to which students are interminably submitted" (Wallin, 2014, p. 117) emerge as ethical concerns. Those

‘interminable submissions’ are obsessively pursued via policy mandates that prescribe early intervention for children who fail to achieve the *expected* reading/writing level. Many children are then allocated, or perhaps more accurately *segregated,* into the world of (low) ability groups. These practices haunt the literacy classroom in their productions of fixed, stable (often eternal) identities of the child *as* ‘at risk’ literacy learner. A kind of recognition where the child is “coded to enable recognition of a visible and articulable” (Davies, 2021, p. 86) subject.

Material conditions of possibilities and impossibilities are created within these pedagogical enactments and become significant to “what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Barad, 2007, p. 148). Murris (2016) notes that the apparatus that bring children’s literacy data into existence is not neutral but imbued with an instrumentalist rationality where success is measured in terms of efficiency. Entangled in this ‘instrumentalist rationality’ is the materialisation of discourses and practices that promote phonics based perspectives of literacy, that position “knowledge and a figuration of the child as deficit” (Murris, 2016, p. 177). Those who advocate for narrow ‘science of reading’ (SOR) based approaches strongly influence literacy policy and practice, especially in the early years of schooling. Among several issues they raise to advance their arguments is the belief that:

> In schools where there are high proportions of children who experience risk factors associated with low language and literacy—particularly poverty-related factors—there will be higher proportions of children who will not make good progress, as defined by the expectations of the school curriculum, if not provided with the highest quality explicit and systematic reading instruction and early intervention (Buckingham, 2020, p. 15).

These ‘high proportions of children who experience risk factors’ indeed are overly represented by children who are greatly affected by ‘poverty related factors’ yet erased in this claim are questions about ‘the expectations of the school curriculum’ that fails to recognise any strengths children bring to school, e.g., their cultural, linguistic or social capital (Vicars & Sesta, 2023). Underpinning this claim is also the assumption that ‘explicit and systematic reading instruction’ that is of ‘the highest quality’ *only* occurs with/in SOR programs. These claims continue to exert their force and greatly shape early

years literacy policy and practices, notably increasing demands we address our declining standards by re-turning (once more) to *back to basics* approaches. Approaches that in essence are continually proposed as the panacea for lifting children's literacy levels on standardised assessments, especially in schools with "disadvantaged" populations (e.g., see a recent account via Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC, 2024], 'How back-to-basics literacy and numeracy teaching transformed a struggling public school.' Concerningly, however, as part of this process it is noted by the Principal that, "At the beginning of the year all students get a two-week crash course in the Marsden Way, including basic skills such as learning to walk between classes quietly, in neat double lines, and to politely greet the teachers." Relatedly, the need for so called 'disadvantaged children' to demonstrate acts of compliance also becomes fundamental to 'back to basic' approaches - *code* for further marginalising/colonising children?).

Entangled with/in these early literacy assemblages are policies that require children to be assessed and levelled (at school entry or prior to, in some cases). These practices are concerned with 'capturing' children's knowledge of early alphabetic principles and require teachers to keep detailed records of e.g., *which* children can name *what* alphabet letter, phoneme or specific sound symbol relationships (see Victorian Department of Education Training, [DET] 2023, English Online Interview). Underpinning these practices are problematic foundational assumptions that position children and their level of cognition as central to whether they learn to read and write. As such, early literacy practices become concerned with overemphasising a focus on the teaching of disconnected skills that are decontextualised. Ewing (2020) has argued strongly against the limitations of 'one size fits all' phonic focused early literacy programs. She states:

> Too often the more traditional and 'simple' conceptualizations of literacy and particularly the reading process are privileged by governments, policymakers and cognitive psychologists in their efforts to find a recipe for literacy success for all children. This desire for a formula overshadows the need for a more complex and nuanced approach and is detrimental for children, their parents and the community more broadly (p. 16).

As noted by Ewing above, repeated desires for simplistic 'formulas' obscure issues of complexity and importantly are 'detrimental' to the lives of many children as they

‘overshadow’ issues of equity. Universal solutions to complex problems that reduce any particularities in our complex worlds.

Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated the negative impact standardised teaching and learning approaches have on children from low socioeconomic and CALD communities. Furthermore, they identify that children deemed to need additional support often come from communities where families have been historically marginalised in mainstream schooling (Comber & Woods, 2016; Gannon et al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2017) and are overly represented from minority communities (Luke, 2012). We can then understand how discourses and practices are materialised into our everyday literacy pedagogical worlds. Sharma (2018) highlights these as forms of “subtle and seeping common sense mentality” (p. 136) that perpetuate deficit thinking about minoritised children. Beliefs that position children and families as being culturally deprived (Bishop, 2009) is further supported by the research of Fenwick and Comber (2021). They claim that children from poverty and/or ethnic minority communities consistently encounter barriers within school systems that limit their opportunities to learn. Consequently, as argued by Riddle et al. (2023), is the implementation of less challenging curriculum constructed for ‘low-achieving’ students who are labelled as disengaged.

Furthermore, Hargreaves et al. (2022) demonstrate how children who are deemed to be ‘low achievers’ absorb values about success that create considerable obstacles to them throughout their schooling lives. What emerges of significance in this research are the fears children reported that were associated with being assessed and sorted into low attaining groups. Many expressed how these lead to humiliation and feelings of anger. Perhaps more devastating is the fact that children “blamed themselves for being inadequate and inferior” (p. 397). Throughout my career in teaching and leadership roles, I observed many children run away from their classrooms when the mere mention that it was time for reading, writing or other related literacy skills. This appeared to be a more appealing option than to sit and endure the humiliation of being cast aside with the least experienced adult in the room, segregated from their peers with the accompanying simple worksheets. Publicly performing their *low* status as Grace did. Immersed in the material ↔ discursive practices that disconnect and *Other* them. Practices that create and reinforce a hierarchy where “children are educationally sorted and consequently manifested as either *risks* or *opportunities* for schools” (Duke & Whitburn, 2022, p. 1121).

-Scratch-

We rarely pay attention to the negative impact of streaming and labelling children in our everyday classroom worlds. We appear to accept these practices so unquestioningly. We fail to recognise how intensely children feel the exclusions, the hauntings that circulate, in their bodies, throughout their lives. How many children endure the withdrawals from their regular classroom lives for years? These are deeply ethical matters that never appear in the persistent discourse of 'raising literacy standards.'

Ball (2021) suggests, "neoliberalism now configures great swathes of our daily lives and structures our experience of the world – how we understand the way the world works, how we understand ourselves and others, and how we relate to ourselves and others" (p. xv). Through the relentless force of neoliberalism's emphasis on ways of structuring our literacy lives in the singular pursuit of attaining 'high' levels, children learn very early that they are in some way *deficient* if they are unable to meet these requirements. Goodley and Lawthom (2019) state that when overemphasising the individual, what becomes constituted as 'normal' "interpolates a particular kind of citizen: an adaptable, self-sufficient, autonomous labouring individual" (p. 236). Their concept of *neoliberal–ableism* highlights the interconnectedness of neoliberalism and ableism. They draw attention to the privileging of ableism, where "human enhancement, individual progression, cognitive advancement, economic independence and therapeutic growth are just some of the aims of an ableist regime" (p. 235). Duke and Whitburn (2022) further add that perversely, "while neoliberalism fosters the conditions of individualism, ableism provides the psychology of 'typicality' by which individuals labelled as 'special needs' are anticipated to integrate with a particular based ability-based idea; or, in other words are defined by their deficiency" (p. 1121). Profoundly, "bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them" (Snaza, 2022, p. 38).

It is possible to imagine a cacophony of the "multiplying signifying agents" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 13) that perpetuate particular regimes of truths in our early literacy learning worlds. Where literacy has been reduced to a body of knowledge to be mastered by children often through simplistic pre-set programs that purport to be 'scientific.' Who

can argue with *science*? Entangled with top down policy mandates that increasingly promote the exclusive implementation of phonics based print programs in the early years exclude other possibilities. These are positioned as unquestioned scientifically, evidence-based *matters of fact* (Stengers, 2018); as fundamentally the *only* way to conceptualise literacy learning. Interestingly, in recent research on neuroscience and reading, Hruby and Goswami (2019) contend:

> The reading education base, taken at large, indicates that the answer to the simplistic question, What works?, is it depends – on student variability, teacher efficacy, material resources. curricular objectives, and numerous other contextual factors. As experienced teachers know, no method will work for everyone in a given class, and nothing works for anyone all the time. Given that, the question should be rephrased as What works for particular kinds of students under particular kinds of circumstances, to particular ends, with particular dependability? (p. 271).

It depends. Student variability. Teacher efficacy. No method will work for everyone. 'Rephrasing our questions,' as suggested by Hruby and Goswami draws us to understand that there are alternatives to the repeated insistence of 'one size fits all' early literacy practices. Those advocated by a large body of researchers and interest groups who have significant commercial investments in promoting phonics based approaches. These are positioned as simplistic solutions to address learning difficulties that children experience. This is not to deny that specific children encounter problems in learning literacy and live with the anxieties that are produced. However, this should not erase a multiplicity of ways in which children can learn, process information and importantly *thrive*. One need not travel far to find a slew of 'resources' that keep us mired in reduced discourses and practices that perpetuate the sole of purpose of literacy learning is primarily to *remediate.* Approaches, e.g., '100 Easy Lessons to teach your child to read,' 'Highly scripted and easy to follow that 'teach children to read polysyllabic words, using repetition and nonsense words.' Promises of "Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar" and the like. Concerningly are suggestions to use these for children from as early as 'kindergarten' who are struggling to read and write (Auspeld, 2024). A battery of endless bland, vocabulary used to create simplified bland sentences for children to recite in bland acts of recall are far from 'jolly.'

We can imagine how literacy is territorialised in the neoliberal classroom as a bounded 'body' of literacy skills and knowledge that is to be acquired. We can then consider how our children as literacy learners become 'territorialised' through labelling practices being identified as 'at risk' according to their assessment results. What does this mean for issues of social justice that are concerned with children's access and participation if we expand our perspectives to embrace the intra-actions of the human, non-human and more-than human assemblages? We can ask, what kinds of knowledge is produced in these encounters? What is produced throughout children's daily worlds when *literacy* is conceptualised and enacted in the assemblages of neoliberal accountability, intervention programs (and and and...) for children who are deemed to be 'struggling'? Wallin (2014) captures the overly determined nature of curriculum imagined within these frames.

> Constituting an image of the 'possible' for the material life of the classroom, the *planned curriculum* arrays desiring flows within highly blinkered forms of institutional expression and production, palpating both the dependency of the subject upon the institutions mechanisms of representation, problem solving and ultimately the standardization and infantilization of desire under bureaucratic control (p. 118).

These 'blinkered forms of institutional expression and production' territorialise literacy as a body of representational knowledge and provoke questions of what comes to *matter.* We need to be strongly attuned to issues of power that exist within the assemblages of 'literacy' when it is territorialised in these narrow ways. For Grace and many children, becoming the 'subject' (literacy learner) with/in these entanglements, meant that she endured a raft of interventions, remediations, and practices implemented to fix her literacy *problems.* There were never conversations as to what else might be considered. In their commentary on the pervasiveness on school readiness programs, Alcock and Haggerty (2013) believe that "we rather now find ourselves immersed in the prevalence of a future-focused, outcomes-driven, reductionist view of children as economic units... such a perspective of childhood is always viewed as a preparatory stage" (p. 22).

A provocation from Harding (1991, p. 2) comes to light as I contemplate the plight of children who are determined to need special intervention like Grace. Drawing from *Frankenstein* she reflects on the metaphor of monsters; how they are created, nourished,

and reproduced day after day and then retreat into the shadows. She claims that these *retreats* are endured "as if there are no institutional practices we can hold responsible for the shape of the kinds of sciences and social orders with which they have been in partnership with" (p.3). I think about Grace and so many other children that were pedagogically *moved into the shadows.* I am still unable to contemplate how harmful this was, still very well may be in Grace's life; what may still haunt her. That haunts all children who live out their learning lives this way. What emerges are ethical concerns with how we might *liberate* children from the deficit effects of standardised learning that keep them silent, compliant and passive. These ideas resonate with Sumara (2022) who draws attention to the *deferrals* that haunt us, our relations and what we might become. These pedagogical absences can be profoundly felt when:

> The imaginative functions of literary engagement are hijacked by the normalizing social and cultural practices that shape what it means to be a teacher or students at school - a place explicitly oriented by all valences and variations of the word normal; neutral, right, generic, deferred (p. 301).

Paying attention to the notion of 'deferrals' can uncover all that becomes harmful in the daily worlds of teaching and learning. When children are required to persistently *pause/erase* their desires. Where adult notions of children's place (was and still predominantly 'is') one of subordination in the institutional world of school. Modes of constant surveillance and direction by adults intensified over the years of my professional life, erasing any possibilities of understanding children's identities, their histories or knowledge. Immersed in the repeated articulations and deficit practices that "come to be stuck together in and through circulating discourses" (Edbauer Rice, 2008, p. 206) that act as "a pernicious logic [that casts children who may not attain desired 'levels'] as "subordinated, inferior or invisible" (Alaimo & Heckman, 2008, p. 2). In these normative, restrictive pedagogies and policy structures - what becomes the *raison d être* of our daily teaching lives is to privilege the cognitive; the Cartesian *cogito.* All things rational. Narrow, one dimensional aspects of what children "are" able to recall, state, identify - at a point in time. The eternal quest to make visible numerical forms of data that are said to represent the child. If deemed 'low' children are something to be overcome. Children in continuous states of "being and becoming the monstrous subjects of measurement" (Gannon, 2018c, p. 73). Monstrosities.

- Scratch-

Our everyday world is so full of the stories we tell ourselves and each other. Goodall (2005) would describe this as our 'narrative inheritance.' We can think of this notion; how it powerfully is brought to life, in the ways that children experience their lives as "students"...with/in the complexities of school and classroom life. There are many narratives in the making, unfolding, shaping, guiding through an incalculable range of intersecting elements that are rarely in view. Learning to feel, to know, to become through these stories that at times caution us, entertain us, warn us even, but speak of the worlds of possibilities, both enabling and constraining. What comes into view for some? Often, we discover ourselves in stories we would rather not be living (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). In those stories our possibilities are reduced to what can be powerfully determined by institutional life. At times this can be a mere reading level, whether one can identify a random phoneme disconnected from their world but to please the teacher, the system....the richness of experience of life somehow eludes any explicit recognition by the persistent neoliberal gaze...reduced often to the bland checklist of expectations that limit who we might become.

The pursuit of signifiers

> The logic of the conscious taming of subjectivity and learning, by predicting, preparing, controlling and supervising according to predetermined standards, never really functions well. It is all a question of 'hit and miss'...[as] something always escapes in the flow of classroom life and that teachers need to be open to looking for, that which escapes already determined definitions and positions and engage in collective experimentations with children in the creation of alternative lines of flight (Olsson, 2009, p. 179).

So much 'escapes in the flow of classroom life...as we pursue the conscious taming of subjectivity.' The persistent, unquestioning practices of incessant data collection, levelling children and immersing them in tightly sequenced literacy learning experiences reflects the perverse need of the system to control, label and keep everything 'intelligible'

in the territorialised school literacy world. Massumi (2015) states that to in order to critique something in any definitive way, you have to pin it down. Furthermore, he argues that "in a way it is an almost sadistic enterprise that separates something out, attributes set characteristics to it, then applies a final judgement to it – objectifies it" (p. 14). We can imagine the ways in which we seek to 'pin down' children's knowledge and thus fix their identity through narrow measurements in the literacy classrooms. Acts where children are made "calculable and visible not memorable" (Ball, 2016, p. 1053). Entangled with/in assessment measures and the use of data that intra-actively produce practices that separate out skills, children and possibilities that literacy learning can be more than a cognitive pursuit. That the child might become anything Other. Where is the child in these processes? In what ways do we consult with them, empower them to understand their learning processes? O'Loughlin (2016) decries processes of standardisation in schools that require teachers to "wilfully occlude children's voices, emotions, and imaginations in order to cover the prescribed curriculum compliantly" (p. 14).

-*Scratch*-

We might ask, where is the child in these limited modes of learning? Where is the complexity...? The nuance, the silences that pervade the occasion of learning, invisible, however rarely realised as having any pedagogic worth. Representational logic that assign signifiers through limited representations of a world in pursuit of all that is reduced to narrow quantifiable skills. We miss rich opportunities for our literacy worlds to be imagined otherwise. To plan for a multiplicity of learning, social, material, affective encounters that can challenge dominant views of the child as always being in deficit, as teaching and learning being essentially on the lookout for who is in need of remediation in pursuit of meeting mandated standards.

Increasingly, systems of accountability that intensify increased narrow assessment measures continue to (re)produce what posthuman theorists refer to as 'Cartesian cuts' that create distinct boundaries. Bozalek and Fullagar (2022) juxtapose these to 'agential cuts' which they state produce "*temporary* separations of the subject and object" (p. 30).

With the persistence of ‘Cartesian cuts’ being pedagogically enacted, we can imagine children’s fixed identities as being sedimented in a grid of intelligibility (Foucault, 1994) and the exclusions that are produced for those who perform below expected levels. Neoliberal policies that are entangled with standardisation of learning and accountability measures keep children mired in unjust practices that produce what comes to be constituted and reconstituted as pedagogically ‘*normal*’ - with no alternatives. Entangled in hegemonic ideologies and the policy climates are deficit images of the child that continue to haunt the institution of schooling where all is reduced to quantifying, measuring and segregating learning and learners. Berlant and Stewart (2019) ask, “might we drop the diagnostic tone, even for a minute?” (p. 131) In this current climate it appears not.

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What gets missed in the 'representational' world of the classroom where everything has to mean something in pursuit of the neoliberal logics of (apparent) 'sense?' Where we relentlessly pursue endless empty ‘nexts.’ Where might the everyday moments, events, utterances, silences, children - all that may defy immediate representation via the highly regulatory curriculum and its prescriptions. In our eternal quest to assign meaning, to label in order to make ‘sense’ of what things mean. Erased are openings for alternatives.

The role of knowledge as tethered to rationality precludes opportunities where we learn about ourselves and our world in its dynamic relations. Following Reinersten and Thomas (2023), I believe that as researchers “we must work to escape the imitation game: the echoing mimesis that we can unwittingly take on in our research, academic, thinking work. Knowing about mimesis is important because it gives us the opportunity to liberate ourselves from its grip” (p. 7). The same can be said of our classroom teaching and learning worlds where we are persistently told to ignore our feelings, our emotions as they will only ‘get in the way’ to the more serious, credible pursuits of knowledge production that occurs (apparently) only in the mind.

Contesting the overemphasis on the individual, the measurable and ways that "sanitise and simplify the emotional landscape" (Henderson, 2018, p. 1) of the literacy classroom invites us to be attuned to what Stewart (2012) so beautifully refers to as the 'ordinary' happenings in our everyday worlds. Drawing us into understanding how as teachers we can "raise the question of how to approach ordinary tactile composition, everyday worldings that matter in many ways beyond their status as representations or objects of moralizing" (p. 519). To be directed toward the creative exploration of ideas, feelings, moments, events and memories that 'intra-act.' Where literacy teaching may perform a multitude of work. Where our social, critical and affective worlds are opened up to potential transformations to enable all children to thrive as learners.

Where are the spaces we can contest the apparatuses of hegemonic policies and practices which must be re-thought, re-imagined toward an openness of relations of difference, of diversity, where affirmative movements gesture toward an accountability, an ethical response-ability in the pedagogic moment to moment matters of the classroom? How might we find ways to expand our practices and account for more socially just perspectives? These concerns are equally expressed by Niccolini (2019b) who urges us to:

> ...let go of stakes in individual and self-contained actors such as the "right" book, the "right" teacher or the "right" instructional method and also attend to the minor gestures, spontaneous coalitions, and autopoietic happenings in classrooms...to attune us to the collectivities and materialities activated by more-than human forces (p. 92).

Imagining Otherwise: Shifting to matters of concern

Our teaching and children's learning lives are felt by the absences, the presences and exclusions that emerge in the order of things that saturate our classroom worlds. Profoundly, Barad (2017) states:

> No justice... seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility...in these troubling times, the urgency to trouble time, to shake it to its core, and to produce collective imaginaries that undo pervasive conceptions of temporality that take progress as inevitable and the past as

> something that has passed and is no longer with us is something so tangible, so visceral, that it can be felt in our individual and collective bodies (p. 56-57).

Re-thinking the ethical relations in our daily teaching worlds becomes critical to our capacity to imagine otherwise. To call into question the narrow ways in which our practices "close off and reduce bodily possibilities and potential for change" (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p.3). Increasing pressures on teachers to implement narrow pedagogical teaching and assessment practices continue to position the child as the *receiver* of knowledge – the empty vessel – akin to banking models of education (Freire, 1970). In contrast, Taylor (2016) argues that posthumanist practices offer a new ethics of engagement for education by including the nonhuman in questions about who matters and what counts in questioning the constitutive role played by humanist dominant paradigms.

From a social justice perspective, this means contesting the neoliberal logics of standardisation through the insistence of quantifiable measures that *mark* the success of our children. That instils in them a fear of not being good enough in a world where their "characters are constantly judged, both by themselves and others, as at risk of falling short of the ideal of what human subjects ought to be" (Davies, 2014a, p. 34). That stratify and exclude through practices of withdrawing, remediating and regulating children's bodies. Grace's body as one constituted as an "at risk' palimpsest" (Spry, 2016, p. 69), the becoming subject with/in the always disappearing and always present assemblages and relations of *deficit.*

Neoliberal policies and practices that relentlessly pursue the collection of numbers and measures continually carve up and deny any possibility that children may aspire to anything other than their pedagogic worth. Where are the more complex and variable ways of understanding the experiences of children that depart from the purely epistemological driven concerns and essentialised meanings? (Bohlmann & Hickey-Moody, 2019). Where are children's rights to aspire (Appadurai, 2004)? To have a sense of hope that perhaps their knowledge, perspectives or perceptions of the world may be sought? We rarely pay attention to the negative impact of streaming and we label children so unquestioningly. We fail to recognise how intensely children *feel* the exclusions, the hauntings that circulate, in their bodies, throughout their lives. Many children endure the withdrawals from their regular classroom lives for years, begging the question; if these

interventions are effective why is it that specific children find themselves "needing" intervention year after year? Once more we reckon with the ghosts of neoliberalism.

Barad (2007) reminds us that we are all responsible for the matter *produced* in our worlds. As we consider our children in the daily literacy classroom, we can then ask, what becomes constituted as *literacy* (curriculum) for children? Ehret and D'Amico (2019) suggest that "questions of how life feels in becoming relations with texts and how those feelings move bodies toward more or less, just acts of doing, making and being together have not been fully explored in literacy research" (p. 148). From a social justice perspective, it implores us to recognise the ethical nature of research and pedagogical work.

-Scratch-

Reflecting on the narrative elements of classroom life led me to consider more deeply these in terms of children's experiences in the classroom.... where they talk, not talk, listen, read, write, interact, move...and so much more. What becomes implicated in the becoming and (re)telling of children's learning lives in these assemblages? In the daily world of school, what kind of stories do they hear? How do they engage in these? What kinds of identities do these produce? What kinds of texts infuse their cultural, linguistic, social and academic histories? What assembles into the many layers of experience? How do children make meanings of all of these elements that entangle, come into play as they become literate? What becomes absorbed in the day to day life of the child's learning? What stories do children tell themselves and others about what it means to become a learner? Are these stories of agency that tell tales of self-insight, a desire to connect with others? To belong? Or are they stories of longing, of loneliness that constrain who they might become? These encourage us to strive to embrace the multiple entanglements of possibilities that we are in the world (of the classroom).

In arguing for gestures toward ethical and political pedagogies of relation, Blaise et al. (2017) suggest that a different kind of logic is required for teachers. In this newly configured *logic* lies our capacity to think with and invent new practices that pay attention to the complex and ethical ways in which humans and more than humans are entangled. To shift educational challenges from 'matters of fact' (described in the educational environment as traditional norms and practices that reduce learning to standardised sets of reading skills) to 'matters of concern' (which are noted as being attuned to ethical and political practices). These imperatives urge us to account for our ethical 'response-ability' (Barad, 2007) in literacy teaching and learning. This entails contesting the increasingly narrow ways teachers are required to plan and document children's literacy experiences that position knowledge as 'acquired,' incremental and signified by levels that become entangled with the provision of materials that limit what children not only learn, but may actually *become*. These are 'territorialised' as standards that children are expected to acquire from one skill to the next. Reducing any unexpected possibilities for diverse lines of flight. Murris et al. (2022b) advocate for the need to shift from narrow linear models of teaching and learning that limit the ways in which we conceptualise our classroom worlds. These call on us to:

> disrupt the linear lines implied in notions of child development and progress, and to reconfigure learning as more complex in terms of deciding what is – what is real. Included in what is real is also the more-than-human as part of a notion of agency that is distributed and does not reside in the individual human. Indeed, the notion of distributed agency helps us not only to rephrase the child-centred question 'What if and what else are the children doing'? to the question 'What if and what else is happening?' (p. 190).

Reflecting on issues of justice, to understand 'what else is happening?' as suggested above, turns attention toward questions of equity, participation and access. These become significant matters of concern as we seek to understand *who* is enabled to fully participate in literacy classroom life and what exclusions are produced. Expanding analysis to consider the more than human relations can produce different insights "in a style that express possible worlds through difference" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 3). From these perspectives, we are able to generate alternative narratives of life and learning that are attuned to our relationships with each other, materials, affects, objects and discourses

beyond the human to understand what else can be theorised. We become ethically aware of what is materialised in the literacy classroom and significantly, what these produce. I now continue the discussion to propose provocations in which we can rethink issues of social justice in our everyday literacy classrooms.

Rethinking classroom life as assemblages

To counter the overemphasis on literacy as being focused on *individualistic* notions of knowledge acquisition, the concept of 'assemblage' is extremely useful to think about the human and more than human entanglements that produce relations in the world of the literacy classroom. Boldt (2022) describes an assemblage as being comprised of any number of heterogeneous elements people, material, objects, histories, and ideas. Significantly, however, she notes that these have no inherent meaning or coherence until they are 'territorialised' - a process which has the capacity to "to turn a limitless potential of such a gathering into something with recognisable meaning" (p. 213). We can thus imagine the infinite assemblages that become *territorialised* in/through/by neoliberally driven policies in the literacy classroom. Those of which Boldt (2022) states are "given meaning or made provisionally stable" (p. 213). Thus given these states are made 'provisionally stable' we can imagine the potential of rethinking our literacy practices as being composed of diverse assemblages and importantly understand what is enabled or constrained with/in these. Rethinking classroom life this way, invites us to be open to recognise daily life as being in a constant state of change and movement. As suggested by Bansel and Davies (2014):

> The concept of an assemblage is useful for keeping in play the combination or coordination of discrete parts that produce multiple possible effects. Assemblages are not simply objects or things, but qualities, speeds, flows and lines of force. Their character is defined not by what they are, but by what they can do, or become. And they are always in the process of becoming, not through an intention to arrive at a pre-determined end-point, but through multiple encounters with emergent multiplicities (p. 41).

Multiple encounters. Emergent possibilities. An emphasis on the production of what the 'qualities, speeds, flows and lines of force' of our everyday worlds draw attention to the

ways in which boundaries are created by the human, non-human and more than human elements. Classrooms become reimagined as composed of innumerable entanglements in the *doings* of literacy. Rethinking classroom life as being composed of shifting assemblages becomes a space that is not determined by fixed identities, programs and lessons, but of heterogeneous elements of human, non-human and more than human bodies, objects, materials and affects that can be imagined as "encounters between diverse actors" (Taylor, 2013, p. 691). These have the capacity to profoundly shape what children learn and significantly what they are enabled to *become*. In this way, we can imagine assemblages that "come together and create new ways of functioning" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18).

Recall the experiences of Grace and the children as their learning became affected by the intensities produced through, e.g., reading artworks, collaborative discussions and writing personal letters which were deeply entangled with/in their personal lives. These 'new ways of functioning' produced in Grace a sense of becoming different to her former status as an 'at risk' learner. The intra-actions of Grace, the materials, diverse texts, dialogue, relating to others and quality literature (and, and, and) greatly shaped ways that she could learn and express her insights. Meaning making practices transcended the mere recall of disconnected facts but required Grace and the children to be fully present, to be immersed in diverse entanglements that opened up a world of multiple perspectives. To trust what they know and importantly to understand the views and experiences of others.

Openings can be made possible. *Alternative* ways for children to experience classroom life can be imagined. Enabling the children to learn in new ways with different materials produced different assemblages. We can thus become attuned to what Lenters (2022) refers to as the creation of 'agentivising assemblages.' Where we understand that agency is produced with/in diverse assemblages in the literacy classroom and emerges within complex intra-actions that occur. To be mindful of what becomes assembled through specific material↔discursive practices, we can think of how "agency as a force in between participants in assemblages" (Lenters, 2022, p. 222). This shifts the concern from a teacher trying to build agency "in" each child to reconceptualise a host of relations that come into play each day as being imbued with potential for agentic assemblages. This resituating of agency has significant implications for how we see our daily literacy worlds and work toward matters of justice.

In this way, we can thus imagine the possibilities of dissolving harmful boundaries that segregate bodies, and instead consider how affective assemblages emerge as "lively forces of vibrant matter" (Quinones & Duhn, 2022, p. 238). Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) state that Deleuze's approach to ethics is concerned with not only what a body 'is' "but what it is capable of, and in what ways its relations with other bodies diminish or enhance those capacities" (p. 3). How might this attune us to children's 'potential' as opposed to the relentless focus on what they *know* at a given point in time? How might we embrace a sense of uncertainty and be open to elements of surprise? To allow for possible "fields of resonance" (Massumi, 2015, p. 123) that emerge not from individual identities or experiences, but in relation. Concerns that are as much about the *rhythms* of classroom life, of the collective and the affects that can be produced.

Furthermore, in imagining the shifting relations produced in assemblages, we can also consider in Baradian (2003) terms, the potential of agency as being 'distributed.' In this way, agency never 'runs out' as intra-actions have the capacity to reformulate agency in an ongoing reconfiguring of both the real and the possible (Phillips & Larson, 2013.) The human, non-human and more-than human entities that come together to intra-act suggests that these are "open for the (re)configuring/(re)articulations, for agency and possibility, from which humans and non-humans emerge" (Phillips & Larson, 2013, p. 726). Thus, possibilities exist for Grace, the child who is constituted as 'at risk,' the struggling individual learner reduced to the *Other* who needs remediation can be reimagined. There are renewed possibilities as Grace, the Subject, no longer needs to exist within the restrictions of categories we create but is able to be "transformed/reconstituted as part of dynamic living systems" (Hendry, 2020, p. 1241). We can consider what is made possible in children's learning lives when we understand what is produced through everyday material ↔ discursive literacy practices and importantly how these *affect* children's capacities to act. These ideas suggest we shift literacy practices from predetermined structures that emphasis the individual child in isolation to an understanding of how they are imbued with "a multiplicity of relations" (Fullagar & Taylor, 2022, p. 32). Becoming attuned to the child as being entangled with/in a diversity of texts, materials, affects and collaborations that embrace, e.g., children's interests, their knowledge and significantly their potential, offers a renewed image of classroom life as 'unbounded.'

As we think further with Lenters' (2022) notion of agentivising assemblages, we become concerned with how we might imagine the networks of relations in our literacy classrooms, to conceptualise fully embodied accounts of experience; to realise how deeply we are all entangled. As such, we can seek to make visible these enmeshed relations and consider how these may enable or constrain who we might become in the everyday moments of practice. What lines of flight might be created when I read this specific text....? What boundaries might be created if I use this 'evidence based' policy directive..? What is produced when policy/school leadership decides that one literacy program will be implemented across the early years? How are children affected when they are removed from their classroom for one to one *remedial* intervention programs? In what ways do these decisions, policies and practices produce specific exclusions that are implicated in matters of justice or injustice? Thinking of our classrooms as entangled in a network of relations, of assemblages, those *hidden* from view in our daily lives, matter considerably to the work of social justice. We can thus reimagine the significance of the effects and the *affects* that are generated by emergent properties in an assemblage which have an ability to make 'something happen' (Bennett, 2010).

Murris and Haynes (2018) suggest that conceptualising the agency of the material as part of an assemblage of entangled human, non-human and more than human encounters, "provides an onto epistemological context that is always shifting, evolving and in/determinate" (p. 19). From these theorisations, it is imperative we become immersed in acts of noticing the less examined spaces of our literacy worlds that profoundly impact children's learning lives. An attunement to the shifting relations composed as assemblages in our classroom worlds invites attention to matters of social justice as we pursue radical openings. In this way, we can imagine our everyday classroom practices as alive to the "emergence of something new becoming possible" (Spector et al., 2019. p. 186).

-Scratch-

Reimaging the ways in which we can liberate children from the constraints imposed on them cruelly, systematically, that leave their marks on their bodies, demands an attentiveness to what Maxine Greene (1995) has described as a wakefulness to the

unknown. Where are the moments we are able to embrace possibilities and be open to elements of surprise – be captivated (even) by children's theories of the world. Imagine what (classroom) life might become if we create opportunities to be 'enthralled' by the ideas of our children! For them/us to be affected in this way. For children to know they are capable of greatly affecting others. Of feeling a sense of vitality. To create these spaces in the highly structured school world is our constant challenge. Spaces that generate the vitalities and intensities we all need to thrive. Especially for children who are denied experiences where they feel vital.

Rethinking binaries and boundaries

> Inequity is produced through erasure of what has not yet been imagined
> (Wolfe, 2021, p. 22).

How might we reimagine classroom life in its various shifting assemblages to enhance possibilities for 'what has not yet been imagined' as suggested by Wolfe? In these processes we are called to unsettle binaries, deficit identities and practices that limit what thoughts and practices are made 'intelligible.' We become further attuned to critical and ethical questions about the kinds of literacy 'worlds' we create each day with children, especially those that produce exclusions. Exclusions that are amplified through boundaries created with/in neoliberal assemblages reinforcing fixed identities. The need to "disrupt power producing binaries...that are not about essence or identity" (Bozalek & Murris, 2022, p. 54) thus becomes imperative.

Given their orientation and openness to relationality, movement and change, theories from agential realism and posthumanism seek to unsettle the humanly created stable 'normative' boundaries that go unnoticed in our everyday classroom worlds. In our literacy classrooms specifically, we can imagine these as being reproduced through developmental psychological approaches aligned with autonomous models of literacy learning. Models of learning where one is considered 'literate' in the early years according

to their proficiency in naming disconnected letters and sound/symbols relationships in standardised English. Holmes and Ravetz (2024) suggest this is "the 'normal' developmental trajectory built into primary education's model of the unfolding child [which] fails to recognise change as something continuously ongoing, divergent, excrescent, manifold, and collective, presuming a carefully regulated move from one predefined position to another" (p. 691). In dissolving boundaries created in the neoliberal classroom, we are able to think with and beyond the humanist individual subject i.e., the child, who is expected to learn literacy skills mapped in sequenced stages and be evaluated according to narrow predetermined linear benchmarks. We become open to the complexity of relations that become entangled in children's literacy learning life each day. These enable us to be attuned to how learning can shift and navigate multiple contexts, times, spaces, interactions, intra-actions and situations. Literacy learning thus becomes reconfigured as being imbued with change and movement.

From these insights, turning toward relational ontologies enables us to reconfigure possibilities for unsettling the binaries, deficit identities and practices that produce exclusions. Davies (2014b) advocates that we "think beyond the individual self as entity" (p. 739) to embrace the intra-actions in our entangled literacy worlds. If we pause, what ethical possibilities become issues that matter? There is a compelling need to seek to 'dissolve' boundaries and binaries created through neoliberal mandates, that limit how we conceptualise literacy and children. The notion of 'becoming' is a useful concept to think with as it addresses harmful binaries that have been created such as the subject/object and teacher/child, which perpetuate hierarchies and limit what we are able to imagine. The separation of binaries is questioned to challenge the taken for granted categories lived out in the literacy world that reproduce inequitable relations. These engage us to recognise the entangled knowing, becoming and doing (Kuby et al., 2019) of literacy in relation to a host of non-human and more-than human entities.

We can thus consider what is produced during literacy practices yet also ways in which children are *becoming* literate during intra-actions. These ideas are reflected by Barad (2007) who suggests that intra-actions iteratively reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible at any given moment. She elaborates by noting that "there is a *vitality* to intra-activity – where there is a new sense of aliveness where the world's effervescence cannot be contained or suspended" (p. 235). So to what extent can we imagine this sense

of becoming or as Barad notes 'a new sense of aliveness', if at all? In pursuit of this, we are reminded of the need to contest humanly created concepts such as:

> Binary pairs [which] have often been the central analytic tools that human beings have in their ontological, meaning making and knowledge production. A binary mode of reasoning has become the most prevalent modernity episteme...however binary opposites are social constructions that do not correspond to any existing polarities (Murris et al., 2022a, p. xxiii).

Recall Barad's (2007) notion of 'ethico-onto-epistemology' that challenges limited views of 'knowledge' and identity that have been created through Cartesian logic. These kinds of "normative epistemologies have introduced the categorisations, binaries and hierarchies that include and exclude" (Murris & Osgood, 2022, p. 210). Alternatively, pedagogies grounded in ethico-onto-epistemological concerns disrupt binary thinking. They bring critical attention to not only what children *know*, but significantly question what is *produced.* Kuby and Zhao (2022) believe that there is an overemphasis on assessing what children *know* as literacy learners to the exclusion of examining what this knowledge produces for children. They suggest that it is vital that we acknowledge how children *become* literacy learners and provoke questions such as, What becomes of children's ways of knowing and becoming literacy learners? What boundaries are created? How do these include/exclude specific literacy teaching/learning/assessment practices? A consistent theme throughout this thesis is the need, in posthuman terms, to resituate children, not as isolated individuals, but as part of dynamic, heterogeneous assemblages. We can thus be aware of the need to recognise how our materials, objects, policies and practices greatly affect the potential ways in which children *become* literate - beyond top down measures that direct us toward disembodied teaching and learning practices.

We might ask, What if our daily learning lives became ethically concerned with creating environments where children actively shared their experiences, their history, their theories of the world, expressions of becoming (literate) that are erased the quest to *measure* and *remediate*? We could become more closely attuned to the ways in which the everyday literacy texts and materials become entangled in how children learn. To consider how these greatly affect opportunities to learn. Multiple, diverse readings of the world, of

children's experiences and classroom life can replace the persistently over-coded and limited/limiting practices directed by neoliberal demands. The futile time intensive endeavours of collecting data that constituted little more than decontextualised, obscure and arbitrary skills of what a child might be able to read at a specific point in time. Essentially detached from anything meaningful in that child's world. These mask any possibilities of creation – agentic moments that might unfold and be capable of producing *difference* if we imagine otherwise.

Plugging into notions of difference can help us to think with ideas of becoming. Davies (2009b) describes the Deleuzian concept of *differenciation* as an alternative way to conceptualise children's learning experiences. In this manner, rather than focus on categorical differences in children (e.g., *low* learner, *poor* speller etc.) that essentialise universal categories, the notion of *differentiation* pays attention to how the child is *becoming* different. Quoting Deleuze, she states that "real difference is a matter of how things become different, how they evolve and continue to evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into" (p. 18). This openness to imagining children as *becoming* different through a multiplicity of learning encounters each day, requires we challenge the boundaries produced that limit what children are able to learn and *become*. It suggests we are aware of the entangled relations in our classroom worlds - children's learning *processes* and significantly how they are affected by these. What might this mean for our everyday practices in the literacy classroom? Rather than labelling children, sorting and allocating them into specific ability groups (categorical differences), we can consider a diversity of literacy learning practices to engage all children beyond their perceived ability.

Posthumanist researchers emphasise the need to be aware that the ethical choices we make *create* specific boundaries – and in the process can exclude other possibilities. Taylor (2013) argues that we need to account for how data collection and analysis affects the decisions we make in order "to pay attention to what we don't normally see, to what is excluded" (p. 692). These are ethical matters of concern and have particular consequences for issues of participation as we become aware of how our children are enabled (or constrained) through the boundaries created. It invites us to rethink how we collect and use data. More importantly, we need to consider how the child is greatly *affected* by the types of experiences we plan and the actual assessment processes we

implement. These are entangled processes as suggested by Barad (2007), who argues that "knowing, thinking, measuring, theorising and observing are material practices of intra-acting within and as part of the world" (p. 90). The teacher/child/data thus does not stand apart from the world as a separate container and *represent* it as an authority of what 'is' but is conceptualised as "specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 91) of the literacy classroom.

What then might be made possible when boundaries are reconceptualised as 'specific material arrangements?' We can recognise that any boundaries we create are *contingent* and in doing so, open up possibilities to reimagine children's participation and our practices more expansively. This stands in stark contrast to the overly determined nature of literacy teaching, learning and assessment practices that segregate and detach children from more embodied ways to *learn*; to *become.* Literacy classroom life can be therefore reconceptualised not as ontologically carved up and driven by simplistic 'cause and effect' encounters (i.e., If I teach effectively you will learn; If I teach *this* phoneme before *that* phoneme you will learn it more effectively, I will put you in a small group because when you are below a level you must receive remedial approaches, vis a vis 'the adult will *cause* the child to learn - adult/child and subject/object binary), but become a "dense mixture of material ↔ discursive events that are folded upon each other" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 22). In these processes where boundaries are dissolved, we become concerned with how literacy learning takes place *in-between* the child, materials/time/space and other people. The goal is not to determine cause and effect relationships but rather to "observe how particular entanglements become agential, co-constituting reality" (Hill, 2017, p. 7). With/in these entanglements we can become aware of how differences are produced. Barreiro (2020) notes:

> In intra-action, subjects and objects, such as literacy, texts, bodies, and time are not separate ontological units acting one upon the other, as in a linear understanding of cause-effect relations, but rather these agencies are entangled and emerge together to produce events (p. 92).

There is an ethical imperative as we are urged toward an accountability for the particular exclusions that are enacted in research that requires we assume responsibility to "perpetually contest and rework the boundaries" (Barad, 1998, p. 104). In this relational

view where boundaries are dissolved, the world is re-configured as being in constant states of movements. These are continually open to the possibilities of the emergences of human and non-human entities in their various indeterminate configurations. Thus, life, knowledge and thought is conceptualised as entangled and in motion. As literacy teachers, we can imagine children's learning and their capacity to *know* being *contingent* with/in these dynamic relations. In these processes, we can be mindful of the host of relations that come into play each day. To understand "how bodies of all kinds [can] disrupt the human/non-human binary and make themselves intelligible to one another" (Murris & Fullagar, 2022, p. 62). In these ways we can focus on continually reflecting on our practices and what they produce.

Dissolving binaries and boundaries can produce conditions of possibility for literacy to be conceptualised as a way of *thriving.* As becoming an assemblage of intellectual, material, discursive and affective encounters in which children are able to flourish. To be engaged in embodied, unexpected relations that recognise multiple states of *becoming* as captured so beautifully by Maxine Greene's expression, 'I am...not yet' (Neider, 2021). These ideas are extremely daunting for teachers, however, are vitally needed given so much of literacy classroom life is dominated by evidence based 'scripted' programs that narrowly define what an effective teacher of literacy *does*. In imagining literacy learning as entangled becomings, we need to be comfortable with a sense of uncertainty given that "potentialities can be actualised in unforeseen and unexpected ways" (Lenz Taguchi (2010, p. 47). These require considerable ontological and epistemological shifts to our overly coded and hierarchical classroom worlds. Koro et al. (2022) urge us to embrace many forms of knowledge production that are attuned to difference and relations which can "rest on curiosity, sense, affect, wonder, artistic intervention and experimentation" (p. 157). How might we then strive toward an "ontological priority of relations" (Semetsky, 2009, p. 94) and reimagine the boundaries created in our highly individualistic literacy classroom worlds?

These propositions present significant challenges to teachers in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning. Barad (2003) argues that representationalism is "so deeply entrenched within Western culture that it has taken on a common-sense appeal. It seems inescapable, if not downright natural" (p. 806). When situated in the literacy classroom, the 'naturalness' of humanly created binaries and labels perpetuated by psychological

developmental models unproblematically sediment their wielding power in constituting the *normal*. These become agentic forces when entangled with literacy practices, deficit beliefs, assessment regimes, demands that children achieve a specific benchmark, children's anxieties, teachers' anxieties and affects that emerge in relation to 'at risk' assemblages (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022). The pursuit of ways in which we can strive to dissolve boundaries and binaries and materialise the concept of *becoming* thus assumes critical importance as we strive for social justice.

-Scratch-

Throughout my research, I have come to understand the infinite number of human, non-human and more-than human entities that entangle in/with/through our relations in the (classroom) world. Mapping Grace's and the children's literacy learning experiences using posthuman ideas enabled me to understand more expanded ways to think about social justice. I reflect now with incredulity, intense regret and at times anger, at how oppressive these practices are – yet how we so effortlessly implement these in our attempts to 'meeting children's needs' – an overused yet pervasive term in the primary school world of education. They are undertaken so unquestioningly, as part of the everyday business of doing school. Children were never consulted in this process, in terms of how these experiences affected them. Comber and Hayes (2023) note that a key danger in such literacy rituals becoming commonplace is the alienation that can result. These injustices seem to be multiplied when our capacity to see beyond humanist frames are gestured toward the material world of the classroom to understand the atmospheres and the affective relations that evade our humanist gaze.

Rethinking learning as emergent

Reframing classroom life by theorising assemblages, rethinking agency, dissolving boundaries and binaries and using the notion of 'becoming' have the capacity to open up pedagogical spaces for children and literacy learning to be imagined differently. These become entangled as we reconceptualise literacy learning as 'emergent.' In further theorising how these ideas might live in our everyday world, the figure of the rhizome

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) can help us to reconceptualise knowledge production beyond its teleological hierarchical status and be reimagined as *emergent*. This requires a de-territorialisation of Literacy (as a body of knowledge) that reflects (only) epistemological aims, i.e., to represent and reproduce the known. It also challenges ways the child is positioned as the *receiver* of this knowledge.

Using the figure of the rhizome can help us to de-territorialise 'dogmatic images of thought' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) perpetuated through standardised literacy learning. To shift from fixed meanings to embrace more open pedagogical spaces and relations that can dissolve boundaries between knowledge/knower. We can imagine a classroom world where children become immersed in dynamic multiple ways of coming to *know;* to *learn*; to *become.* To be conceptualised as a "series of ever emergent relations...where we are able to decentre both reading and psychological processes as the central frame for interpreting what happens now and what happens next" (Boldt & Leander, 2020, p. 7). We can conceptualise diverse rhizomatic relations as becoming entangled (such as histories, memories, knowledge, affect, materials and so on) as children learn literacy. These relations invite us to reconsider knowledge generation as *emergent* and produced with/in rhizomatic lines of flight. In Deleuzeguattarian thinking "lines of flight are free flowing dynamic mo(ve)ments of/in thinking that continually dis/connect ideas within the multiplicity and through constant change draw any assemblage together (Sellers, 2015, p. 9). They are a far cry from the child who is to be taught predetermined literacy skills constituted within linear, sequenced lessons. In sharp contrast, Colman (2010) proposes:

> Rhizomatic thinking, being and/or becoming is not simply a process that assimilates things, rather it is a milieu of perpetual transformation. The relational milieu that the rhizome creates gives form to evolutionary environments where relations alter the course of how flows and collective desire develops...the rhizome is a powerful way of thinking without recourse to analogy or binary constructions...[but rather] to reveal the multiple ways that you might approach any thought, activity or a concept (p. 235).

A milieu of perpetual transformation. Multiple ways to approach thought, activity or a concept. What could this mean for literacy teaching and learning and for children as they become 'literate?' Thinking with the rhizome "shifts attention away from fixed meanings and toward action and the new 'becomings' that are an important part of literacy performances" (Leander & Rowe, 2006, p. 429). Recall Grace and the children as they engaged in ongoing open ended discussions of literature, their reciprocal writing of letters and looking at art – as 'new becomings.' They were invited into literacy learning experiences that defied the insistence that they memorise specific alphabetic knowledge in order to 'meet' specific pre-set benchmarks at allocated times. They were rather immersed in openings where they were enabled to express themselves and learn literacy in multiple ways. To be affected by their learning, to *feel, to be* engaged in flows of thinking/being/doing literacy in iterative processes of learning. With/in these processes, as their teacher, I was able to follow the children's lead - the lines of flight that emerged during those sessions as they expressed their ideas, preferences for topics and questions. These 'lines of flight' evolved into new practices (such as Reciprocal Teaching and Readers' Theatre) that positioned the children's knowledge as the "starting point and continuous focus for pedagogical intervention" (Olsson, 2012, p. 89). Children's learning processes and the emergences of ideas, desires and experiences became the basis for further planning literacy experiences.

An emphasis on rhizomatic thinking - of imagining learning as emergent, challenges the emphasis on knowledge as hierarchical. Kuby and Murris (2022) highlight the privileging of epistemological pursuits in the early literacy experiences of children that (reductively) focus on what students *know* about alphabet letters/sounds, comprehension and vocabulary. Significantly they ask, "What if pedagogies consider the ethico-onto-epistemological ways in which literacies come into being with young children?" (p. 75). Once more the neologism 'ethico-onto-epistemology' (Barad, 2007) comes into view. Ethico-onto-epistemology emphasises the interconnectedness of "ethics, knowing, and being" (Barad, 2007, p. 185), calling on us to pay attention to how children perceive the (literacy learning) world through meaning making processes and how they relate to others in their lives. These are ethical matters that require attention in our everyday literacy practices as we become attuned to understanding not only *what* children learn but *how* they are *becoming* literacy learners. It thus becomes imperative that we are opened up to "different ways of understanding [the] material, discursive, and affective dynamics"

(Song, 2020, p. 236) in our daily classrooms and significantly how these are implicated in children's capacity to thrive. I am reminded of Boldt's (2021) notion of the importance of children feeling a sense of 'vitality' here as an ethical imperative.

We can thus resituate knowledge as being emergent and inextricably entangled with/in children's processes of learning. This enables us to shift what is made possible as children come to know the world and themselves as co-constituted with/in it as literacy learners. Paying close attention to how we 'see' children in the literacy classroom as they intra-act with diverse materials, objects, spaces and affects that assume *performative* roles becomes imperative. This re/focus engages pedagogical shifts from learning as a product to the "learning *event* that is taking place in between the child, the material in the space and the event of learning" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 35).

-Scratch-

I am coming to understand ways in which words can be felt in an embodied sense, pedagogically and otherwise and expressed to ignite emotions in the reader. Their capacity to move us. To stir something inside. I am presently thinking about this in terms of the ways our words can invite literal movements in children in their bodies and hearts or conversely command a stillness, a rigidity that I am arguing is experienced when literacy activities are about mere recall of disconnected facts. The same can be said throughout the process of research, especially when one strives to 'discover' knowledge detached from themselves through traditional step by step linear modes. I spent so much time in this way...experiencing disembodied feelings of detachment as a researcher. These feelings are perpetuated in educational institutions where we learn very rapidly that to author your ideas you must set aside any deeply felt expressions of experience.

Rethinking learning as emergent can broaden our thinking to recognise that humans never act in isolation, but rather in concert with changing networks of people, objects, histories and institutions (Nichols & Campano, 2017). Questioning the taken for granted conceptions about what counts as literacy for children and examining how materials as active agents produce discourses and realities (Lin & Li, 2021) has the potential to encourage us to rethink social inequalities in children's literacy learning (Hackett et al.,

2020). Literacy imagined as producing new and different relationalities and emerging with/in pedagogical encounters can open us to be comfortable with "unpredictable connections...that [do not] presuppose the transmission of the same but the creation of difference" (Semetsky, 2008, p. viii). With/in these open learning encounters, children learn to "perceive the world rather than merely viewing it, memorising it, in a passive state of spectatorship" (Helmsing, 2016, p. 137). Pedagogical possibilities are opened up to diverse lines of flight that emerge. These offer more expansive ways to reimagine classroom life and what might unfold in "the ordinary everyday as emergent forms" (Stewart, 2012, p. 519). In these emergences we can reconceptualise literacy learning that recognises the 'in-between' moments; the spaces which are fleeting, often fragile, yet have the potential to direct us to the 'something elses' of literacy classroom life. The disparate entities, feelings, forces and movements that assemble and circulate in infinite configurations as we live in/through our teaching and learning lives.

Paying attention to these affectively charged moments and embodied forms of meaning making means turning away from humanist quests for certainty; to explain, define or represent children's learning as 'fixed' by external standards. In contrast, MacLure (2016) argues that in observing the vast experiences that emerge in classroom life, many often defy translations into significations. She argues that we need to "embrace the a-signifying, affective elements that are at play in becoming- child: these haunt qualitative "data" but are still often dismissed as "junk" material that distracts from truth, meaning, or authenticity" (p. 174). What might this mean for imagining alternative ways to teach and assess literacy? It requires we challenge the conventionally collected (mostly quantified) literacy data that represent little more than simplified acts of recall. Assessment practices that create "close, striated space of intense overcodings" (Grosz, 1995, p. 126). It demands we become open to seeing our children and their learning in new and unexpected ways. To cultivate opportunities for pedagogies of possibilities that position children as capable, as imaginative and robust theorists as they navigate their schooling lives. To pursue more expanded ways we envision our children and literacy pedagogies otherwise, it is vital we "shift the focus from *questions of correspondence* between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions" (Barad, 2003, p. 802). To achieve this, we require ethically driven, complex, entangled imaginings that open up how we theorise our literacy teaching and learning worlds.

In agential realism, "to create knowledge is to make specific worldly configurations – not just making up random facts but in the sense of materially engaging as part of the world and giving it specific from" (Barad, 2007, p. 91). Inviting more expanded and creative ways in which we can 'engage as part of the world, to give it specific form' draws attention to the need to be mindful of the entanglements of children and the role of everyday literacy materials, bodies, texts, paper and pencils (Zapata et al., 2018). Of significance, is how these emerge and greatly *affect* literacy learning. As discussed throughout this thesis, our classrooms are imbued with a host of relations that assemble in our daily lives. It is with/in these entanglements that affectively charged atmospheres emerge - where bodies can affect and be affected. Being attuned to what is produced in these relations compel us to work towards equity. To be constantly aware of the ways in which the 'worldly configurations' created in our classrooms significantly impact on children's participation and access to rich literacy learning. This requires we practice an unwavering vigilance, a mindfulness of the shifting, moving intensities that "make thoughts thinkable, practices performable and worlds workable" (Spector et al., 2019, p. 186) in order for all children to thrive.

(In) Conclusions

Dear Reader,

So it is now time to offer you some final thoughts. Perhaps these are (in)conclusions as our work is rarely ever 'finished.' Writing against the stark, clinical neoliberal spectres aligned to agendas only concerned with standardisation, individualisation and remediation required that I learned new ways to research and write. Being immersed in a new world of theoretical ideas and concepts has enabled me to think deeply about the persistence of inequalities that ravage many children's early literacy learning lives. To write against ways in which teachers are expected to perform institutional demands that reduce forms of literacy learning, and erase the possibilities for alternatives.

My research has offered diverse textual representations of literacy classroom life to speak back to the persistence of inequalities that are haunted by neoliberal demands. Writing of the learning lives of Grace and the children, throughout this thesis entangled with

autoethnographic methods and postfoundational concepts has taken me to unimagined places and ideas. From critical locations to the world of 'more than human' perspectives that became entangled with theories of affect, have enabled me to challenge the injustice of persistent practices such as ability grouping for children who are deemed not to 'make the cut.'

In writing and researching to examine these complexities, I have sought to contest these by using theories to assist me to generate alternative ways to think about and enact more socially just literacy pedagogical possibilities. I have pursued less examined ideas and concepts from the world of postfoundational scholarship throughout my research in order to address" the ontological oversights that are seldom documented" (MacDonald et al., 2020, p. 161). These ideas are complex – they elude simplistically being translated into 'practical' strategies to implement unproblematically. My intention throughout this thesis was to provoke thought through my contestations. To think differently – to use theories and concepts to experiment with ideas and possibilities. To reimagine children's literacy learning worlds as enmeshed in a host of relations and consider what can be made possible when we expand the ways in which we see our classroom worlds. In researching the outwardly 'ordered' everyday literacy classroom, were persistent concerns with how to bring into view the heterogeneous elements that assemble and can help us to conceptualise more complex understandings of classroom life. That could realise something (else) can happen – (must happen) that eludes immediate 'capture' but can be nonetheless felt intensely. Intensities that can inspire us to take different directions that enliven our pedagogical and research lives.

Throughout this thesis, I engaged in examining the use of concepts and theories that enabled me to 're-read' the neoliberally configured literacy classroom to understand our teaching practices in new ways. I aimed to keep the power of personal, intimate forms of research-writing alive and entangle postfoundational approaches that counter the neoliberal world of big data that confines every desire to an overcoded structure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I sought to emphasise how our learning lives are enmeshed in networked relations beyond our limited humanist gaze. These significantly impact on how we become 'affected' leading to an understanding that:

> *A classroom is a space animated not only by orderly lines of curriculum and learning, but also by the chaotic movement and production of affect. Affect disrupts and mutates the processes of learning; deterritorialising the classroom and giving it an intensive relation to the outside. Thinking the classroom through affect draws attention to the politics of learning; an often-imperceptible politics which slips between and beneath what is said and what is 'known'. Affect opens up the possibility for the production of new forms of teaching; new kinds of pedagogy which affirm the experimental lines that traverse the classroom (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 10).*

As I reflect on my experiences with Grace and the children throughout my research, what emerges as significant, are the ways in which we (re)story our classroom worlds and with/in the process, what we pay attention to. As stated above, these matters require an attunement to an 'often imperceptible politics' that eludes our hurried everyday lives. It is crucial therefore that teachers embody a critical praxis of pausing (Tuck, 2016) from which we can theorise alternative understandings and pedagogies that redress the ways in which many of the children in our classrooms become the 'missing people' of humanism that Braidotti (2019) writes about. In making these matters of justice visible, we are compelled to be open to see our classroom worlds anew and importantly continue to agitate for ways to create "difference, the unknown and unrecognizable" (St. Pierre, 2021b, p. 480). This is a far cry from the dogmatic images of thought (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that repeatedly frame and limit our literacy teaching and learning lives.

Throughout my thesis I have argued that feeling, writing and reimagining the political aspects of our daily teaching worlds thus becomes about an attunement to the material ↔ discursive possibilities for creating more equitable classroom cultures (Hendry, 2020). I have sought to complicate the all too pervasive "human-centered deficit perspectives" (Cirell & Sweet, 2020, p. 1184) through analysis and discussion areas and positioned these as crucial to more socially just possibilities. Following Snaza (2022), I have argued that we need to rethink our classroom worlds by becoming politically attuned in ways to imagine "how nonhuman participation in literacy matters....[that in...] becoming more sensitive to that participation, we can begin to feel differently, and this feeling can differentially orient us to ourselves and all the others with whom we are entangled"(p. 38). I have sought to reimagine our literacy classroom worlds as being entangled in a

diverse array of shifting assemblages each day. As such, I have argued that we are inseparable from our critical, material, social and affective engagements with/in our more than human worlds and significantly highlighted how these greatly affect us. When conceptualised this way, I have come to understand how imperative it is that we become attuned to what is produced in our everyday literacy practices and to be open to notice profound moments that are often missed.

We need to imagine otherwise. To cultivate the conditions for all children to feel 'vital' in their everyday learning lives. To be open to understanding how children (and all of us) become profoundly affected by the innumerable human, non-human and more than human assemblages of daily classroom life that emerge in dynamic pedagogical relations. It is imperative we become ethically compelled to notice what is produced through our entangled relations and significantly imagine how these can incite possibilities for change.

For more socially just literacy pedagogies.

For Grace.

Sincerely,

Jenny

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