

**OWL WOOL:
A NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE OF TEXTILE LITERACY IN AN
EARLY YEARS CLASSROOM**

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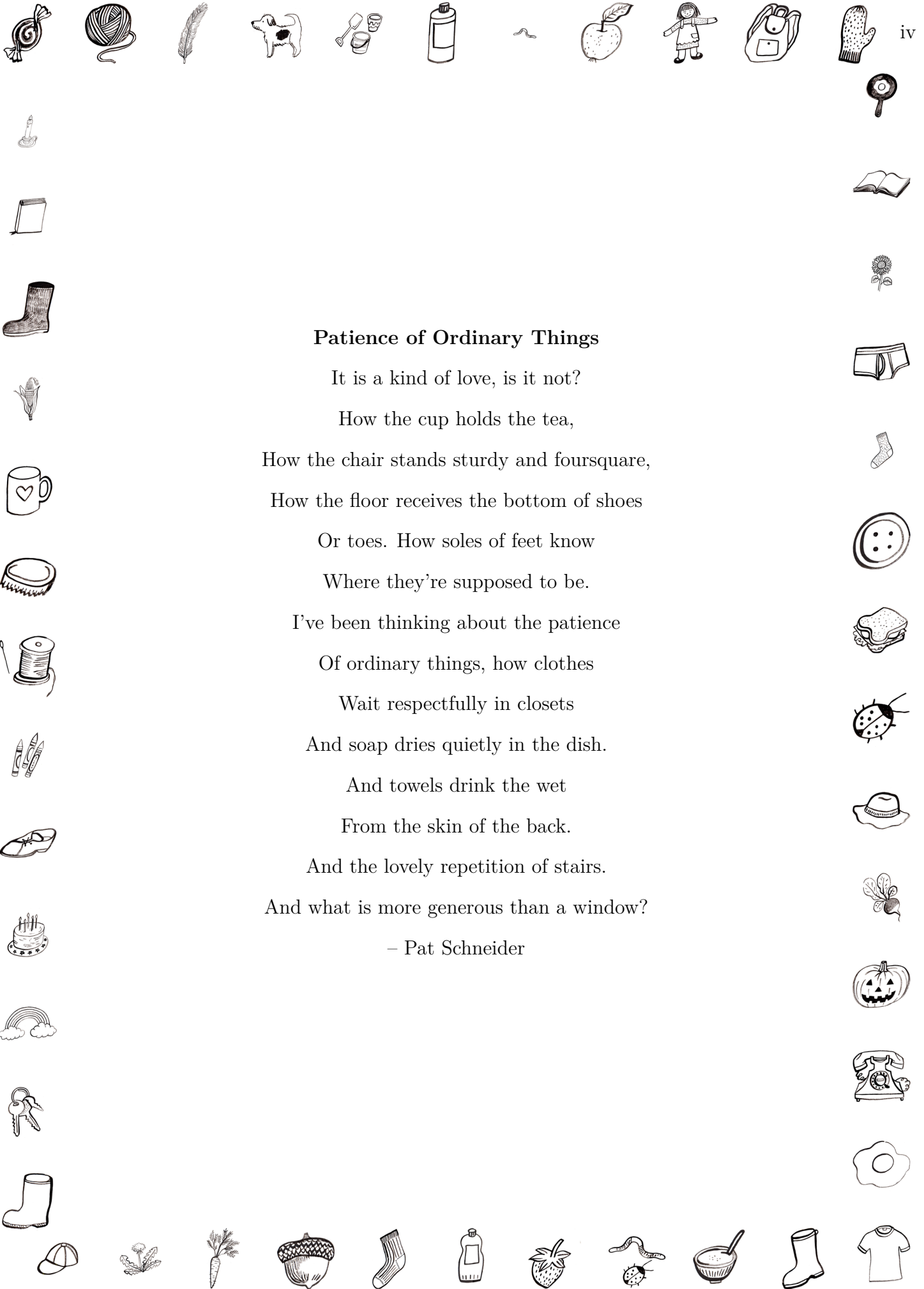
Owl Wool



Abstract

With few exceptions, children do not attend school naked. Clothing, as a cultural universal, is often invisible under the gaze of mundanity (e.g. we wear clothing every day). But young children are well suited to paying close attention because, for them, the gaze of mundanity does not yet exist. In order to more clearly see the relationship between preschool aged children and their textiles, this sociomaterial narrative centers on one coastal Canadian preschool's three-month immersion into textile literacy. This work used listening-as-method in order to explore the multi-stranded stories that arose when preschool students interacted with textile themed provocations in their classroom. Using student stories and placing them under a metaphorical magnifying glass, the work identifies themes and threads between the children's stories (verbal and non-verbal) and their material, textile, world. These themes and threads ultimately make up an eight-theme web that helps define the research assemblage which highlights children's relational entanglements, and considers how we might reimagine children's entanglement with the non-human world.





Patience of Ordinary Things

It is a kind of love, is it not?
 How the cup holds the tea,
 How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
 How the floor receives the bottom of shoes
 Or toes. How soles of feet know
 Where they're supposed to be.
 I've been thinking about the patience
 Of ordinary things, how clothes
 Wait respectfully in closets
 And soap dries quietly in the dish.
 And towels drink the wet
 From the skin of the back.
 And the lovely repetition of stairs.
 And what is more generous than a window?

– Pat Schneider



v



For my father who builds houses and my mother who opens each door





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To the children and teachers at the Gather Round preschool who took a chance and let a young researcher in. Your generosity of spirit humbles me.



To my brother who can be counted on for a well-timed joke. Thank goodness I have you.



Thank you to Robin Clugston for the breathtaking illustrations you created for this work (all rights reserved). You are a treasure.



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Prologue



When I first proposed this thesis project, I had a particular research question in mind. I wanted to ask: “*What themes emerge in young children’s stories of their textiles as their classroom experience shifts to include invitations to textile literacy?*”



This original question still has merit and was answered (to the extent any question is ever “answered”), and in the following chapters you will find the many themes of textile literacy that emerged in the Gather Round preschool classroom. But, as this project unfolded around me, the question first posed of the research seemed less and less necessary. It seemed to me that posing a singular question, or even a set of questions, of this experience was an attempt to impose order on what was really an energetic experience with a metaphorical life of its own.



The children were not interested in my question. They were engaged with their own world, work and worries. The children did not need me or my question.



The textiles were not interested in my question. The textiles were engaged with the world and their own thing-ness. They certainly did not need me or my question.



Everything I read about textiles and sustainability seemed to feature authors, researchers, teachers, students and artists who were *doing* something. They were working for change or they were working to make. I could see value in this, but it was not for me. How could I work alongside those voices yet add something quiet? What if, I thought, this was a project that refused to “do” and “answer”? What if instead of textile-activity, I focused on textile-listening? The children could lead the work in any direction it would go and I would listen. I still offered invitations to engage with textiles, termed provocations (see Chapter 3), but I did not ask anything of these engagements. I had envisioned a project that deeply considered the “sensory, storied entanglement [of children] within the interrelational agency of other animals, plants, insects, and the rest of the world” (Ritchie, 2014, p. 250) and to do this well I decided that I needed to listen. Perhaps this is a new version of active listening; for this project





it meant that listening *was* the activity. I needed to let go of my desire to impose order and to seek answers. What follows then is a project that meanders alongside the textile literacy experiences the children at Gather Round offered me. I gave them the deepest attention I am able to offer anyone or thing. For me this offered the project as a whole, and the child participants in particular, the deepest respect.

At the close of this project, I offer a further series of questions as a gift to readers of this work. I close with questions as an invitation for further listening. You can be sure, dear reader, that I am asking these questions of myself. I am still listening.





1 Introduction



I know why I am here. This space, full of children, is one I have often visited. Establishing this meaningful research relationship with a school, one where all parties benefit and grow, has taken me over three years. When I decided to move to this area five years ago, I reached out to a local early educator training program in hopes of becoming involved somehow. Having spent the majority of my twenties teaching alongside expert preschool teachers, and learning from expert preschool children, I missed that presence and wanted a way back in. As a graduate student I knew I needed a *different* way in, one the focused on a mutually respectful research relationship. What I did not know is what that would end up entailing. This preschool space and I can now say “we go way back”. We reach back into substitute teaching (there’s always someone out sick, I help when I can). We reach back into professional development workshops (we have taught each other often). We reach back into many productive, yet challenging, research (Dunnington & Magnet, 2020a, 2020b; Tremblay-Dion & Magnet, 2018). We send each other holiday cards. I stop by with donuts or a new plant for the garden. Indeed, we can reach back into our long-standing relationship, while we also reach forward into this and future projects.

Each time I enter, the purpose of the day reveals itself to me. There is always a general plan, but the needs of young children inevitably shift things. I support the teachers, finish a report, listen to the children play or intercept a heated disagreement about paint. But today it is different. I know why I am here.

In 2018 I had dreamed up a doctoral thesis about children’s narratives of textiles; tentatively I termed this *textile literacy*. Now I was in the middle of the project, walking into the Gather Round Childcare Centre each day with this purpose in mind. Some days I changed a pair of wet pants, wiped a runny nose or found a lost block. A necessary side-gig. If you’re going to work with early childhood educators you have to be helpful. The job of the early childhood educator requires too much immediacy and





mundanity to be carrying dead-weight researchers around. Every day I saw teachers forgoing their own needs in order to care for those of a child. Potty training is easily derailed. A fight over the favorite toy train escalates like wildfire. It was necessary to be useful and complete research at the same time.

On this day I am here to put loose wool roving into a large sensory-table bin and let the children interact with it (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2016). I pull the wool out of my bag upon entering the room and children already crowd around my legs. They chatter to each other and ask to hold some of “that stuff” as I maneuver and fill the empty table (I’ll never have said it enough: *good preschool teachers are magic*). I take a child-sized wooden chair and sit down as I spill the wool, brightly colored mixed with undyed, into the bin. The questions and hands come swirling around, engulfing me in a child web of word, motion and body.

This particular day of research and this particular planned provocation (see p. 38) was no more difficult or messy than any other. But a particular student response to this provocation ended up shaping this project. When the children first reached in to experience the wool, a young girl named Una¹ asked me what “this stuff” was. I responded simply:

“Wool”, I said.

Una nodded knowingly. “Wool from owls,” she said.

Wool from owls.

I was captivated.

As adults many of us know that wool comes from sheep and we generally have some visual context for those sheep, covered in their woolly coats, being shorn and released back into the field. True, most of us have drifted from this reality in our modern lives. Very few North Americans keep or shear our own flock (Hahn, 2020). Yet, we have picked up an image, be it from a book, video or class trip to a farm. We generally have

¹All names that appear in this document, excepting my own, are pseudonyms chosen to protect the privacy of each participant.





context for the word “wool”.



But this child had somehow subverted that context. She must have held some loose notion connecting wool to animals. It may be that the material reminded her of animal fur or she had heard once that wool came from farms. She did not choose to share her connections with me in this way. Yet the connection between wool and owl goes beyond knowledge of animal origin. The words share every letter. Very few words can be made using only w, o and l. Somehow this child chose the only animal named using all the same letters as the material *wool*. If said aloud “wool” and “owl” share the sound /w l/. The word owl silently contains wool and is pronounced ow/wool. These connections Una drew continue past my own imagination, I’m sure. With children they always do.



The classroom I am in, sitting near this table of “owl wool”, is filled with other objects. No matter how tidy or freshly washed the early childhood classroom, there are always things everywhere. There are toys in use: small cars in hands, cardboard tubes complexly stacked, an old velvet purse being toted around and books with broken spines lovingly spread open. There are toys awaiting play: baby dolls sitting in their crib, scarves hanging on a peg, wooden apples in a basket and a glass jar filled with marbles. Then there are abandoned items lingering on the floor: beads, sequins, smears of pasta sauce, dry oats and a few blocks. Finally, there are items awaiting practical use, action-objects such as washed rags, nap mats, the broom and the dust-pan. “Sociomaterial studies try to reveal the minute dynamics and connections that are continuously enacting the taken-for-granted in educational events: the clothing, timetables, passwords, pencils, windows, stories, plans, buzzers, bubblegum, desks, electricity and lights – not as separate objects, but as continually combining with (and dissolving away from) other assemblages” (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011, p. vii). The children are literally surrounded and immersed in things. Ignoring these things in the classroom, or passing them off simply as stuff and not involved in learning, seems neglectful at best.





I am reminded of a project by Seattle based photographer Melissa Kaseman entitled *Preschool Pocket Treasures* (2018). When her young son came home with a red thumb tack in his pocket, Kaseman photographed it to share with her husband. From this humble beginning Kaseman checked her son’s pockets each day, photographing the tiny collections he continued to bring home. Crayon bits, beads, pieces of string, a stone, a Lego®, a used sticker and a broken branch... the photographs of his collections filled a book. Clearly the objects her son was choosing and keeping were not random. “The project was born out of a desire to capture this chapter of his boyhood” states Kaseman (p. 39, 2018). Yet I wonder if there is not another message hidden in Kaseman’s work: that the things we find in preschool pockets shouldn’t be ignored. It is worth paying attention to the items that fill her child’s, and every child’s, days. While we may not be able to say definitely what a child thought or felt about the objects they interacted with, or in the case of Kaseman’s son actually collected, we can certainly honor these items in their stories (Weldemariam and Wals, 2020). We can choose not to ignore the value of things.

Returning to the sensory table I linger over the wool before me. The things that fill this table are often put forth to extend or deepen young children’s learning. The teachers might choose to put in colored water and items that float or sink. They may fill it with sand and empty containers of different sizes. These provocations are designed by the teachers to help the children think through *something*, yet the teacher is not sure what the children will take away, she² only imagines what they might take away (Gray, 2013; Kelly & Camilli, 2007). The wool is no exception. Certainly, I had hoped that children would be curious about the material, ask me questions and attempt to manipulate it in different ways (twist, pull, wad or squeeze). Yet I have no way to guarantee or, more importantly, force this learning to occur. The learning that occurs at the sensory table belongs to the children, not me. It is for them to ponder, query

²For the purposes of this paper the teacher is expressed in the feminine (she/her/hers) as every teacher at the Gather Round Centre used these pronouns. Note that in Canada about 1% of all Early Childcare Educators are men (*Associate of Early Childhood Educators of Canada*, 2019).





and remember.



And here was proof that the learning belonged to the children and that the objects were worth honoring. A three-year-old girl was telling me that owl's produced wool: "Owl wool". Una must have liked the way it felt to say this, repeating it over and over while playing with the wool and raising it high and balling it up between her hands before letting it fall back into the bin. The wool she was touching, the *object* wool, was participating in her learning and knowing. She was not simply acting on the wool, it was acting on her and I was acting as witness to this interaction, to this becoming between seemingly unrelated systems (child/owl/wool). "[...] reflecting upon how we compose and circulate our stories by which we make sense of the situations we find ourselves in, [is] how we 'join the dots'" (Bennet, 2016, p.72). What dots needed to be connected to better understand and acknowledge Una I wondered? Her connections were not those I had anticipated. Furthermore, in the strict sense, she was incorrect: wool does not come from owls.



Many times, while working at Gather Round, I was left baffled by the children and unsure where to go next. I tried to remain present and open at all times, ready to record and accept their responses. Some days I failed. It was difficult never to offer a "correct" response or query an interpretation that may have been better left alone. "Part of the narrative inquirer's doubts come from [the] understanding that they need to write about people, places, and things as *becoming* rather than *being*" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). That is, as the narrative inquirer looks to capture some facet or essence of the research experience, the struggle is to provide a movement-ed account, one filled with the life of the participants, places and things. How could I capture such a complex experience as my time at Gather Round, a place so forcefully engaged in *becoming*? For certainly the young child, who grows and changes as a rate that simply dissolves in adulthood, is the essence of becoming.

The children at Gather Round are "people living storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). The connection drawn between owl and wool





highlights this beautifully. For Una, an origin story lives within her about the nature of this material ‘wool’. It is not my job as a researcher to capture this story, that would highlight her inner text as being (e.g. ‘one thing’). It is my job to capture this story as a moment of becoming (e.g. multi-faceted and alive). Clandinin and Connelly speak often of the “multiple plot lines” each character (participant, researcher, reader) are living (p. 147). A sociomaterial narrative must add the material to the plot line, paying attention to the nonhuman world and its intersections: “this requires us to think relationally with other beings/matter and to draw out the confederacy of objects, bodies and materialities” (Taylor & Hughes, 2016, p.2). For this young girl the plot line of herself (participant/self), an owl (non-human yet alive and agentic) and wool (non-human and dead) form a minute intersection and I must record and wonder about this “confederacy”.

As the following pages reveal, the textile literacy I experienced in Gather Round’s senior preschool classroom was layered and complex. The themes that emerged from this work offer points of insight and moments of the story that I engaged with. They are in no way the whole story. The story of this experience, both for myself and each child, changed every day. These are stories that unfold and live divided between what is past, what is current and what will come. There are the stories told within my field notes, the stories told by the children to themselves, the stories whispered between teachers in the staff room, the stories the children went home to tell their guardians, the stories I told myself about the children... the facets are seemingly endless. This work is presented with this in mind.

1.1 Entanglement and Structure

Stories are a knit sweater. Try to observe an isolated stitch on a knit sweater. It is nearly impossible. Because knitting is defined as the fabric or garment made through a series of interlocked loops of yarn, the edges of one stitch necessarily blend into the next. You will find there is *no such thing* as a single stitch (noun). The singular stitch





7



Figure 1

View as you enter the senior preschool classroom at Gather Round.





does exist as a verb, to “take *one* stitch”, however, if we cut one imagined stitch within a whole sweater it comes undone. There is no clear ‘one’ stitch, yet, there is a place where each singular stitch exists momentarily tied to another. If this connection is broken, the stitches unravel. We no longer have stitches in the plural and we no longer have a sweater in the singular (Morawski & Palulis, 2009).



Productions of research are sweaters. There are singular *acts* of research (verb) yet it is difficult to view research as a singular noun. Singular productions of research exist, but these are collections of any author(s) work and of previous authors who have informed that work. If we tug too hard and break a research ‘stitch’ we envision the ‘production of research’ unraveling before us. We are singular stitchers, yet we require action of the group to make any sweater.



But the processes of research, the doing, that is knitting itself. A changing work requiring both creativity and creation. As we do research, we can unravel and start knitting sections again. You might even knit an entire sweater (e.g. “do” an entire research project), only to look at the production and tear it back to reknit a different sweater. Researching is knitting: we must create and move with both.

Just as stories and research unravel if we separate them from plurality, from *becoming*, so too does this work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The metaphor of the knit sweater physically structures this work. Most knitters can explain to you the myriad ways to knit a sweater. You can knit from the bottom of the garment, toward the neck. You can begin with the neck hole and knit downward toward the waist. You can knit the front, back and sleeves separately then sew them together. You might even, though it is rare, start from the cuff of one sleeve and knit across the sweater, ending with the second cuff. There are many ways to enter and exit a knit sweater.

Figure 2, below, draws from this metaphor by highlighting chapters in this work and points in which the reader may enter or exit. Though the limitations of text and paper require a degree of linearity, no chapter is intended to be hierarchical compared





to another. Indeed, you may choose to enter this text at any given point and move to another non-subsequent chapter after. The chapters have been written and designed with this in mind and should largely make sense read in any order. This work is a knit sweater too.

Situated within sociomaterial epistemologies this narrative study of one Canadian preschool’s three-month immersion into, what I have termed, *textile literacy* is necessarily multi-faceted (Larson, 1993). It is a written conversation. This project also borrows from early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS) to delve into how children experienced the story of textiles within their own experiences (Siraj-Blatchford, Smith, & Samuelsson, 2010). To better navigate this written conversation the work is structured into the following, non-hierarchical chapters.

Inspired by Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards who assert that materials are neither subordinate nor separate from social interaction, I have chosen to dis/order this paper (as in Figure 2) without linear hierarchy. For sociomaterial epistemologies “the central premise is that the social and the material are entangled and together constitute everyday life. That is, knowing and learning, identities, activities, and environments are understood to be sociomaterial enactments” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, p. 372). To better depict this understanding of entanglement, the nonlinearity of Figure 2 helps us as English language readers who habitually read from left to right, first page to last and one line at a time. While this thesis cannot circumvent these conventions as they are useful and, to some degree, necessary for meaning making, it can occasionally challenge these conventions by writing and reading this work in different orders. I can create figures that encourage the reader to engage with the content more spherically, moving in and out of the text at different points. I can create moments of engagement with an otherwise flat document that elevates the materiality of text: this thesis is a *thing*. You are interacting with it and it is interacting with you.

The border illustrations also serve to ground the writing visually (Clugston, 2021). The colored item on each page shows the reader, by using an object, which chapter of





Figure 2

Entanglement as visualization for structure



Appendices →



Conclusions

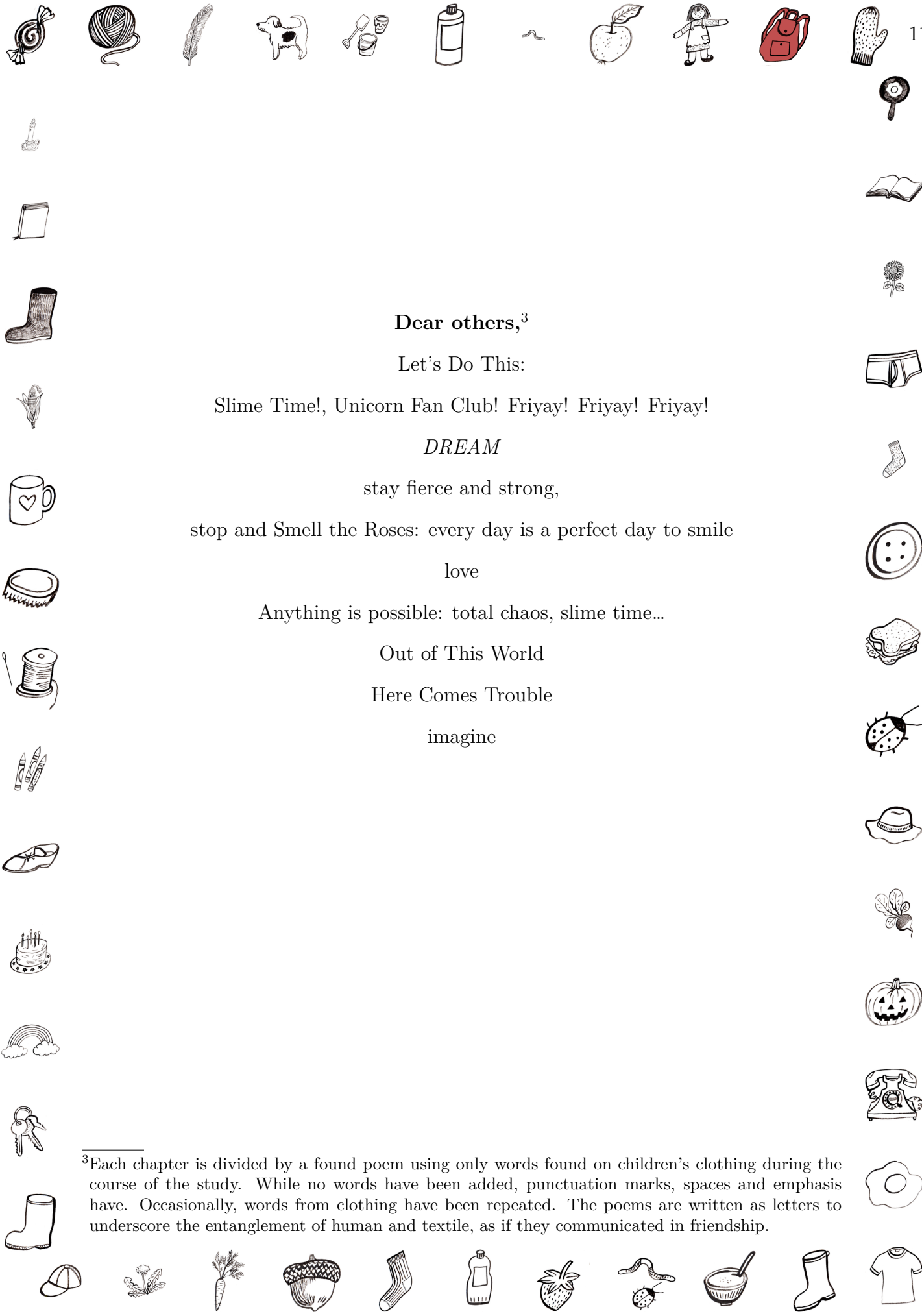
This Narrative Study

The Research Assemblage

Study Design

Relevant Literature

the thesis they are “in”. The other surrounding items, haloing the page like the classroom detritus of Gather Round preschool, might draw the reader into further thoughts of materiality or even engage a reader to color them in! This type of interaction with my thesis is encouraged. It would bring me great joy to hear that the margins were colored in, the pages rearranged and the books lists (see Appendix C) tacked to the refrigerator with highlighted titles displayed. This is intended to be a messy narrative study in more ways than one. I hope you find it interactive. To quote Taylor and Hughes who conclude their introduction to *Posthuman Research Practices in Education* with an invitation “Do let [me] know” (2016, p. 4).



Dear others,³

Let's Do This:

Slime Time!, Unicorn Fan Club! Friyay! Friyay! Friyay!

DREAM

stay fierce and strong,

stop and Smell the Roses: every day is a perfect day to smile

love

Anything is possible: total chaos, slime time...

Out of This World

Here Comes Trouble

imagine

³Each chapter is divided by a found poem using only words found on children's clothing during the course of the study. While no words have been added, punctuation marks, spaces and emphasis have. Occasionally, words from clothing have been repeated. The poems are written as letters to underscore the entanglement of human and textile, as if they communicated in friendship.



2 (Boot) Relevant Literature

2.1 Textiles

Children do not go to school naked. Though a handful of examples to the contrary may exist, generally children who enter classrooms wear some form of clothing each time. When they arrive at their classrooms the teachers are clothed. The clothing we all wear crosses lines of culture, personal taste, political views, religious affiliations, socioeconomic status, history, family constellation and identity. In every classroom, on any day, in any situation, we have authentic examples of textile to draw from. No classroom can claim they are without material.

A storied example: A young early childhood educator cheerfully introduces himself by telling 15 preschoolers “You’re wearing some *cool* shirts. (pointing) You have a shark one!” The children are so excited they jump up to tell him about their shirt. The young teacher is so startled he reacts by forcefully urging them to ‘please sit down’. He concludes somewhat lamely... “Yeah... you’re all wearing shirts.”

That teacher was completely stricken by the preschooler’s passionate response. I was not. At the heart of his statement: *you’re all wearing shirts* was an understanding that clothing is one of *the* universal classroom experiences and thus influences the classroom and students. I can only imagine that the young children, perhaps often asked to answer questions less relevant to their immediate interests, were thrilled at the chance to tell this teacher something both present and personal.

2.1.1 Textiles in the Classroom

Textiles are defined as all forms of cloth, which does encompass clothing, yet also includes textiles that make utilitarian objects such as carpets, curtains, chair coverings, medical gauze and hazard masks (Weibel, 1952). Though many textiles today are, in part or entirety, made with synthetic polymers, textile fabrication still requires the same ancient methods of knitting or weaving that it always has (Burgess & White,





2019; Grass, 1955). Most textiles we interact with fall within the category of ‘crafted’ items even if they were made on machines in distant countries. Though all categories of textiles might have been relevant to this project, I generally chose to focus on textiles as clothing. Because clothing is considered a cultural universal it is the most readily available textile in any classroom.



Textile fabrication moved from away from home production during the industrial era. This move has had a continuing impact on both education and the environment. During the late 1800’s fiber art techniques, taught largely at home, remained the purview of a young girls’ education (Gordon, 2007). By the 1940’s textile arts merged with school lessons by way of the home economics courses designed to teach basic sewing skills for homemaking (Gordon, 2007). The 1950s saw a gradual fading of textiles-based curriculum. Today they remain largely invisible save for supplementary art and craft style activities (Brophy & Alleman, 2009, 1999). Because the fast-fashion industry is the second largest global polluter, what children learn about textiles in schools matters (Conca, 2015).

John Dewey first identified the need for textiles to feature within our classrooms over 100 years ago. He claimed that the utility of textiles imbued every aspect of history and culture, and that through this lens (of sewing and weaving), the work of humankind was recapitulated (1899). Since then, the use of textile-imbued curriculum has been present predominantly in home-economy lessons, supplementary art activities and extensions of pre-existing lesson plans (Black & Erickson, 2001; Gordon, 2007; Graham, 2007; Kazuyo, 2009). Students know little about textile production, functions and universalities (Hofverberg & Maivorsdotter, 2018; Brophy & Alleman, 2009, 2002).

2.1.2 Invisible and Mundane



I wish to turn our focused attention onto clothing itself. As stated above, children enter classrooms clothed. Clothing might reflect climate, status, or interest and in this way clothing marks us. Often, we make assumptions regarding a person’s hygiene,





or socioeconomic status, based on our perception of their clothing's cleanliness and quality. We might assume a student enjoys hockey, or baseball, based on the frequency and type of sportswear they choose. My interest is not in challenging stereotypes or our perceptions of others, though this may be a valid project. For this project, I wish only to highlight the ways in which we use our clothing to talk to one-another. I would argue that we don't listen completely to what our clothing is figuratively saying.

In dwelling on the nature of clothing it is helpful to discuss the distinctions between art and craft as follows: "[...] craft works must be functional, whereas fine art need not, even should not, have any practical use" (Boden, 2000, p. 289). Artistic examples of high fashion aside, clothing fits this definition of craft quite well. Made for everyday use, clothing is generally designed to provide modesty or protection; "The crafts are grounded in, and deliberately evoke, enactive psychological mechanisms. Not only are their artefacts typically functional, but many of their functions concern basic aspects of life and domesticity: eating, drinking, cooking, mating, grooming, and keeping warm" (p. 297). This rationale does much to deepen our understanding as to why clothing remains clearly visible, yet overwhelmingly overlooked. Boden highlights that the function of our clothing is supposed to be subtle: we are not intended to notice functional items most of the time.

Clothing, used every day, is necessarily mundane. Imagine life if, all day long, you were consciously aware of what you wore? The closest we can imagine is often a time we wore something uncomfortable all day. How often do we consider our silverware or our flooring? These items become invisible under the everyday gaze of their users. It is easy to ignore clothing because it is, in a sense, designed to be ignorable. Recent publications that begin to address the connection between textile and story are often aimed at the role of clothing in our lives. Thus, books such as Emily Spivack's *Worn Stories* and *Worn in New York*, or the work of Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton who collected stories into the book *Women in Clothes*, all focus on how clothing functions as story for the wearer (2014, 2017; 2014). These publications ask *what role did an*





item of clothing play in your life? Such memoir style collections all harken to the notion that clothing tells a story for the wearer.



Children’s books on the other hand, tend to focus on the “how” of clothing. Works such as *Where Did My Clothes Come From?* by Chris Butterworth, *Charlie Needs a Cloak* by Tomie DePaola or *Pelle’s New Suit* by Elsa Beskow, all underscore the making and manufacturing of clothing (2015; 1973; 1912). These books highlight a prolonged history on directing stories at children that aim to instruct through narrative. Books that underscore the story of the clothing for the child are far rarer (See Appendix C).



2.2 Sustainability



A resident of any western country throws away about 70 pounds of textiles a year accounting for an average of 5% of our landfill space (Council for Textile Recycling, 2022; Conca, 2015). Children are textile consumers even though they do not (typically) purchase textiles themselves, guardians do so on their behalf. Their involvement in changing how textiles are produced, used and disposed of is necessary. They are current and future textile consumers. Although some literature points to both the tenets of sustainability education and the principles of consumption and production, a thorough review of relevant literature produces no reference to textiles specifically (Madden & Liang, 2017; Davis & Elliot, 2014; McNichol, Davis, & O’Brien, 2011). If we connect the pressure put on our environment by textile consumption and production, with the need for broad sustainability education endeavors, we can preliminarily infer that sustainability education would do well to include the principles of responsible textile use.



2.2.1 Education for Sustainability (EfS)

Education for sustainability is a developing field of research. “The concept of sustainability [itself] is a complex and contestable term with multiple meanings and interpretations” (Green, 2017, p. 151). EfS promotes “[...] development that meets the needs





of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, cited in Hedefalk, Almqvist, & Östman, 2015, p. 975). Teachers who employ principles of EfS in their own classrooms define it as a three-fold process in which students learn about the environment, change their behaviors based on this learning and continue to use their critical thinking skills regarding the environment as they move forward (Green, 2017; Hedefalk et al., 2015). This cyclical education equips children who will have to cope with, manage and enact ecological change within their lifetimes (Green, 2017; Hedefalk et al., 2015).

“Embedded in the notion of sustainability lies a striving for an environmentally sustainable world and respect and care for the non-human world” (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013, p. 25). Sustainability education takes this call seriously by embedding the praxis of sustainability *within* curriculum and educational goals. While EfS implementation is often described as patchy and, as far as countries and approaches go, “one size does not fit all”, a school striving to implement EfS principles should examine current curricula through the lens of sustainability (Elliott, Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Ji, Wang, & Mackey, 2020, p. 54). A lesson on soil might include a discussion about compost or a fictional tale about a lake might include a water-management discussion (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013).

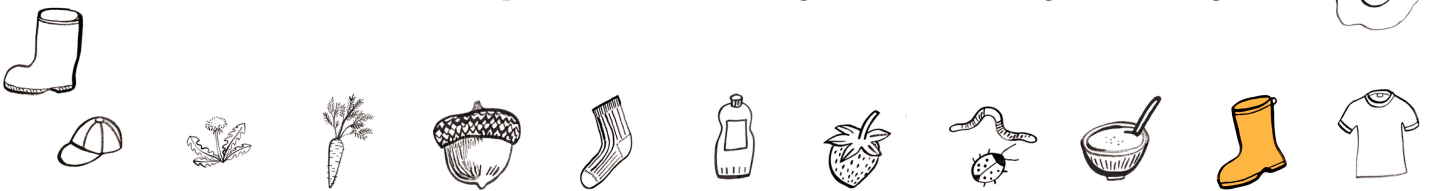
Thus far, few studies have documented what students of EfS are actually learning about sustainability (Hofverberg & Maivorsdotter, 2018; Åberg-Bengtsson, Beach, & Ljung-Djärf, 2017). Though a school may teach sustainability concepts, it remains unclear if children meaningfully enact these concepts in their own lives. One case study asked students to create their own sustainability artefacts using mixed media. Green (2017) asked children “what *story* does your artefact tell about sustainability?” and, from their responses, inferred students’ understandings of sustainability (p. 154). Another study focused on student reading and comprehension of illustrated non-fiction text about compost. The authors suggest that children do not necessarily fill in narrative gaps by using illustrations and, thus, are not necessarily fully engaging with





the compost information as the teachers had hoped (Åberg-Bengtsson et al., 2017). Hofverberg and Maivorsdotter discuss how the process of upcycling textile materials into art did not necessarily lead to transformative sustainability education. They state: “[...] recycling as a remake project is not a self-evident process. Rather [...] it is possible to show how the students learn in their remaking endeavors and, using the concept of *transactants*, illustrate what participates in the remake project” (2018, p. 788). What may be missing from many sustainability lessons then is, precisely, a *transaction*. Without these transactional components, sustainability education fails to connect with a student’s lived experience and leaves them without a relationship to sustainability as they, for example, upcycle jeans into artwork.

“You will read in the following pages that the earth is in trouble and we are the problem. But that can also be turned around the other way: the earth is in trouble and we are the solution” (p. vii, 2004). Taking a decidedly narrative approach, Van Matre decries the environmental education movement of the 1970’s, claiming that as it preaches the specific instead of the holistic, it ends of separating people from understanding their connection to the earth. It does not include transactions. “We teach people the names of some of the parts of the earth, but fail to convey how it functions as a whole” (p.3, 2004). Here, the names of tree species are of little importance if a student has no relationship and concept for how the tree functions in relation to their own life. The loss of story leads to disconnection. Though EfS might not have a singular vision or implementation, it is nearly always concerned with critical thinking and habit shifting (McNichol, Davis, & O'Brien, 2011). Earth education deepens this work by proposing that students also need connection and story. It asks: “how does life work, what does that mean for you, and how can you begin changing your lifestyle in order to live more lightly on the earth” (p. 26, 2004). Though Van Matre has not spoken or written about EfS in particular, an understanding of earth education does much to deepen our understanding of where EfS might turn its gaze.





2.2.2 Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)



As sustainability initiatives have large implications for our youngest citizens, it is necessary for scholarship to attend not only to the current practices of early childhood education for sustainability, but its future practices as well (Green, 2015). Early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS) holds that the well-being of young children, present and future, requires their active participation (Davis & Elliot, 2014). A review of the past twelve years of EfS literature suggested that less than 5% of research focused particularly on early childhood education and sustainability (Davis, 2009).



[...] teaching and learning (and research) for the very youngest of children that seeks to address increasing alienation from nature and that builds their capabilities as active, engaged young citizens has, until recently, been ‘missing in action’ despite the social, health, economic and educational benefits. The *value* of starting early with education for sustainability is becoming much clearer, even if the practice and research is yet to fully emerge (Davis, 2009, p.228)



This is disappointing, yet consistent with research trends in education, in which early childhood consistently receives the least attention (OECD, 2006).



As researchers we need to expand research within the field of ECEfS as we highlight the important links between sustainability education for the future and the formative experiences of early childhood education. Not only are young children more likely to see themselves in relationship with nature, they also seem more receptive to environmental education and show higher levels of concern and empathy for the environment than their older peers (Madden & Liang, 2017). Our young citizens are not only those who carry the future, they are those primed to care about it. Everyone benefits when our youngest citizens obtain and nurture sustainable skills and relationships with the nonhuman world (Madden & Liang, 2017). For children to critically engage with ecological sustainability they must participate in their own learning as they connect





personally to it.



The Transnational Dialogues was established in 2010 and the group has, over the years, eagerly and persistently continued to explore and share research and knowledge in the field of ECEfS. At the core of the research emanating from this group is a perspective that young children can, and should, be active participants in transformative change with educators and other significant adults in early childhood settings (Johansson, 2020, p. xvi).



Research into the current state of ECEfS has made much of the absence of children’s voices. “Children’s participation and agency are neglected in a structure of ready-made views, activities and working methods already imbedded in the current pedagogical practices” (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013, p.25). This absence of child participation highlights a disjoint between education and the child’s right to participate in affairs that concern both their current and future selves. These issues are raised amidst a growing call for our youngest citizens to be *particularly* implicated in matters effecting their futures and to aid their educators, families and communities in coming up with creative solutions.



One resounding provision of this creative solution is as follows: we must give our students “something to *do*, not something to *learn*” (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016, p. 71). Children need to work with sustainable principles instead of learning about them abstractly. Many schools have opted for open-ended nature classrooms where students experience, observe and interact daily with their local environment (Elliott, Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2020; Kiewra & Veselack, 2016; Wight, Kloos, Maltbie, & Carr, 2016). The local environment students learn from, sometimes termed place-based learning, helps educators as they continue to strive for connection between communities, sustainability and leadership: We “[in the future will] need people who seek adventure and are on the lookout for better ways of doing things; people who have had opportunities to develop and express their creativity, who carry those experiences inside, and who can apply this quality in a wide range of life circumstances” (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016,





p. 70).



While ECEfS does underscore and support the need for children to play outside in natural surroundings (e.g. their local environments), playing outdoors and calling it sustainability education is a concerning (re)emergence that current research anthologies are noticing (Elliott, Årlemalm-Hagsér, Ji, Wang & Mackey, 2020). By focusing on the romanticized binary of children and Nature as self-evident, research and teaching ignores the messy relationship between the human and non-human world as a space of possibility (Taylor, 2013). The work, then, is for “researchers to interrogate nature play programs and unpack this [nature play movement] to inspire transformative pedagogies and alternative worldviews” ((Elliott, Årlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2020, p.xxvii). Drawing from contemporary materialist or post-humanist epistemologies offers this research an exciting way forward. The work of this interrogation has begun, but there is much further to go if we want to offer children the possibilities that go hand-in-hand with moving ECEfS away “from focusing on the agentic child [e.g. child is the only change agent in the child/environment dyad] to recognizing diverse ways of knowing that include: affective learning, embodied learning and learning with others” (Weldemariam and Wals, 2020, p.14).





2.3 Sociomaterialism



“I grew up hoping that objects would connect me to the world” (Turkle, 2011, p.3). As scholar Sherry Turkle explores the everyday objects (shoes, apples and encyclopedias) we think both with and through, she insists that things remain active presences within our lives. Though her book does not utilize specifically sociomaterial terminology, it does align with the work of sociomaterial theorists, such as Bruno Latour. Indeed, her written invitation to trace the evocations of our objects could easily have been termed “tracing the actors” (Latour, 2005).



The term sociomaterial itself is best envisioned as a net, engulfing theories of learning concerned with systems and the interactions between humans, materials and what is known (or for sociomaterialists, “enacted”). Often termed new or “neo” materialisms, these sociomaterial theories commonly assert that materials are neither subordinate nor separate from social interaction, while extending previously held materialist theories to include how feelings and meanings contribute to learning and social productions (Coole & Frost, 2010; Fox & Alldred, 2015). For many sociomaterial theorists “the central premise is that the social and the material are entangled and together constitute everyday life. That is, knowing and learning, identities, activities, and environments are understood to be sociomaterial enactments” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, p. 372). For Latour, the instruments, or the materials, do not merely change what is known: they enact this knowledge.

The material, or non-human, actor in Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) serves an incredible purpose in that it co-creates meaning with the actor (2005). The interaction between these two spaces, material and human, is what forms the basis for actor-network theory. A non-human actor belongs to this “knowing” as much as a human actor. “Knowing” is a verb (Latour, 2005). “The task therefore (for ANT) becomes one of how to ‘make [objects] talk, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others – humans or non-humans – do’ (La-





tour, 2005, p. 79 cited in Bennett, 2016, p.68). In Turkle’s work, as discussed above, the actors would be Turkle herself, the object and all the actors inherent to that object.



Within most sociomaterial theories the term ‘material’ is understood as the tools, actions, objects, technologies and bodies (human, animal and collective) that we interact both with and from (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). This includes text and discourse, but goes beyond linguistics or textual-analysis. Materials are understood as “entangled in meaning, not assumed to be separate from it” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p.vi). The term “assemblage” is often used by materialists to refer to this network, or web, of entanglements (i.e. the “actor network”). In research, materialists use the term “research-assemblage” to signify “the bodies, things and abstractions that get caught up in social inquiry, including the events that are studied, the tools, models and precepts of research, and the researchers” (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p.400).

This understanding of materiality also deals with non-binary spaces. Indeed, sociomaterial epistemologies seek to understand, and problematize, many casually accepted binaries such as knower v. known, or human v. non-human. One of the more (arguably) radical of these epistemologies, Barad’s agential-realism, sees objects themselves as emerging *from* their respective interactions (Barad, 2006). Sociomaterialism, then, is an epistemological stance that complicates binary knowing and introduces complex and contextualized knowing (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013). It is useful to pause and discuss the loaded term ‘knowing’ within the sociomaterial context. Often called ‘attunement’ or ‘coherence’ within sociomaterial frameworks, knowing is better understood as a complex interaction between material and human systems. It is a verb. Within a sociomaterial understanding, a ‘knower’ might be best understood as an ‘actor’ who seeks coherence between material and social interactions (Latour, 2005). An example of this helps illustrate what I mean.

Imagine a circle time movement game in which a preschool aged child is shoved by the peer sitting nearest to her who wanted to sit down on that particular spot. The girl who has been shoved falls and bruises her knee while also tearing the dress she





was wearing. The child might now “know”, within the parameters of this interaction, that sitting where she likes results in being shoved. However, through a sociomaterial lens this knowing is a complex interaction between the child, the peer, the biological processes of bruising, the rug she sits on and the torn dress she was wearing (Beckerman, 1995). The knowing could also involve the teacher’s response to the incident and the physical classroom space. All these human, material and biological systems interact complexly to create what the child has learned and knows about this event in her life (Harcourt, Perry & Waller, 2011).

2.3.1 Sociomaterialism and Research

Let us turn our attention briefly to how sociomaterial epistemologies function at the methodological level. Because a key element of any sociomaterial (again, also considered “posthumanist”) positioning is that it asks the researchers to give attention to the “more than human” world, how a researcher pragmatically accomplishes this is a necessary consideration. A researcher must “change the parameters of research and what is counted as relevant. This requires us to think relationally with other beings/matter and to draw out the confederacy of objects, bodies and materialities” (Taylor & Hughes, 2016, p.2). In practice this is carried out in a multitude of ways. To pay attention to the objects and things in research requires not simply the *inclusion* of such things in the research narrative, but a deeper attention to what was enacted and learned through those things. This is particularly important in the case of education research where learning is often of central interest.

Thus far research has been paid more attention to the nonhuman world of animals, environments and advanced technology, likely because these nonhumans still have a form of discernable agency or movement (e.g. a robot pushing buttons or ants digging tunnels) (Bennett, 2016). In conceiving of this study, it was important to deeply consider the non-sentient or dead systems we live with, here, textiles. Barad has labeled the difference between forms of attention given to the nonhuman world as an





ontoepistemological divide between an extreme and mild posthumanist position (2007).



This project is largely concerned with a mild posthumanism “which, more modestly,



wants us to notice the nonhuman realm more, and to understand our entanglement



with it” (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2016, p.67). Where an extreme posthumanist position



sees the essence of things (the nonhuman) as lying outside of human perception, a mild



posthumanist position seeks to pay attention to those things while keeping the human



in its gaze (Harman, 2010; Latour, 2005). Here Latour’s ANT helps the educational



researcher employing a sociomaterial epistemology in that his theory does not seek



to remove attention from the human. Latour is looking at the interdependence and



co-construction of human and materials: people *and* things matter (2005).



Returning to the term research assemblage we can focus our gaze on what socioma-



terial studies might “do” as they wrangle with data and traditional forms of research



production and knowledge. Rather than seeing productions of research as singular or



objective things (again, our knit sweater analogy, see p.11-12), sociomaterial theories

can attend to the research assemblage in creating rhizomatic research outputs that

problematize knowledge. Instead of pat conclusions this epistemological position helps

the researcher who wants to explore multi-stranded stories that reflect on the affective

flow between people, object, environment and researcher (Edensor, 2013). Essentially

this type of research must attend to *becoming* between things (relationship) and pro-

duce research that respects this movement.



[...] “The materialist perspective raises questions about human capacities to produce research knowledge [...] Conventionally, social inquiry (like other scientific inquiry) has been considered from the point of view of the researcher, who through efforts of reason, logic and scientific method, gradually imposes order upon ‘data’, and in so doing, ‘makes sense’ of the world. [But the materialist perspective] with its own affect economy [...] shapes the knowledge it produces according to the particular flows of affect produced by its methodology and methods” (Fox & Aldred, 2015, p.403).





So, a sociomaterial lens allows the researcher to shift what is included as data (Masny & Waterhouse, 2010; St. Pierre, 1997). It attends to the flow of affect between participants, events, objects and research audiences (Masny, 2013). From this space of attention to affective flow the researcher must often design methodologies that suit their needs within the possibilities of sociomaterialism (Fox & Alldred, 2013, 2015).





Dear random,

Hammer Head!

(Sharks)

Pony Power

(Sharks)

Space Squad

(Sharks)

Huntington Beach

(Sharks)





3 (Ladybug) Study Design



I am continually reminded, both in the preschool classroom and outside it, that “children often view and perceive place and their environments qualitatively different[ly] than adults” (Green, 2015, p. 1190). The worldview of the child from ages three to five is quite different than that of adults. The experiences they have had, their literal viewpoint, the items and experiences they find important and their preoccupations are all notably different than that of adults. In this respect I was hindered as a researcher: I am an adult. In an effort to better serve the children and portray their realities I sought to suspend my own adult judgment and questioning as much as possible. I tried to interact verbally with the children as little as possible in order to better take in their culture: I did not interview them. Furthermore, where I chose to locate my body in space as I observed the children had an impact on what I was able to perceive. For example, sitting on the floor at a slight distance from their play I saw them move their hands and toys differently than if I stood above them in observation. Keeping this in mind helped me shape a project grounded in respect for the senior preschoolers.



Beyond respect for the children, and as previously stated, this was a project in textile-listening. As a researcher my position was that of listener. This, while similar to observation, extends the role of the researcher so that the utmost attention is given to the entire engagement of the children. What are they doing? What are they saying? To whom or what? What are they holding in their hands or standing near? I tried to listen *hard*. Again, “for this project it meant that listening *was* the activity”, a new look at active-listening (Dunnington, p.5). Preschool classrooms require a researcher who is present enough to intervene in situations that ethically require intervention (e.g. you are the nearest adult to a child hit by a toy train), but listening remained the role I inhabited in the classroom. A professor of mine once said that qualitative research is only trying “not to get it *all* wrong”, so I tried to miss as little as possible, which is to say, I tried not to miss it *all* (Ahola-Sidaway, 2019).





3.1 Gather Round Preschool



In operation since the early 1980's, Gather Round is a non-profit childcare centre in a coastal Canadian city. As a demonstration site for a local early childhood educator training program, it is host to many students and interns. Gather Round is one of three centres in the area that feature this mentorship design and as such staff report high levels of job satisfaction, with the average teacher employed for five or more years. It boasts three classrooms and enrolls children spanning three months of age until just before their sixth birthday. Because Gather Round is affiliated with a local college of early childhood education (ECE) it follows the best practice guidelines set forth by both the province and the college (Epstein, 2014; Kelly & Camilli, 2007)⁴. Many student-teachers who are currently enrolled at the ECE college come to the centre for practicum placements to learn from the expert staff and teachers (Barnett, 2008). The school is generally considered a community treasure and most families have long standing relationships with the school, sending siblings into the program and visiting after a child has graduated.



3.1.1 The Senior Classroom

Upon entering Gather Round, you are struck by the beautiful natural light the space offers. All three classrooms feature a wall of windows facing a waterfront view. Children in each classroom can look outside and see their outdoor play space, their parent departing for the day or a harbor filled with activity. Depending on ratio regulations, classrooms care for a different number of children⁵. In the infant classroom up to twelve children and three teachers spend their days. In the neighboring toddler unit up to sixteen toddlers and three teachers are present. Finally, in the preschool classroom, where this study was primarily situated, up to twenty-two students and four



⁴To protect anonymity for Gather Round Preschool and all participants these citations reiterate what the policies that the centre operates under, but do not directly reference them.

⁵For further information on child to adult ratios see: https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/BN_ratios.pdf





teachers learn together.



This preschool classroom, termed the “senior” classroom, is a large bright open-concept room divided into learning centers using only shelves and small furniture items.



The only separate space in the classroom is the bathroom area to the left of the entry-way. Three large wooden tables structure the space and feature different provocations for the children each morning when they come to class.



Provocations. The provocations offered are experiences a teacher has set-up as a way to respond to or ignite a children’s interests and ideas (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987; OECD Directorate for Education, 2004). This type of hands-on exploration invites children to test, construct, deconstruct, practice and create their own concepts or theories (Epstein, 2014;). “Central to the whole approach is the conception of the child as a subject of rights and as a competent, active learner, continuously building and testing theories about herself and the world around her” (OECD, p.12).



For example, in the fall children had been playing outside and collecting the fallen burrs of a horse chestnut tree. One teacher set up a provocation where a few discarded burrs were set out with large sheets of paper and shallow dishes of earth-toned paint. This was an invitation to the children to mark-make using this natural material (the chestnut burr) which had previously been of great interest to them.



The difference between a provocation and an activity (a term often considered out-of-date in ECE literature) is that while an activity has a determined and desired outcome (e.g., to fill in a worksheet, use a set of stamps or to sort the alphabet blocks correctly) a provocation is open-ended and child-led (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2014, 2020). Thus, in the chestnut example above, a child who chooses to put paint *on* the chestnut burr, instead of painting on the paper using the burr as the teacher imagined, is not doing anything incorrectly. Rather, that child is using the available materials to learn about and experience the world on their own terms.





Figure 3

Natural light filters into the senior preschool classroom





Figure 4

Sample provocation involving cereal, measuring cups and plastic insects



umentation and loose parts. Documentation is the keeping of notes and records about the children in the classroom (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2016; The Early Years Learning Framework in Action, 2013). Each child enrolled at the school is assigned to one teacher who is particularly in charge of that child's portfolio (a binder with documentation pertaining to that child's growth and development for the year). The term loose parts can refer to any item or material presented to the children. The key is not what the item is, but in how it is offered. Empty plastic bottles, colored glass gems, pipe cleaners, nuts and bolts, seashells and wooden dowels... all of these items are loose parts if presented without absolute context. The term loose comes to signify that an item with an original purpose can now be used in any way the child imagines (Daly & Beloglovsky 2018, 2020). All these terms and norms help define the Gather Round





Figure 5

Sample provocation involving birch bark, pine cones, synthetic leaves and yellow chalk



preschool classroom.

The Classroom Space. In order to help readers situate themselves physically in the classroom and outdoor play spaces a series of three maps were drawn (See Appendix A). The main indoor classroom has designated areas in which children can work with particular materials. Thus, the block area has shelves in which plain wooden blocks, large cardboard tubes, clean pieces of siding and large planks can be used to build and create. The dramatic play area has costumes, empty cookery, a small table and some dolls. These areas help structure the space without providing definitive or concrete activities for the children.





Figure 6

A shelf of building materials helps loosely structure the classroom space



3.2 The First Month

During the first preparatory week of this project I attended the senior preschool classroom at Gather Round for 5 days in a row, in an attempt to speak with and describe my project with every child's family. At the time that this project began, 16 children were enrolled in the senior preschool class. Of these 16 children, all parents or guardians were spoken to on one of the five days of preparatory week. Reception of the scope and topic of this project was positive and many parents took the opportunity to ask questions and express their enthusiasm for the work.

Every family was made aware of the voluntary nature of this work and that they were free to withdraw consent at any time. No family or guardian chose to withdraw consent during the course of the study. Of the 16 children enrolled in the senior preschool class,





13 were enrolled in the study. In the case of the three children who were not enrolled, although their families expressed interest in the project, the children were living with non-verbal autism diagnoses and assent could not be obtained. Having never received proper training to obtain alternative assent, and facing a dearth of literature in how to ethically do so, participants who could not provide verbal assent were not included in data collection (Paramasivam, Jaiswal, Minhas, Wittich, & Spruyt-Rocks, 2021). It is important to note that no child was excluded from any provocation, material or interaction regardless of their enrollment in the study.



When the study began there were 16 senior preschool students, three classroom teachers and one inclusion coordinator⁶. During the first three weeks of the study enrollment shifted and two new students joined the classroom. Of these two, only one was eventually enrolled in the study. A child enrolled in this study left Gather Round during the first four weeks of this project and any observations or notes that pertained to this child were removed from the study. Thus, the total number of participants remained at the original number of 13. Finally, while the inclusion coordinator stayed on throughout the entirety of the project, she was joined by numerous other behavioral specialists at different times. These specialists were labeled in my notes simply as “visitor” and are referenced only when a child was directly engaged with them.



Once each child had guardian consent to participate in this project, verbal assent was obtained individually from each child (See Appendix B). A total of thirteen children were asked if they would like to participate in this project and all thirteen provided assent. Assent was asked of the children one at a time within the authentic classroom environment. Children were not taken out of the classroom for assent to be obtained as this might have made the children nervous and fearful. Each child was approached as they moved about the classroom and the assent form was read and subsequently signed. Only one child asked me any questions during the assent-taking process (the



⁶An inclusion coordinator is a specialized teacher responsible for a small cohort of students in the classroom who have unique needs. Their expertise lies in supporting the inclusion of these children into classroom life.





child was curious if “research starts with the letter r like my name”) and this was answered.



The first month of the project was designed so that the environment of the senior level preschool classroom could be adequately and respectfully observed. Each preschool classroom is a particularly rich and unique culture (Somerville & Green, 2015). In an effort to immerse myself in this culture-sharing group of the senior preschoolers at Gather Round, I spent the first four weeks (“the first month”) simply observing their routines and activities with little to no interjection. I made copious use of free-hand notetaking (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Speaking with the children occurred only when, without solicitation, a direct question was asked of me. I kept my answers short and clear. I attempted never to engage the children in further conversation. Speaking with teachers was only done in instances when clarification was required. I tried to keep all direct clarification-questions to one-on-one conversations with teachers either early in the school day (when children had not yet arrived) or during a break time.

I arrived at the preschool between 7:30 and 9:00 in the morning, three days a week. At Gather Round all children arrive at any time their family chooses, up until 11am. By staggering my arrival time, I was able to see different children arrive and interact with their parents or guardians. Each period of observation ended prior to the preschooler’s afternoon nap at 12:30pm. The teachers and I had decided that limited two-hour observation periods would be in the best interest of the children. This time limit provided for ample observation, while not fatiguing the children with a continual observer-presence. Thus, I left the classroom anywhere between 9:30 and 11am each day, depending on time of arrival.

It was during this first month of observation that I created maps of each preschool space: the main preschool classroom, the back outdoor play area and the front outdoor play area (See Appendix A). In this way my notes could reference particular classroom locations, indoors or outdoors, at which student observations occurred.





3.2.1 Notetaking During the First Month



The goal of my notetaking during these four weeks was to paint a rich picture of the senior preschoolers, their behaviors, norms and the classroom itself. To this end I prioritized detailed notes that included items present in the space, words and phrases employed by the children and how the space was utilized. I did not prioritize particular student stories or actions, thus all notes from the first month use only the abbreviation **CH.** (to stand for “child”) as a way to signify action within my notes. Similarly, no teacher is identified in the particular. I chose instead to use the label **T** for “teacher”. In this way notes could be taken quickly and student stories and experiences could weave together to create an overall student/classroom narrative. Notes from each day were transcribed on the same day they were taken

Beginning on the first day I was struck by a naming convention that existed at Gather Round. Rather than use words such as “play” or “toys”, the teachers often used the word “work” (Kelly & Camilli, 2007). For example, if a child was upset that another child had taken his stack of blocks, he might say to a teacher “he broke my work” and the teacher would help the children resolve this conflict. Thus, the word work was employed in all notes, and in subsequent writing, to signify respect for Gather Round norms and conventions.

Particular attention was given to the materials of the classroom. Any material directly utilized by a child was noted. I paid attention not only to the identity of the item (doll, scarf, shovel, etc.) but to the qualities of that item. I sought to describe the item used by the child noting the color, texture, relative size, general appearance and any other unique feature. Keeping in mind that, “the construction of scene [elements] are often missing at the time of writing as one tends, during data collection, to focus on people rather than things” I strove to create a detailed account of the things in the classroom, particularly those in use by a child (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.8). In this way the materials of the narrative were not ignored.





Thus, notetaking paid particular attention to what the children engaged with and their responses to those items. As I moved slowly around the room in those four weeks, I often paused to listen to children, noting what they said and paying particular attention to any mention or use of textiles in their play. It was during the second week that I noticed many children arrived at school wearing clothing with wording somehow displayed on it. I chose to keep a record of all words or phrases that appeared on the children's clothing each day. These word lists are used to create found poems that separate the sections of this work. Finally, whenever a child made reference to their own clothing this was also noted.



3.3 The Second Month

The second month of this project considered one child at a time. Where the first month identified the children only as "ch." within the notes, the second month assigned actions, behaviors and stories to individuals and utilized their names⁷. The overarching goal of this month of study was to focus on one child at a time. As with the first month, the second month was comprised of a four-week period. During these four weeks the senior preschool classroom was visited three times a week, now for a ninety-minute period. After a discussion with the teachers and centre director, we came to the conclusion that ninety minutes was an appropriate length of time to observe an individual child without over-saturating her with researcher presence.



Although children did not arrive at the preschool at the same time, the first four weeks of the study had familiarized me with the habits of each child and their family. This made it possible to roughly guess when a child might show up for preschool and plan my entry into the classroom accordingly. There were days when a child I thought I might observe did not come to school. During instances such as these, I simply chose a different child enrolled in the study to observe. By the time the second month of study began there remained a total of 13 children enrolled in the study. Because one

⁷Note that all names identified within this project are researcher-assigned pseudonyms.





90-minute observation period was allotted to each child, it was possible to observe two children on one day. This observation of two children on one study day was done to accommodate the twelve-day time frame of the second month of the project.



Observing the children individually was designed to equalize the amount of time and attention paid to each child. In any classroom environment there tend to be dominant voices and personalities (Gallas, 1994). Though it is never my intention, it is easy to favor notes and observations that foreground the behaviors of children who are naturally more outspoken, gregarious, or demanding. In an attempt to mitigate this tendency, I designed this month of the study to make sure I had attended to each child, in particular those who spoke little or favored playing alone. This proved wise. My notes revealed there were indeed children who were underrepresented in the first month of observation and notetaking. This second month of observation worked to remedy this.



As in the first month of study, observation took place in the area the children were normally engaged in: the main classroom, front outdoor play space or back outdoor play space (See Appendix A). I did not wish to interfere with any child's intentions and continued to speak very little. In order to better understand a child's behaviors, movements or thinking I asked open-ended questions to obtain more information. Questions often took the form of "I wonder..." or "I didn't know..." statements (e.g. "I wonder why that truck is smashing into the other truck" or "I didn't know that dolls could fly"). These types of statement questions generally support conversation with young children better than direct lines of questioning (Martin, S., 2019). At times even when a child explained things further their meaning remained unclear to me. During instances such as these, I chose to write down the child's own words and leave their play or behavior alone in order to better observe what was true for that child. I tried always to remember that the children were not there to help me understand, but were there to grow and learn on their own terms.





3.3.1 Notetaking During the Second Month



Although I still interfered very little during this month, I nevertheless was conscious that my project sought a *textiled* narrative. Due to this focus, my notes regarding any one child did focus on any play, narrative or movement that involved textiles. In this spirit, I continued to note any text on the clothing of other children present in the classroom. Finally, in order to keep my focus on textiles, occasionally I asked a child a focused textile question if an item being played with involved a textile though the child had made no mention of it in their play. This technique was used sparingly.



3.3.2 Challenges to Individual Observations



Because each day had a particular focus (i.e. one child) there was no need to preference any portion of the classroom or move about of my own will: I simply followed the movements of the children. However, I remained careful to move my body a bit further off from the children so as to not overly influence what was being said or done. This proved a useful strategy whenever two children were engaged in conversation, one child being the focus of that day's observation. Dialogue between two or more children often involves negotiation. When the children were negotiating there was a tendency to seek adult intervention. If I was the closest adult, the children often solicited me to side with them or fix the disagreement in their favor. As I was most interested in noting the entirety of the conversation between the children, including negotiation and disagreement, I remained silent. The only exception to this occurred if safety became an issue, such as when a child was hitting or pushing another child or if a teacher directly asked me to intervene on their behalf. I intervened minimally.





fear is such a vulnerable emotion, I chose to limit how much time I ever observed a child I sensed was feeling fearful to 15 minutes. I would observe from afar for that span of time, then move even further away to observe a different child and move back only if it seemed the fearful child was feeling better.

In the case of limited language skills, which occurred with two children, I found it was challenging to understand everything the children were attempting to express to me or a peer. The experience of repeating oneself or drawing blank looks from others did seem frustrating for a child who obviously had something to say. I tried to remain encouraging and patient so as to facilitate conversation for any child struggling to communicate.

One of the two child with limited language skills did persevere and I was ultimately able to understand almost everything he said. A second child eventually gave up using his language skills to try communicating with me, something he seemed to want to do, and instead began signing and pointing. In this way I was able to understand some of what he wanted to express. Other tools I used to communicate with these two children involved drawing pictures and asking one of the child's peers to sit with us. Both these tools were limited in their utility, but both children seemed to appreciate and work through them. Picture drawing was more successful with one child than the other.

At the close of this second month of study 12 children had been observed for one 90-minute period each, and one child (who seemed fearful) and was observed for a 15-minute period. As in the first month, notes from each day were transcribed on the same day they were taken.

3.4 The Third Month

The third month of this study engaged the children in provocations of textile literacy (Biermier, 2015; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Shore, Bodrova & Leong, 2004). After a month immersing myself in the classroom culture and a month paying focused attention to each child, I was ready to engage





the students in textile-specific provocations designed to build upon one another. Each provocation was set up as one “centre”, situated in a particular portion of the classroom (Epstein, 2014). I aligned myself with Nelson and Hodgins who “do not invoke art in our work with the intention of creating objects we can point to as evidence of children’s comprehension” (2020, p. 160). Though several provocations feature productions on behalf of the children, they are shared below to help situate the reader into the materiality of the work, not point to students “arriving” at an understanding of textiles.

As centres were never assigned, students were free to come to and join or leave a provocation as they saw fit. With only one exception, my textile-specific provocations took place from 8 until 10 am, three mornings of the week. In a 4-week period I offered a total of twelve provocations. Provocations number seven and eight were designed to immediately build onto one another and, as such, were set up in a row on the same day. This is why month 3 was comprised of eleven study days. To illustrate the progression of the textile-specific provocations, each one is detailed below.

3.4.1 Notes and Goals During the Third Month

Overall, the goal of this month was *solicitation*. I wanted to bring out student stories, ideas, pre-existing knowledge, interests and next steps. Provocations grew organically from broad to specific and were partially pre-conceived and partially invented during my time in the classroom. I wanted the children to play with textiles, to be free to make their own connections and draw their own insights.

Children’s lives are enriched through free play that is pleasurable, self-motivated, imaginative, spontaneous, creative, and free from specific adult-imposed goals and outcomes. The knowledge that the most important way children learn is through play is vital for families and educators. By *play* we mean child-directed experiences that are free from adult interference and micromanagement [...] Our longtime mentor Bev Bos shared the invaluable





wisdom of never asking a child a question that you can answer [...] Play is process oriented and done for its own sake. (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2020, Chapter 1, Section *Play*, para. 2).



Every activity, while it did invoke textiles, was designed to be interesting on its own. Children need not engage with the provocation in any particular way, as one of the defining characteristics of play remains that it is self-directed and chosen freely (Gray, 2013; Daly & Beloglovsky, 2020).

I invited teacher ideas while designing the provocations listed below. Several of them include fragments of teacher concepts that were shared with me. Because the teachers and centre director felt that significant changes to the classroom environment were not possible, I did not relocate furniture, introduce any large-scale imagery or drastically alter the materials of the classroom. The only change to the classroom environment I undertook was to switch out the picture books available to the children for the textile-focused picture book library I had carefully curated (Brown, 2010; Epstein, 2014). Please see Appendix C for a full book list.

3.4.2 Provocations

Provocation 1. Large Table B (See Appendix A) this first provocation was set up and open to 5 students at a time. Each spot was set with a piece of paper, a myriad of markers and colored pencils, and in the center of the table, three picture books were open to images of people getting dressed (*Pelle's New Suit*, *Where Do My Clothes Come From* and *Red Butterfly: How A Princess Smuggled the Secret of Silk Out of China*). Children who joined the table were told simply "I wonder if you can draw me a picture of what you're wearing today?" ...





Figure 7

Drawing by Bentley; "They're all puppies. They're all the Paw Patrol®"



Provocation 2. This activity tried to engage children with cotton cloth as a material by providing cloth scraps, scissors, watered down glue, paint brushes and paper pages with large letters on them. The inclusion of letters was due to a teacher's idea that, as the children were particularly interested in the letters in their name right now, it might be a good way to make a conversation about cloth more naturally engaging to their interests. Using cloth scraps to create designs they could glue to the page, this provocation was a way for children to create images with cloth if they wished. All materials were set out on Large Table A.





Figure 8



Work by Sally; "some glue and some cloth"

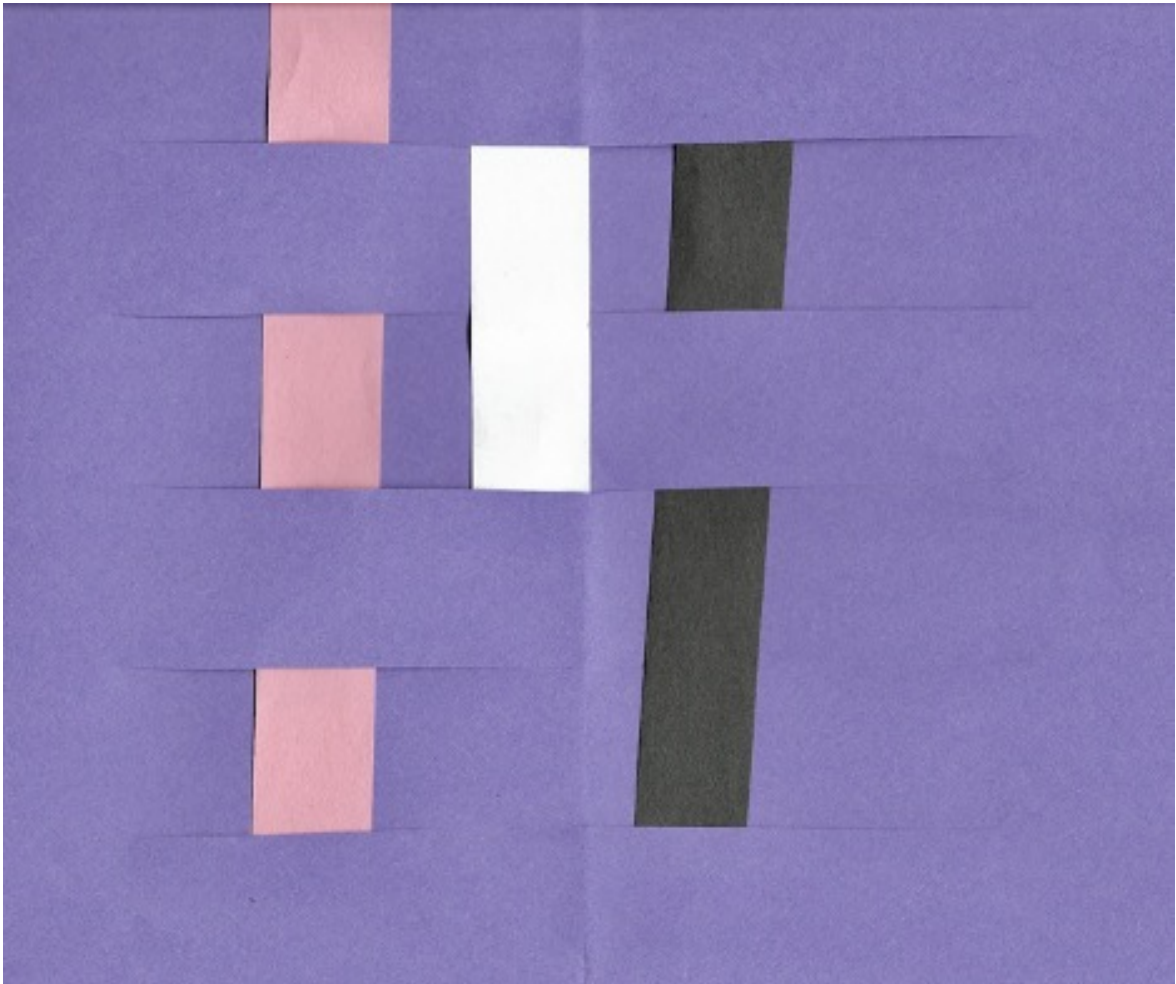


Provocation 3. This provocation featured an invitation to weave with paper. Prior to entering the classroom paper was pre-cut into looms (sheets with six slits cut the long way) and long thin strips in rainbow colors. Additionally, I pre-wove two sheets myself to demonstrate what it might look like when a project was complete. After setting out paper looms and colored strips, children were then invited to sit at Large Table A and weave paper strips onto their paper loom in any manner they chose. The main instructions provided were simple, holding out a sample piece I stated, "this is a weaving made on a paper loom and you might make one too". Then, while sitting and weaving alongside the children I demonstrated the work slowly while saying to myself "weaving goes over, under, over, under and over again".



Figure 9

Weaving by Una; "It's a train!"



Provocation 4. For this provocation the Sensory Table bin was filled with small squares of cotton cloth and three hand-made cotton and wool figures (the children called them dolls). The Sensory Table was one-quarter full and children were allowed to work at the Sensory Table three at a time. The concept was that a free exploration of cloth might ensue as imaginary play scenarios emerged. No formal solicitation or prompt was offered to the children. I sat nearby and recorded child interactions and responded only when a child posed a direct question or to ask for gentle clarification.





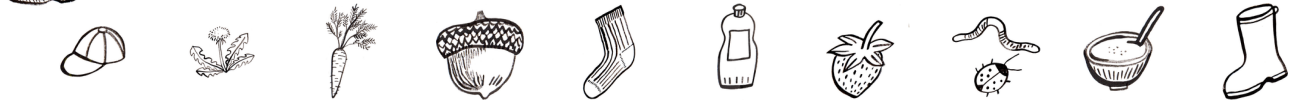
Figure 10

Sensory table filled with cloth scraps and dolls.



Provocation 5. This provocation featured a visit to watch a local ballet company’s production of *The Nutcracker*. I was hopeful the children would engage with the costume element of the show. The show followed the traditional storyline of *The Nutcracker* and featured many large and bright costumes: tutus, candy costumes, Victorian-era dresses, a large furry Nutcracker-Bear and various props and lighting effects. I sat between four children and at intermission moved to sit with four different children. Due to the rules of standard audience etiquette, it was not possible to sit near every child. Only 8 children were heard during this provocation.

Provocation 6. A microscope was borrowed from a local science lab and set up in the classroom space at the Art Table (See Appendix A). The microscope was labeled as an educational-grade microscope with an external light source. Slides were prepared





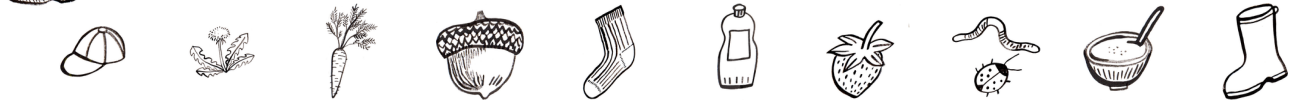
in front of the children in order to facilitate their understanding of what they were viewing. An old chambray shirt was placed on the table and every child who visited the microscope watched and assisted as a small section was cut, dry mounted and placed in the viewing tray of the microscope. Paper and pencils were provided in the event a child wanted to draw me a picture of what they saw through the lens. The microscope was focused beforehand so that the young children were not tasked with doing so themselves. I also allowed them to move and handle the focus knobs to account for differences in eyesight and increase their engagement with this provocation.

Figure 11

Drawing by Evelyn; "What it's like when we see blood"



Provocations 7 & 8. For these provocations the sensory table bin was first filled with loose carded wool, some undyed and some dyed with bright plant-based color. The children were invited to play and manipulate the wool as they saw fit. No other tools or toys were placed in the sensory table. During the second half of this provocation (8) warm water and two tablespoons of dish soap were added to the sensory table to invite





the children to engage with wet soapy wool. Because wet soapy wool will shrink, felt, and to some extent hold its shape, I hoped children might comment on or question the new texture of the now familiar material.



Provocation 9. At Large Table B five small standing looms (purchased from Ikea®) were set-up as a provocation. The looms were warped and assembled outside the classroom and brought to school ready for weaving. Each spot had one loom, one comb, one “needle” (a dull plastic style), and one long strip of colored fabric (either pink, blue, orange or green). Children were shown very minimally, with language echoing that of Provocation # 3, how to weave. I moved from spot-to-spot to help them if they solicited my aid.

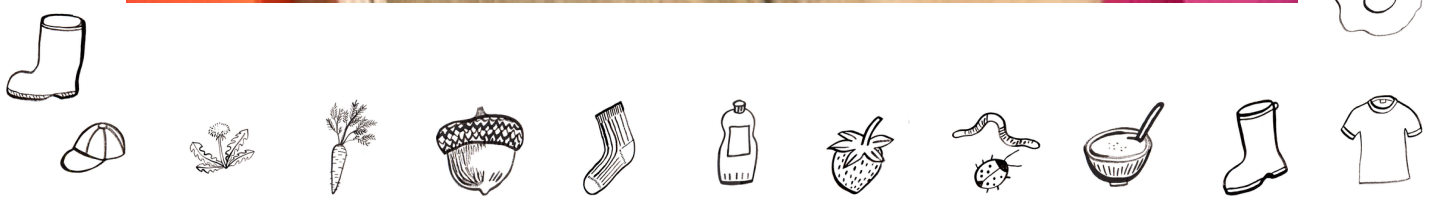




Figure 12



Standing looms set up for student weaving





Provocation 10. For this provocation an electric sewing machine was brought to the classroom along with large pieces of all-wool felt. Families had been previously told that students could bring a special doll, stuffed animal or similar toy to school on this day. The sewing machine was set up at the Art Table and I was seated behind it. Children were encouraged to visit the machine and bring their stuffed toy or doll. If they wished they could select a color of wool felt and request a clothing item to be made for their toy. Using scissors and an in-depth knowledge of pattern drafting, items such as capes, vests and hats were made in real time for the children to put on their toys. Each child could visit the centre and request one item. Children were encouraged to ask questions as the process unfolded before them. As I worked to make their items, I provided very basic narration of what I was doing such as: “I am cutting out a square shape” or “I am using the machine to sew these two pieces of wool together”. All children were able to touch the machine and push the pedal if they wanted to.





Figure 13

Janome M7200 sewing machine that children observed and used



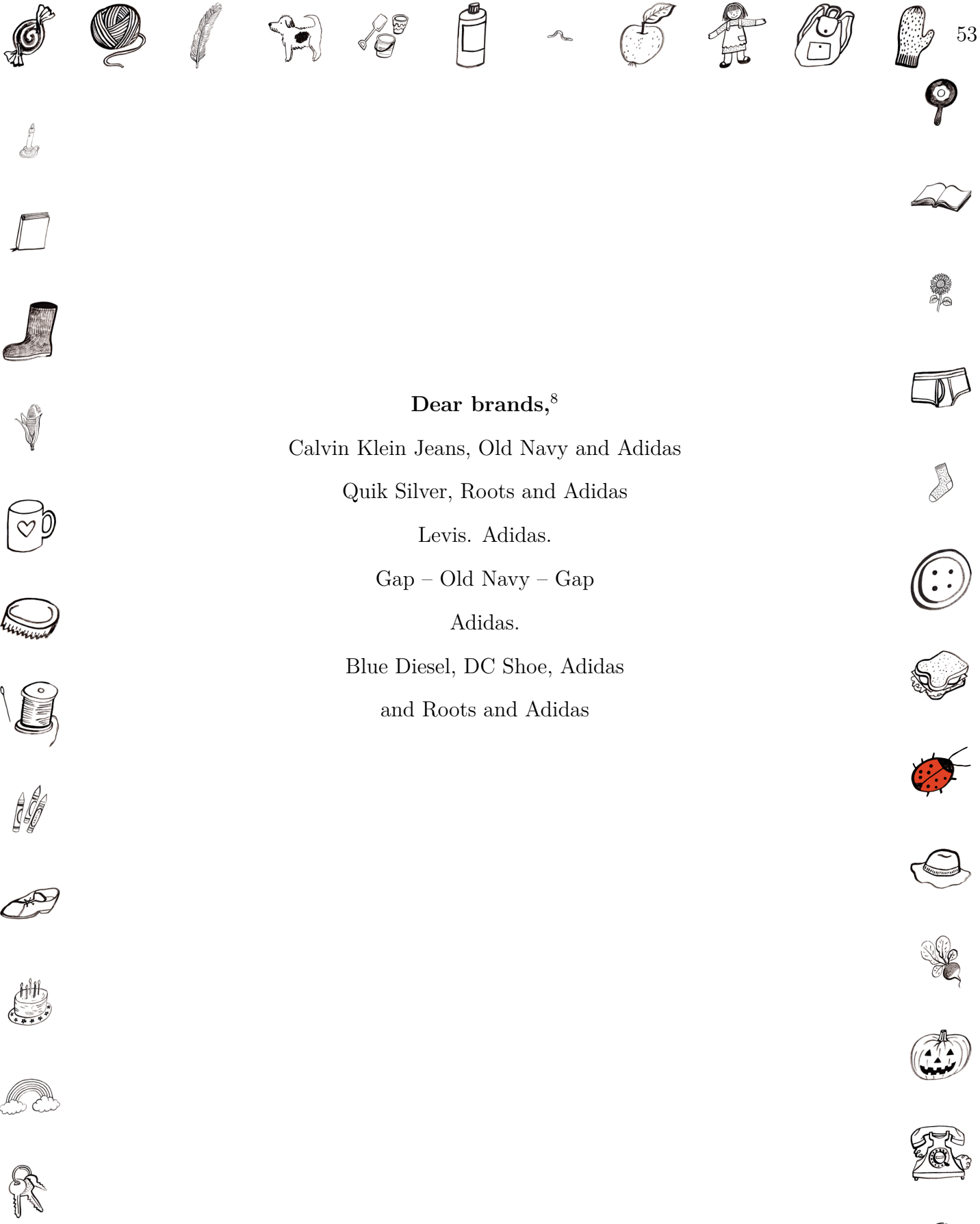
Provocation 11. For the final provocation of the project, I led the regularly scheduled classroom circle time. During circle all children were seated on the large ABC Rug while I was seated up front. I began circle by asking the children if they wanted to tell me about something they were wearing today. Any child could volunteer an answer and I did not move on to another question until they had all been offered a turn to respond. I followed up this question by asking if anyone knew where their clothing was from. Again, I awaited all responses before moving forward. Then, I read the books *Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett and *Something from Nothing* by Phoebe Gillman





aloud to the children (2012; 1992). During each reading I paused to ask open-ended questions and allowed all students who wished to respond the opportunity to do so before moving on. I closed circle by asking if anyone knew who made their clothes and awaited responses. When all books and question/answers were completed, I thanked the children and dismissed them one at a time to get ready for outdoor play.





Dear brands,⁸

Calvin Klein Jeans, Old Navy and Adidas

Quik Silver, Roots and Adidas

Levis. Adidas.

Gap – Old Navy – Gap

Adidas.

Blue Diesel, DC Shoe, Adidas

and Roots and Adidas

⁸The word “and” was not original to any of the children’s clothing – I have added it for emphasis.





4 (Underwear) This Narrative Study

The overarching goal of narrative inquiry is a deeper attention to story as “a distinctive way of thinking and understanding that is unique and embodied, that is, it integrates the physical and psychological dimensions of knowing (Bruner, 1986, cited in Butler-Kisber, 2018). This project borrowed heavily from methods used by narrative inquirers as I patched together a research methodology fitting a textiled narrative, one that paid particular attention to the relationships between children and textiles. Because I also firmly sought a sociomaterial perspective in this narrative construction I needed to borrow from different methods and tools consistent with new materialist research that features a heavy degree of eclecticism in methodology (Fox & Alldred, 2015). This sociomaterial narrative would then be focused on”what things do, rather than what they ‘are’; towards processes and flows rather than structures and stable forms [...] to interactions that draw small and large relations into assemblage. A range of designs might fulfil some or all of those criteria (Fox & Alldred, 2008, p.408).

As a production of this research project, I wanted to weave together a series of narrative moments within the preschool classroom that I witnessed and wondered about. I did not want to represent one singular “output” or research conclusion. There is no objective truth about textile narratives in early learning classrooms to be found in this work. To do this with any degree of grace required an understanding of narrative work *and* new materialist work. I wanted to create a rich assemblage that expanded minute relationships (as found in student narratives) between children and their textiles into larger webs of affective flow. I wanted to wonder about how the textiles and the children acted on each other and how these thematic actions might be woven together. Most of all I wanted to make something messy and follow suit with researchers such as Taguchi and Palmer who cut, discussed and moved with their data in such a way as to create a “rhizomatic zigzagging flow” (2013, p. 675). Below I expand upon the work of narrative inquiry so as to deepen our collective understanding of where





this project borrows from. Though sociomaterialist perspectives are not particularly implicated in the research cited below, the method of narrative inquiry is unique and vast enough that a deeper understanding of the method helps us better navigate the research assemblage and thematic analysis that follows.



4.1 Narrative Inquiry



Arising from the work of sociological life history research at the Chicago School in the 1920's, one hundred years later narrative research methodologies are now relatively well established (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Spanning disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and education, this mosaic of methods is shifting and difficult to define singly. Other authors have termed this attention *experience*, reminding us that "Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.19). Thus, as a research methodology narrative inquiry is a focus on story and storied experiences of either participants or authors. This attention is a complex turning toward experience as narratively defined and narratively lived. To inquire narratively is to think within the imagined dimensions of narrative spaces.



Clandinin and Connelly, in wrangling with a definition of narrative inquiry, have written that their goal is not to define narrative inquiry, but to define the spaces (i.e. dimensions) of narrative inquiry. They offer a three-dimensional model that focuses on *interaction*, *continuity*, and *situation* (2000). Each of these three spaces offers researchers a way to conceive of narrative inquiry. By outlining interaction (as either personal or social), continuity (the timeline of past, present, and future), and situation (place), Clandinin and Connelly are providing researchers with a framework for envisioning the elements that they may possibly include within their studies. This three-dimensional conceptualization is useful in defining the facets of what makes a narrative inquiry methodology (2000). It is no coincidence that imagination and metaphor help us define what narrative inquirers do.



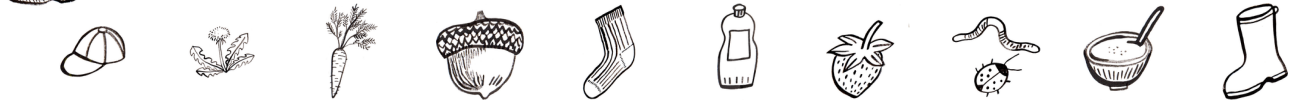


nation plays a role as this methodology seeks to envision the researcher, the participant and the storied relationship between the two. “[T]he place of imagining in narrative inquiry, particularly the place of imagining in the relationships with research participants” is an important facet of narrative inquiry as method (Caine & Steeves, 2009, p.2). The narrative inquirer also views playfulness as part of this imagined space; the ability to approach research with openness and creativity. Finally, imagining the narrative space as an “emplotted” narrative means it is a story *with* plot, set in a space imagined in the present, past, or future (Caine & Steeves, 2009).

Equally, narrative inquiry as method highlights the aesthetic dimension of research. For a story to be a narrative it must also be one in which there is “an emotional quality that is both feelingful and satisfying” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p.162). A story that carries no weight for participant, researcher, or both, is not a narrative construction. Though certainly a story might carry aesthetic resonance only at certain times, or for certain people, it nevertheless remains important to highlight this *quality* of the narrative space. “[N]arrative inquiry space allows us to understand and to represent the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of people’s stories to live by. We attend to our stories to live by as narrative inquirers and to the stories to live by of children and families [...]” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 163). There is a turning both inward and outward as the narrative inquirer seeks the aesthetic, or the emotional, within the stories. The narrative should draw on central emotions within the stories present; what is *within* the story, and what is *outside* of the story (Coulter & Smith, 2009). A story to “live by” implies just that: life. As life is lived narratively, narrative inquiry is a form of living.

4.1.1 How I Built a Narrative

Cathy Coulter and Mary Lee Smith identify two broad categories of narrative inquiry: *analysis of narrative* and *narrative analysis* (2009). The first of these, *analysis of narrative*, is the more traditional approach to writing life stories and subsequently an-





analyzing them for themes (2009). It might be conceived of as a more linear approach for the narrative inquirer to employ. The latter method, *narrative analysis*, is a restorying process in which narratives from a particular project are emergent and organic. These emergent stories are then re-arranged artistically in order to assemble a larger or more nuanced story. For both methods: “narrative research strives to portray experience, to question common understandings, [and] to offer a ‘degree of interpretive space’” (Coulter & Smith, 2009, p. 577; Barone, 2001, p. 150). In this spirit, this particular project borrows from **both** these interpretive tools. Employing *narrative analysis*, the stories from Gather Round were both restoryed and rearranged; they are not presented chronologically or as a single story. Employing *analysis of narrative*, thematic analysis was used to identify themes within the restoryed narrative. This helped me imagine the research assemblage formed by the children, the textiles, the researcher and the classroom environment.

If it remains difficult to grasp the differences between what narrative inquiry *is*, methodologically, and what narrative inquirers *do*, practically, a particularly robust definition is offered below:

People shape their daily lives by the stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the story of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375).

Above, the authors give particular attention to the notion that narrative inquiry looks at experience through the medium of narrative *because* it understands life as a “storied phenomenon” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). This signifies the epistemological





view of reality as storied, thus the narrative researcher understands reality as storied.



This important distinction draws the line between narrative inquiry as method and



other research methods which might view reality as a construction, as a singular truth,

as primarily a sociocultural experience and so on. In this way narrative inquirers seek

stories because they reflect the reality of life as experience and stories-of-experiences.



Narrative is relevant to children who *experience* their schools and their learning

environments every day. As scholar Karen Gallas notes “For children, meaning is built



into stories; they use narratives to construct mental models of their experience, to

make the world they inhabit sensible” (1994, p. *xiv*). As narrative is a natural mode

for making sense of experience for a child, it follows that it is a natural methodology



to employ when interested in the life of children. Their stories are their experiences,

their experiences are their realities and the classroom is a location in the reality of



childhood.



In the writing of a narrative the researcher pays attention to literary elements just

as one would in writing good literature. Elements of story such as point of view,



metaphor, or theme all apply to narrative inquiry (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Clandinin

& Murphy, 2009). A main division between literature and narrative inquiry is simply

that narrative research is just that: *research*. The story is the result of interviews,



inquiry, observation or questionnaires. It is a story rooted in the research process that

requires the conventions of storytelling and the elements of good literature. Terms used



to describe the processes of writing narrative research include reworking, restorying,

and crafting (Coulter & Smith, 2009). These highlight the work of the narrative



inquirer: to craft the story from the research, to rework the words of participants, or

to *restory* our own research stories.



Because the stories of the Gather Round preschool emerge from interactions with

young children this work has been *barely* reworked. Rearranging student stories or

changing the order of events has been done only to draw audience attention to the



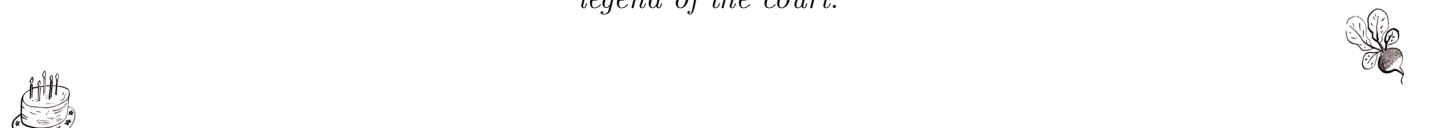
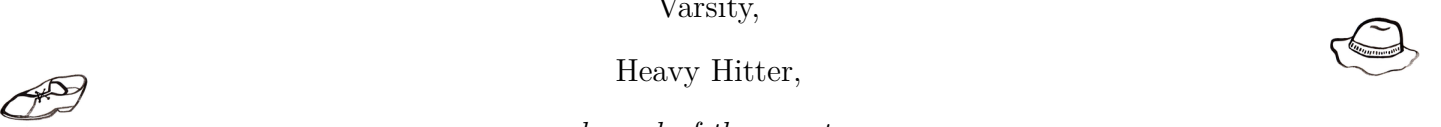
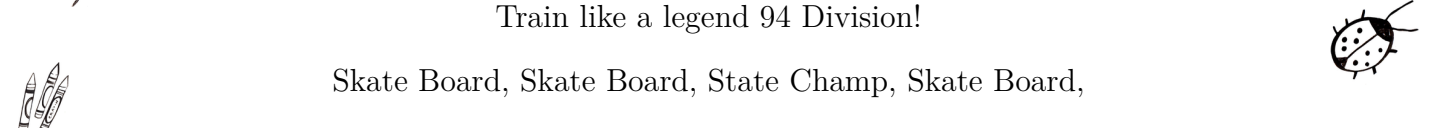
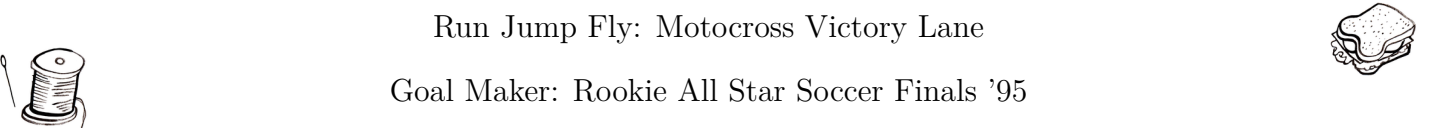
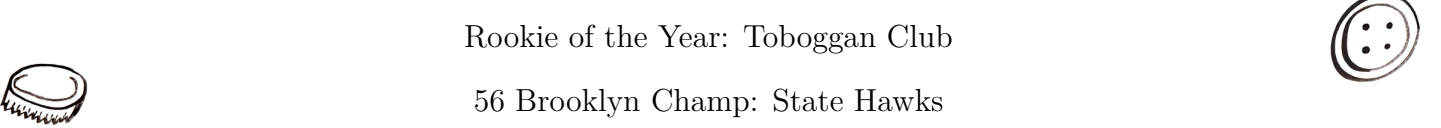
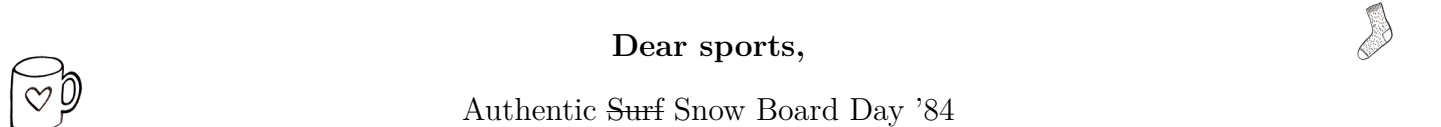
research assemblage; to affective flow. To offer young children the highest degree of





respect I have not, to my knowledge, altered their language or grammar usage. I have tried to take student stories and place them under a metaphorical magnifying glass, seeking themes and threads between the children’s stories (verbal and nonverbal) and their material world. I have kept the tenets of good literature to heart and the stories of textile literacy in the Gather Round preschool room are meant to be “good reading” (Coulter & Smith, 2009).





Dear sports,

Authentic Surf Snow Board Day '84

Rookie of the Year: Toboggan Club

56 Brooklyn Champ: State Hawks

Run Jump Fly: Motocross Victory Lane

Goal Maker: Rookie All Star Soccer Finals '95

Train like a legend 94 Division!

Skate Board, Skate Board, State Champ, Skate Board,

Varsity,

Heavy Hitter,

legend of the court.



5 (Sweater) The Research Assemblage

The following themes were not easily identified. Children's narratives are often subtle, non-linear, cryptic or non-verbal (Gallas, 1994). To arrive at these themes, it was necessary not only to revisit my notes many times, but to revisit the emotive space the classroom and children held for me (Fox & Allred, 2015). This space was necessarily intangible and internal. I had to return to the *feeling* of being with the children and experiencing their textiled-narrative in order to arrive at any sort of thematic agreement. Van Matre writes "[...] it is strange but almost no one in our societies works directly with the nonverbal. [...] Take a few minutes right now and think about a couple of the richest moments of your own life. ... Chances are good the words faded from those scenes long ago. What remains are the feelings. It is the feelings that endure in life" (p. 69, 2004). In reading my notes, in "being with" my notes and choosing a thematic structure for the children's stories it was necessary to rely on the nonverbal, on feelings. Drawing from the two-part process described by Butler-Kisber, the coarse-grain and the fine-grain phase of thematic analysis, researcher notes were read several times and emergent themes physically highlighted, cut and sorted. (2010; Huber & Whelan, 1999).

5.1 Thematic Web

In conceiving of these themes, I also sought a way to visualize how connected each was to the other. These types of minute connections created the research assemblage of child/textile/researcher/environment. In any singular anecdote or observation, I often found that more than one of the identified themes applied. Finding a way to conceptualize how these themes were in concert and how affect flowed between the elements identified required many iterations and visualizations before Figure 14 (below) was settled on. This is certainly not the only way to visualize how themes highlight affective flow between "bodies" (again, children, textiles, environments and researcher), but it





provides a useful image. The concept of each theme being held together by a thread, ultimately creating a large web, was certainly inspired by the textiles themselves.



It is possible, with the visualization I created, to imagine that plucking any thread within the thematic web would catch and move all the other threads. This is important. This type of visualization makes it possible for any portion of a story to appear in more than one thematic space. It also underscores the interconnectedness of child/material and how this constitutes affective flow or movement.



If we imagine walking along any thread in Figure 14, we ultimately would be walking on a thread, or a connection between threads, leading to any other theme. It is impossible to situate yourself (imaginarily) on the web without connecting to other themes. Furthermore, more than one set of threads connect any two themes so that to move along from one thematic thread toward another leaves many choices as to how many connections to other themes will be touched along the way.



As I have stated, I am interested in making things messier. In proposing a project on textile literacy, I never imagined I would develop a linear or singular story. Nor could I possibly have imagined all the nuanced intersections and twists in the children's stories and the subsequent themes identified. Figure 14 ultimately helps in complicating the narrative as it provides a visually non-linear strategy for thinking through the themes identified. This is particularly helpful when faced with the limitations of the written word and a necessarily paginated project. With this in mind, note that all themes identified and developed below are presented non-hierarchically, albeit linearly. The visualization of Figure 14 helps the reader keep in mind the connections between these themes are various and tangled, not nearly as linear as the page might lead us to believe.



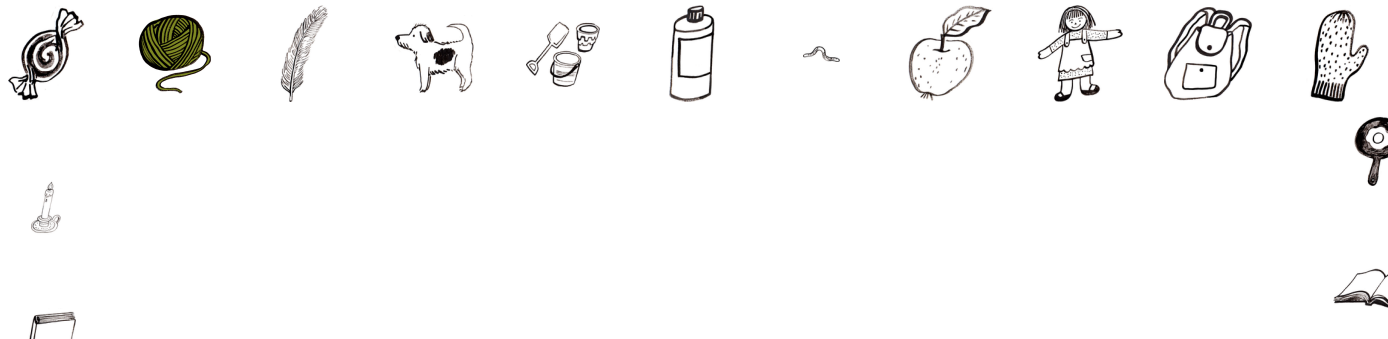
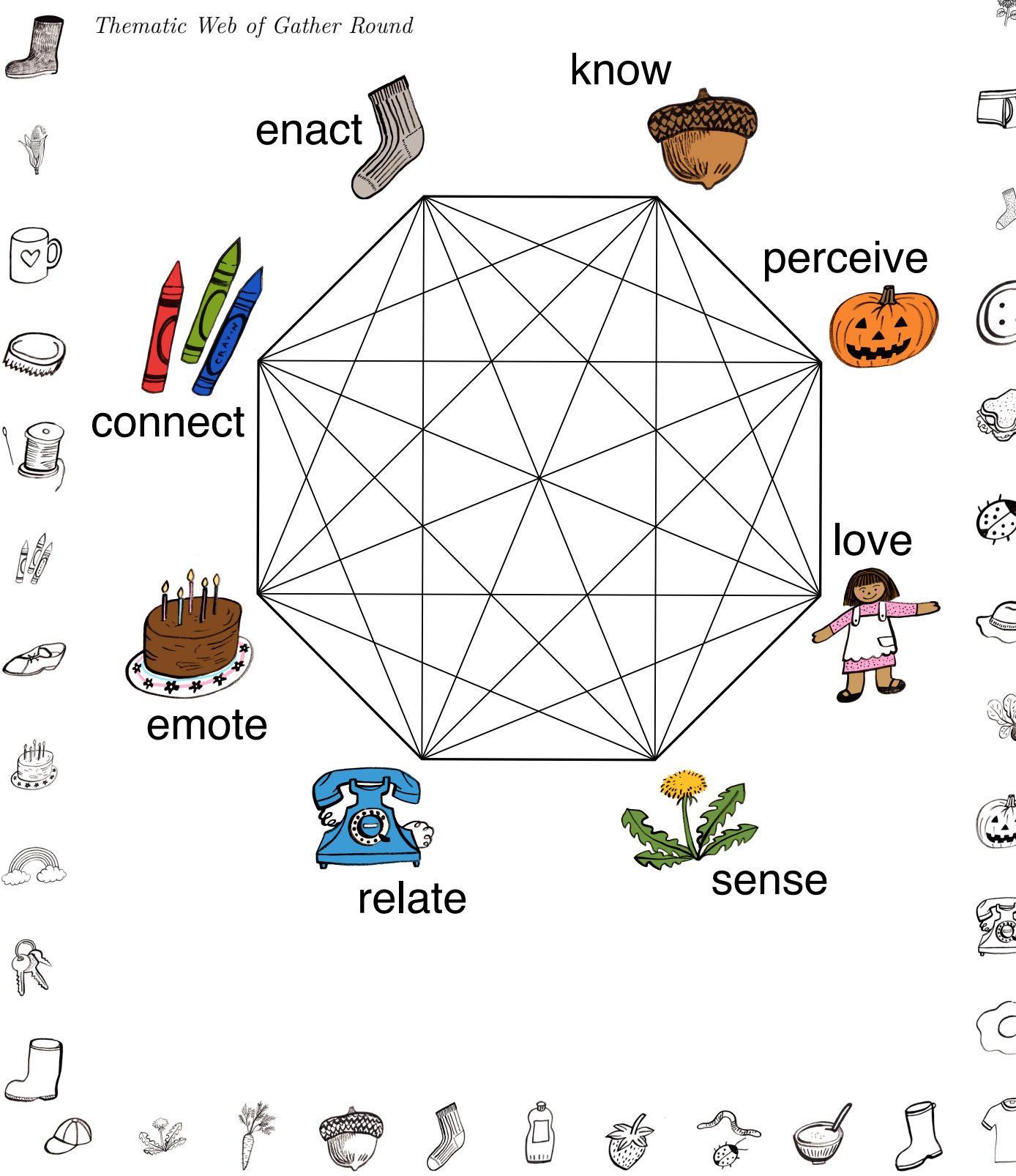


Figure 14

Thematic Web of Gather Round





narrative from the classroom, I quickly saw it would be impossible to identify singular themes in any moment of a child or children’s story. Every moment features at least two themes. Thus, I provide stories and relevant themes as the entanglement that they were. Figure 14 appears in a highlighted form alongside these narrative moments as a map to help identify which themes were at play.



Each theme has been named for both a verb, in the active tense, and an object. This complication seeks to situate knowing as something that involves both the material and the human. By choosing an active verb I am trying to underscore that each child (the subject) performs the theme’s (the verb’s) action, within their story. By choosing an object to encapsulate this theme, I am trying to draw attention to both the materiality of the narrative as well as the visual materiality of any verb. What I mean by this is simply that when we imagine a verb such as “run”, “know”, or “hold” we cannot easily picture the verb without both a subject and an object. For “hold” we might picture a mother (the subject) holding a telephone (the object). For “run” we might picture a teenage boy (the subject) running in his sneakers (the object). The objects associated with each theme are in no way intended to encapsulate the theme completely, but they act as anchor reminders that materiality was paid particular attention to within these children’s narrative.

Selecting objects to hold the thematic elements in the children stories also helps invoke in what Weldemariam and Wals have termed “assemblage thinking” (2020).

Assemblage thinking, which highlights children’s relational entanglements, has been indicated as an important pedagogical tool to open up possibilities for **rethinking children’s mundane and seemingly trivial everyday encounters** with the non-human world around preschool settings. By acknowledging these entanglements and expanding children’s possibilities to be entangled in all that is around us, early childhood educators can provide an approach into a more connected way of being in the world (p. 22, emphasis added).





Every provocation was conceived of as a way to rethink ‘learning’ and pay attention to the assemblages that included children/textiles. By using objects to symbolize the entangled themes that emerged in this project we further this goal of stepping away from seeing children/objects as exhibiting agency in only one direction (e.g. child bangs on a drum).. As Weldemariam and Wals note “[when] agency is shared with the non-human materialities and other species, [it] opens up possibilities for fundamentally rethinking our relationship with the world”. (2020, p.20). We are invited to see that the object is part of that assemblage and is “becoming with” the child



5.1.1 *Relate/Telephone*



The theme I identified as *relate* is best conceived of as moments within the narratives that highlight how textiles help form a relationship between the child and the world.



The textile acts to *relate* the child to useful objects, their peers, or their teachers.



Relate signifies an external relationship held by the child and a presence (again: useful object, peer, or teacher) that the textile works to facilitate. This means that it is the textile that facilitates the moment of relationship.



5.1.2 *Connect/Crayon*



Similar to relate, the theme *connect* implies a moment of relationship within the story brought on by the textile. However, I chose the word *connect* to signify an internal link between child and feeling, knowing, understanding or experience, all facilitated by the textile actor.



Thus, the different between *relate* and *connect* has to do with internal and external moments of association. For the theme *connect* a textile might have triggered a memory, an emotional association, or even a link to previously held knowledge.



For the theme *connect* a textile might have triggered a memory, an emotional association, or even a link to previously held knowledge.



5.1.3 *Know/Acorn*



The theme *know* highlights when children’s stories included textile knowledge that the textile artist would consider factual. This means that a child expresses something in





their story that matches reality in a way frequently associated with the word “knowing”.



The importance of this theme is that the child’s expression was, again, facilitated by



the textile or textile discussion occurring at that time. The link being formed involves

the child’s knowledge base, the textile facilitator, and the expression of this knowledge

both verbally or, occasionally, nonverbally.



5.1.4 *Perceive/Jack O’Lantern*



Perceive highlights a moment when the textile as facilitator evoked a moment in the

child’s story where information was relayed to a listener (peer, teacher, myself) that

does not match what is commonly considered factual information about a textile, but



nevertheless is incredibly valuable in understanding the child’s narrative. Rather than

calling this theme misconceive, I feel the word *perceive* highlights the ambiguous space



in which knowledge lives. Though we may not currently consider thread to come from

trees (knowledge from a child we would consider “incorrect”) there may be some future



method for making thread from tree cellulose (Gallas, 1994). The child’s narrative

that includes thread from trees remains important to our developing understanding of

textile literacy.



5.1.5 *Sense/Dandelion*



Sense is an intuitive theme in that it highlights the evocation of the five senses

brought out by the textile actor. Thus, children’s narratives that considered the tactile,



olfactory, or visual aspect of textiles would be in line with the theme *sense*. Though

it rarely occurred, a child’s story that featured the auditory or gustatory link between



themselves and textiles would also fit within this theme. The theme of *sense* requires

a particular degree of observation on the part of the researcher as it is not as present



in the transcribed story of the classroom. A child who runs his hand on a blanket

or smells his mitten before putting it on is indeed linked to story and textile through



sense, yet only a truly detailed research record would note such moments. In attending





to the theme *sense*, I was careful to recall moments of body language and rely on the portion of my notes dedicated to nonverbal observations about the children.



5.1.6 *Enact/Sock*



Enact, in the context of this project, was the theme I chose to encapsulate the lived through moment, the imagined experience, or the envisioned reality that many of the children's narratives contained. This theme is one of the most abstract to comprehend.



Essentially, the textile and child were linked together by a moment of imagination or enactment that was not necessarily based on reality as an outside observer would see it. Thus, a child approaching a teacher with a scarf and asking for help putting on



"long butterfly wings" is expressing a moment between himself and textile that I would consider an *enactment*. The child is linked to the textile through an imagined moment.



This theme is different than *connect*. In the theme of *connect* a child is linking to an internal experience, comprehension or memory. They are not envisioning something alternate to reality, the moment, or the past. With the theme *enact* the child is living through the textile an alternate, or fantasy, reality of their own choosing.



5.1.7 *Emote/Cake*

The theme *emote* signified a moment of emotional connection between the child and the textile. The key to this word choice is that *emote* is an almost neutral affective connection. Thus, I have chosen it to signify when a child felt something in relation to a textile, but not something particularly strong. In fact, for the theme of *emote* the affective connection need not be positive. A child expressing that a sock is uncomfortable, or lightly grimacing at the look of a certain coat, all highlight the lackluster, yet definitely emotional, connection embodied by the word *emote*.



5.1.8 *Love/Doll*

Love was chosen to highlight a very strong emotional connection between a child and a textile. The word love itself is often reserved for human/human or human/animal





connections. Thus, here the theme *love* was reserved for textile connections that were particularly intense or visceral in nature. Textiles that fell within this category were almost always brought by a child from home and into the classroom.



5.2 The Stories



The following sections offer a series of narrative moments from my time in the Gather Round preschool classroom, all focused on textiles and subsequently analyzed for the themes outlined above. Stories from this work are taken from all three months of the study, with particular attention given to stories drawn from the third, immersive, month. Following a story there is a recreation of Figure 14 which has now been used to help the reader visualize the intersections of theme within the story. A red area has been highlighted to show the intersections.



There are more moments of textile literacy and accompanying narrative than this one project can possibly capture. I could write about the experiences in Gather Round preschool for many months. Some children do not feature in the following stories but have suffused this project with their energy and time in such a way that I am eternally grateful to each one. I would like to thank and “name” them all: please join Bentley, Crystal, Cyrus, Dirk, Evelyn, Job, Joshua, Lucy, Noah, River, Ryder, Sally, Una, their textiles, their classroom and myself as we enter the stories of the Gather Round preschool.



5.2.1 The Zoo



Preschoolers at Gather Round are encouraged to bring one “lovie” (a soft attachment-item, often a plush animal, blanket, or doll) from home. When they enter the classroom, they are given several minutes to include this lovie in their free-play before a teacher takes it from them until nap time. Lovies that have been taken are placed in a black plastic milk crate on top of the fridge which is affectionately termed “the zoo”. Thus a teacher might lean down to a small child who is moving her stuffed





kitten amongst a block “forest” and say “It’s time for your kitten to go to the zoo” and this child will know what the teacher means, where her kitten is going to be for the day and the parameters of when she will get it back for nap time.



On a blindingly bright September morning during the first month of this project, I am sitting in the classroom writing notes about the Gather Round classroom space.



One large table (Table B) has been set with shaving cream on colorful plastic lunch trays. Small green glass tiles, the kind someone handy might buy at a home improvement store to create their own kitchen backsplash, are in nearby jars. Three children are sitting at this table and making elaborate and messy shaving cream and tile sculptures.



On the floor of the classroom, on the ABC rug, several children are using large wooden blocks to make a barn complete with a “red roof” and plastic animals. They are peacefully working together for the time being. I note that the floor has a wrinkled copy of *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Trout*⁹ laying forgotten (I can only presume) and an abandoned wicker basket, somewhat worse for the wear, holding eight red plastic apples in it.



As I sit taking notes two young girls approach me where I am seated on a low wooden chair. They take their stuffed animals, a glittery lamb with concerningly huge eyes and a brown dog with a purple bow stapled to its head, and make them pretend to run up and down my neck. The girls explain to me that they are “tickling me right here” and continue to giggle and move their animals up and down, now on my back. When one young girl asks the other if they can trade (to tickle me with the opposing animals), her peer asks me to “put [her] lamb in the zoo”. After I oblige, the other young girl now clutches her puppy tightly and informs me that the puppy “is going to the zoo, but not yet”. She then takes her puppy and puts him into the previously abandoned apple basket and kneels down. She uses her hands to scoot the basket around the floor by



⁹Sloat, T. (1998). *There was an old lady who swallowed a trout*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.





herself, eventually stopping near the Dramatic Play Area and taking the puppy back out. She throws him in the air giggling and says: “Toss and catch. Toss and catch.”. When the puppy falls to the ground on her third toss she laughs delightedly saying “Toss and not catch”.

The above vignette took place over mere minutes in the classroom. What could be seen as simply a momentary interaction between peers and, eventually, a researcher, can equally be seen as a meaningful and layered textile story. Indeed, I call this vignette a poignant moment of textile literacy, encapsulated in the themes I identify.

First, when the two young girls approach me and tickle my neck with their stuffed animals, we have a moment where they are using their textiles (here, stuffed animals) to *relate* both to me and to one another. They are physically using the textiles to approach me and interact with me. The young girls, who had limited experience of my being in their classroom at that time, chose to approach me through the familiar medium of their from-home stuffed animals, forming a connection between the three of us that was held momentarily with these textiles. Choosing a safe textile object (one from their personal lives) they were able to cheerfully approach and interact with a relative stranger.

When one child asks her peer to switch animals, we have both a moment between the girls where the textile might have related one to the other, but her peer denies the switch. Instead of saying “no” however, she asks me to put her animals in a space she has understood to be safe and inaccessible to other children. Here the textile serves to *connect* her to her own understandings about the classroom’s norms and her willingness to share a beloved toy. The meaning of the stuffed animals shifts, though the object and people in the story do not change.

Finally, when the young girl decides to keep her puppy with her, she begins a personal imaginary game with him, encapsulated by the word *enact*. She uses the textile-object as the medium in which she enacts an imagined story about the puppy, the basket and motion. Her words did not signify to me what this portion of her game





might be about, however, it was obvious by her focus and self-narration that she was engaged in a meaning-making enactment, somehow informed by an imaged scenario that featured her puppy. Furthermore, her narration of “toss and catch” versus “toss and not catch” is intriguing in its honesty. Perhaps she was simply narrating what ultimately happened as she threw and caught, or did not catch, her puppy. But it may well have signified something else entirely, highlighting again the sometimes-cryptic nature of the young child’s narrative construction (Gallas, 1994).

If we reference Figure 14 once more, we now can highlight the area at the intersection of *relate*, *connect*, and *enact* to create our new Figure 15.

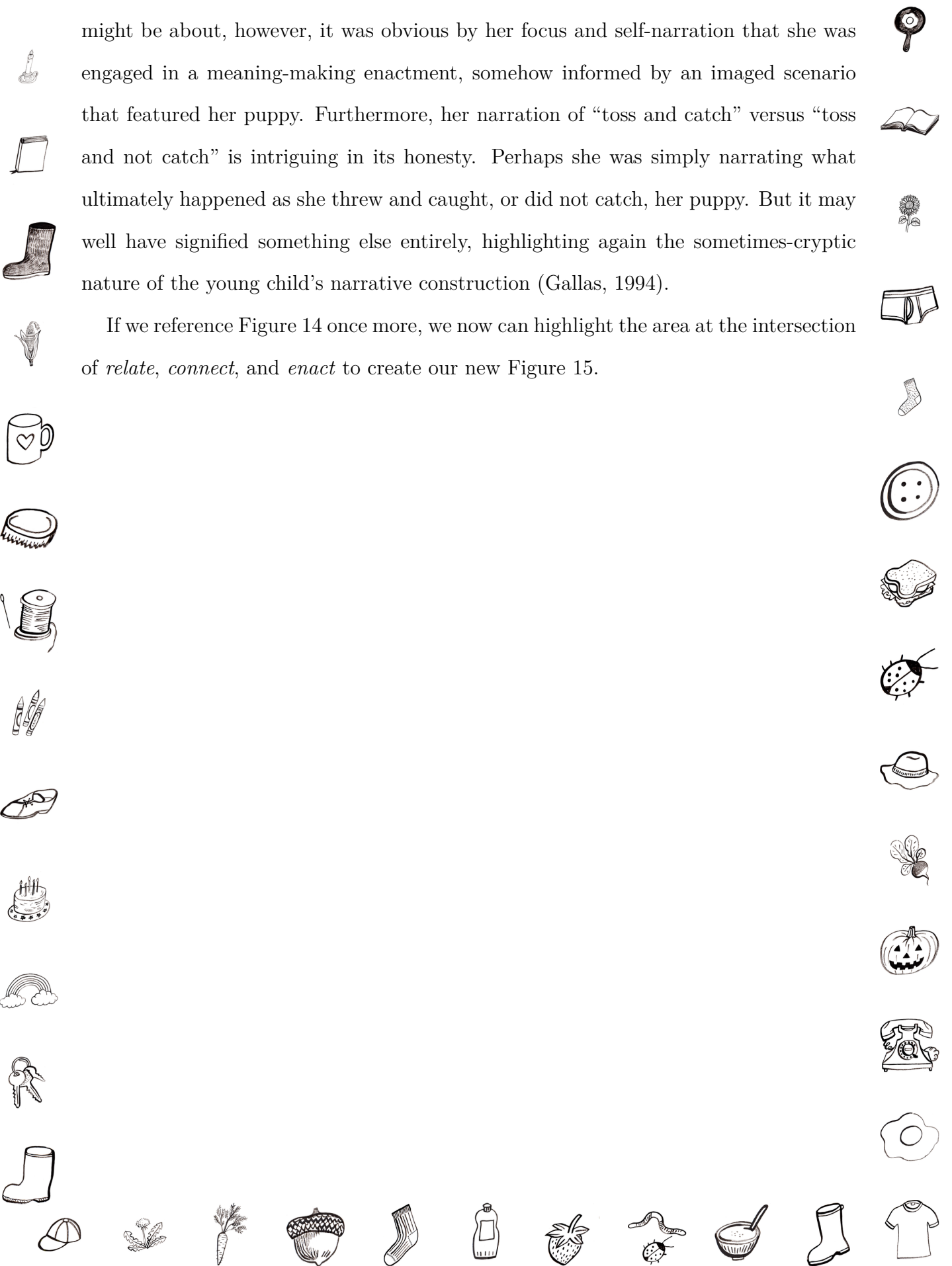
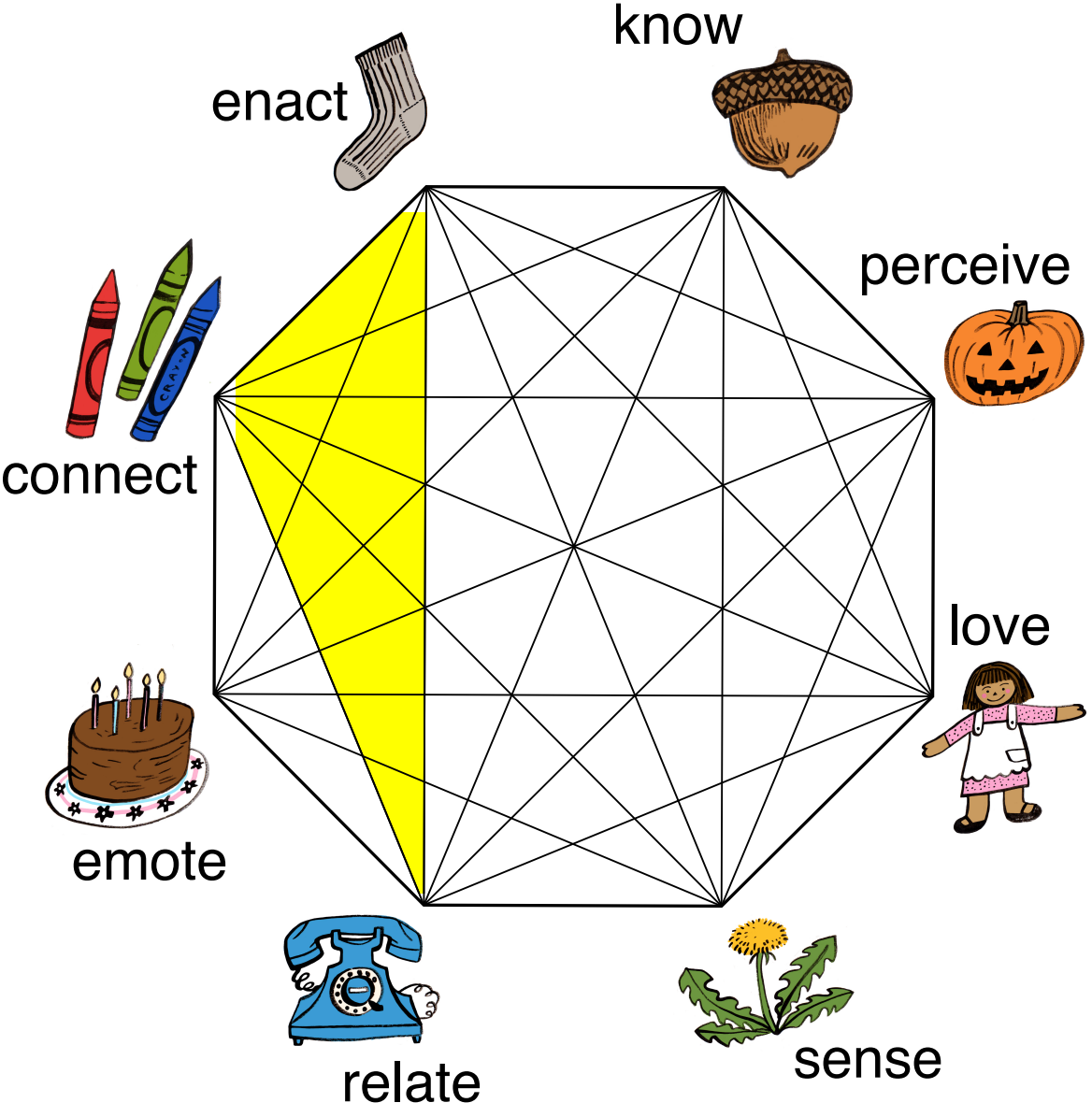




Figure 15

Thematic Web for "The Zoo"



You will notice that due to the complex nature of this visualization there are actually many points of intersection we might choose to show how these three themes exist and interact within the above story. Where the point is placed depends on the reader on the story. Here, in particular, I chose a point where the three lines meet, yet the intersection remained relatively centrally located between the three themes. In a later vignette when a particular theme felt more prevalent the area was drawn nearer to the





theme in question.



5.2.2 Lucy and the Pants



In the second month of the project, when I spent each day focused on one child at a time, I eventually had the honor of observing Lucy. Lucy was a four-year-old girl in the preschool classroom. During my time at the centre, I found her to be talkative, capable of self-care, often cheerful and particularly bonded with three other children.



After entering the classroom, a bit later in the morning which was typical for Lucy, she generally sought out her favorite peers to play with. Many games involved elaborate make-believe discourse featuring a few animals and select characters from the television show Paw Patrol®.



A dreary October morning spattered rain on the classroom windows and found all the children playing indoors. Lucy was loudly playing a Halloween game with her three preferred peers: Evelyn, Job and Crystal. Each was involved in imaginary preparations at the dramatic play centre. The game involved many scarves and crumpled bags from the classroom’s selection. Heated discussions about “tricks” and “treat or treating” were underway. Some of the bags Lucy described as “full of candy” and others as “full of sparkleys”. As I sat at a distance so as not to intrude on their game, Lucy’s attention came to rest on me. She made eye contact, smiled, and turned back to “treat or treating” with her friends.



Just three minutes later, unprompted, she set down her bag and approached me. She sat down next to me and leaned over to rest her head on my knee. After first simply smiling and running her fingers through her own straight blonde hair she sat up abruptly, leaning over the knee she had previously been laying on. Looking intently at my textured leggings she took her right hand and experimentally ran her fingernails across the textured stripes. Looking at me while giggling she said, “it’s a weird sound”. Looking at my face intently she tilted her head and asked me “Why are you wearing





a hat today? It's not cold.¹⁰ I simply said, "I wonder about that." Smiling broadly, Lucy accepted my statement and got up to return to her friends who were holding out her "treat or treat" bag and asking her to come play again.

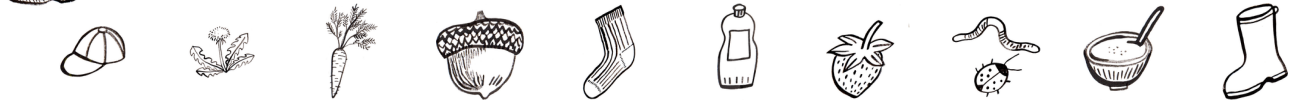


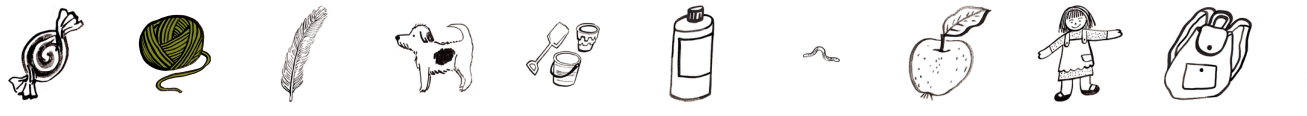
Here we have another densely layered textile vignette, told subtly through the narrative of the child. This story is unique in that it was the textiles *I* was wearing that prompted the textile-literate interaction. Moments such as this were rare. Far more common were children's stories about their own textiles or, occasionally, those of a peer. This story is particularly interesting to me as it draws in the themes *know*, *connect*, *sense* and *relate*, all as a child interacted with me and my textiled presence.

For Lucy the moment of connection between us came when she lay on my knee and the texture of my pants somehow attracted her attention. This began a moment I would encapsulate with the word *relate* as Lucy chose to create a momentarily relationship between us using my pants as a transactant. From here the story shifts to include *sense* as Lucy touches the pants and hears a sound, described as "weird", as a direct result of her touch. When she turns and relates this information to me, she notices my hat and decides to comment on its presence, *connecting* to what she *knows* of hats and when they are an appropriate textile to wear. While it is certainly factual that a hat can be worn when it is cold, many types of hats exist for weather, occupation, safety, or fashion reasons. Thus, the final comment Lucy makes about hats would be identified by both the themes *know* and *connect* as she is indeed claiming accurate information, yet she is drawing my hat into a moment of connection with her own experiences and understandings of that textile.

To illustrate this story on our now familiar thematic web we would highlight an area where *know*, *connect*, *sense* and *relate* all intersect. Again, we would have more than one choice of intersection. As the receiver of this story and the writer of this text I subjectively chose the following intersection (see Figure 16 below) as it seems to draw

¹⁰I was wearing a floral print head scarf, tied like a headband, to pull my hair back. This, I assume, was the item Lucy had identified as "a hat".





slightly nearer to *relate*, *sense* and *connect*, while straying just slightly away from *know*.

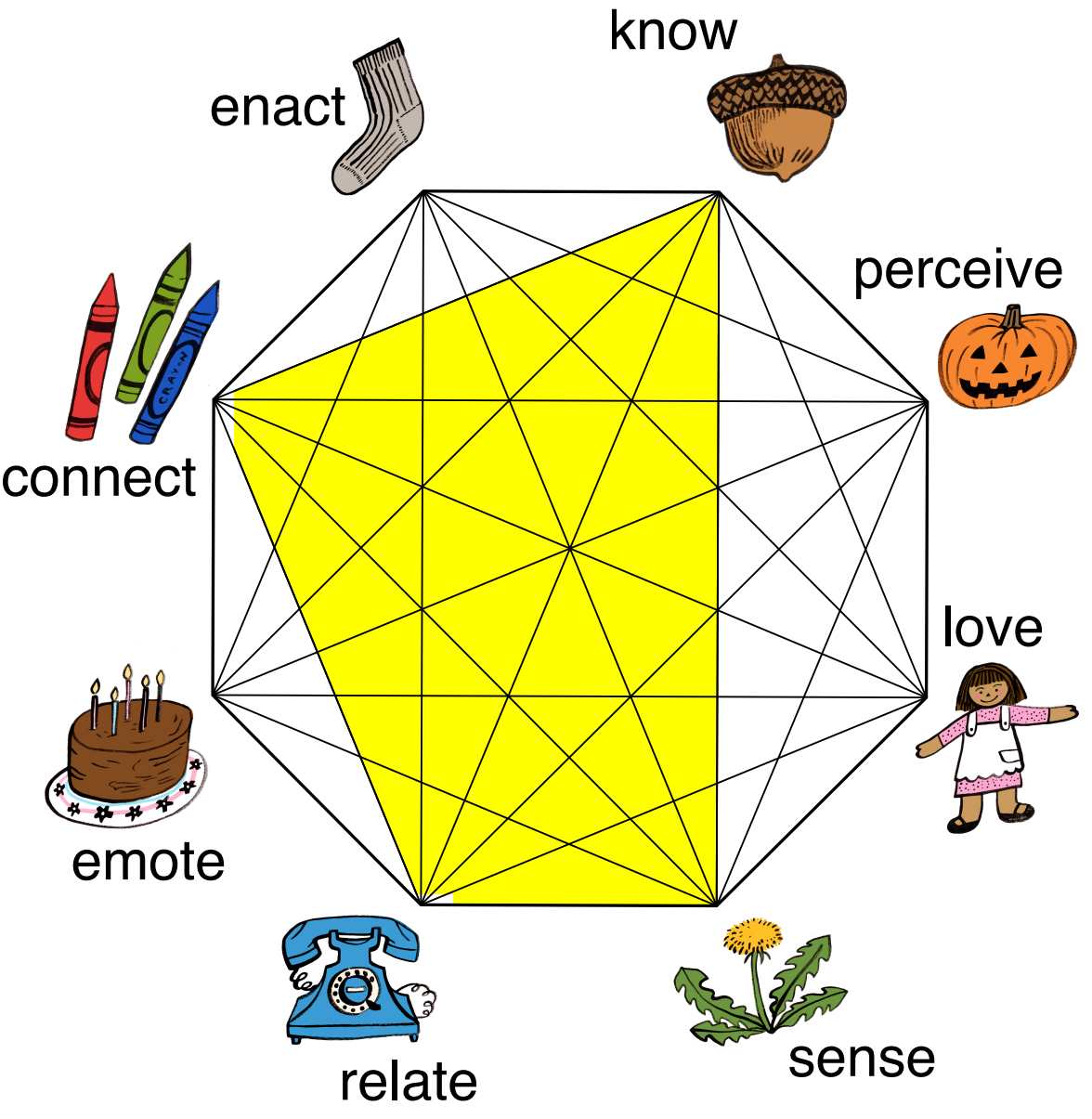


For me this best illustrates the complex moment of textile literacy between Lucy and myself. You will notice that when four themes intersect to frame a story instead of forming a point intersection, they form a triangle.



Figure 16

Thematic Web for "Lucy and the Plants"





5.2.3 Picture Day



Ryder was a three-and-a-half-year-old boy who joined the Gather Round preschool classroom partway through the school year. Previously he had stayed home with his mother and during a brief conversation with her, in order to describe the project and obtain consent, she referred to her son as a “mama’s boy”. Once in the classroom, Ryder was slow to interact with other peers and would remain silent much of the day. At the conclusion of the study he still refused to eat any school provided food. When Ryder was coaxed into speaking or responding by a teacher it became clear his speech was idiosyncratic in nature, lacking conventions and difficult to understand.

During the second month of the project, on the day when Ryder was to be observed exclusively, it happened that all of Gather Round children were going to be getting their pictures taken. These individual portraits were taken once annually and available to guardians for purchase. The photographer had been returning to the centre for many years and was accustomed to the teachers and some of the older children. His method for obtaining an authentic smile from each child was to use a small plush fish doll and ask a child to kick it. When a child had done so the photographer would make a silly noise and make the fish doll swim in the air up to the camera lens where the child would, typically, follow with their eyes and laugh.

When it was Ryder’s turn to have his photo taken, he nonverbally expressed enthusiasm by smiling, laughing and getting up with energy to go sit for the photographer. Ryder was highly engaged with the fish doll, moving his leg several times in an attempt to kick it repeatedly even after the photographer had moved it away from Ryder’s foot. Ryder laughed enthusiastically at the photographer’s antics and as he got up to leave the chair, he doubled back in an attempt to touch the fish doll up close. A teacher intervened and moved Ryder back into line to wait for his peers to have their turn.

During this time, I was standing back in an attempt to observe unobtrusively the photo taking process and, in particular, Ryder’s experience. As the teacher lined up





the children to return to the classroom I walked to the end of the line, near enough to hear that Ryder was laughing to himself. As we entered the classroom children dispersed to play in the preschool classroom but Ryder hung back by the door. When a teacher summoned a new small group of students to go have their photo taken Ryder volunteered to go again. Though the teacher turned him away, explaining that every child needed to have their photo taken only once, he stayed by the door smiling for ten more minutes, possibly waiting for the group of photo takers to return.

Ryder's story is a unique one as it is an entirely nonverbal moment of textile literacy. Within this observation the featured textile, here the stuffed fish doll, features the theme *emote*. Though we are tasked with reading Ryder's nonverbal literate expressions, we can surmise that he was genuinely engaged emotionally with his experience of the stuffed fish.

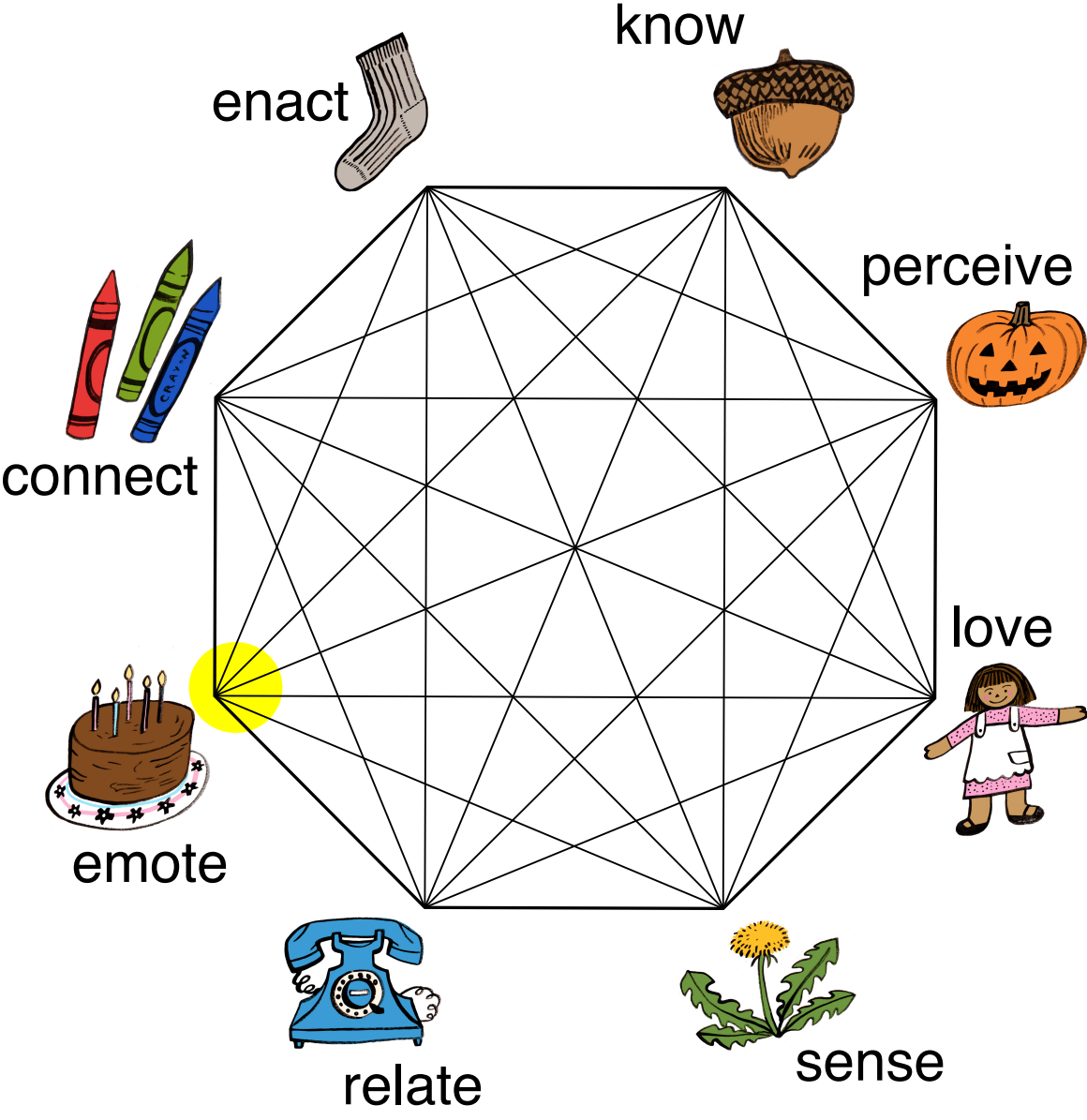
There is no nonverbal cue that leads me to think it was the photography that brought Ryder to this moment of *emoting*. As he strove to kick and touch the fish repeatedly, and the experience of watching the photographer move the fish made him laugh, I imagine that his desire to return to the photographer had to do with the textile and not the photo in question.

Though it is certainly possible Ryder's interaction with the stuffed fish doll had other thematic layers his nonverbal cues and my own researcher intuition lead me to believe this was a moment of textile literacy encapsulated completely by the theme *emote*.



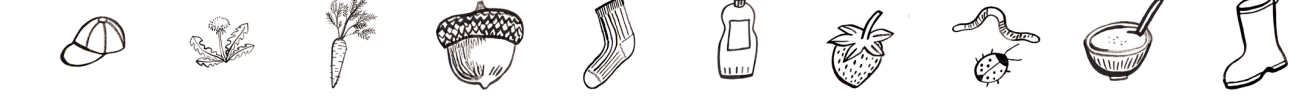


Figure 17
 Thematic Web for "Picture Day"



5.2.4 Hook Jeans

Job was four and he was proud of it. He was often dropped off by his father early in the school day. He had a hard time, often crying for a few minutes, when his father had to leave. On the morning of his observation day, he entered the classroom with his father and seemed to be in a particularly joyful mood. I was sitting at Large Table B nearest to the entryway door. Job had not seen me and was waving an enthusiastic





good bye to his departing father. His peer, Noah, approached to wave as well. When Job noticed Noah, he stopped waving, and turned delightedly toward him. He smiled, extended both arms to hold Noah’s elbows while simultaneously turning Noah gently to face him. Job said “Dad and I’ve got jeans. I’ve got pants like Daddy with hooks! [he touched the belt loops on his pants]. Daddy and I both have hook jeans on!” A nearby peer, Sally, overheard and responded quietly, almost as if to herself “And I’ve got jean shorts.” Noah smiled at both of them in turn and simply said “Yeah”. Noah moved away from his peers toward the block area while Job approached Large Table A where snack was being served. Sally wandered away from both of them without settling on a particular classroom activity for some time.



This moment of textile literacy, featuring Job, Noah and eventually Sally, I identify as having four themes: *know*, *love*, *connect*, and *relate*. The first three themes are within Job’s textiled narrative while Sally’s narrative gives us our fourth theme *relate*. From Job’s moment we see that he is using the connection between his father’s pants and his own as a moment of strong affective relationship: *love*. Job had so often exhibited sadness at his father’s departure. On this day he felt such a strong joyful connection to his father due largely (or possibly exclusively) to the similar pants they were both wearing, that he did not express any sadness at their parting. When Job turned to Noah to explain about his pants this textile literate moment shows us what Job *knows*. Job expresses that both he and his father are wearing pants called jeans (this is accurate): he *knows* about jeans. He goes on to describe a feature of both their jeans, that they have belt loops which he demonstrates and labels “hooks” when speaking with Noah. As his father is no longer in the room this textile narrative utilizes memory as well as knowledge, which is evident when Job *connects* to his understanding of these “hooks” and how they feature prominently on both of their pants.



For Sally, who joins the textile narrative toward the end, she is using textiles to *relate* to Job’s narrative which she has overheard. By proclaiming that she has “got jean shorts” she is making a connection between a textile material (jean or denim),



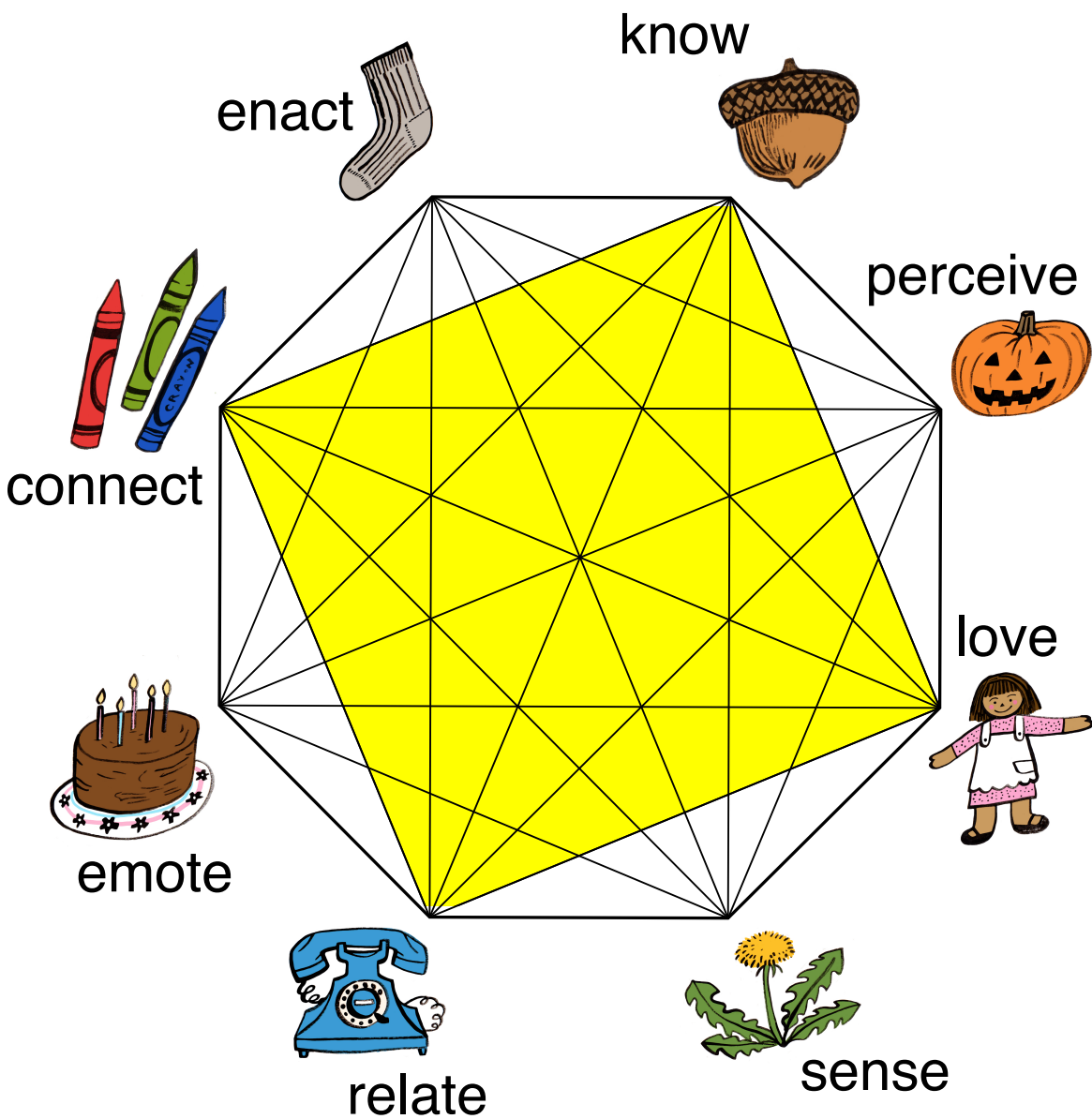


Job's experience of wearing this material, and her own experience of wearing it. Her narrative might also be labeled as *know* because she too is aware of the fabric quality we typically call "jean".



Figure 18

Thematic Web for "Hook Jeans"



5.2.5 Ocean, Worm, Fur

During the third month of this project all provocations I designed for the children were somehow related to textiles or textile fabrication (see p.46-59). During provoca-





tion 6 a microscope was set up for the children to look at a woven cloth up close.



It was the first cold day of December. The children were arriving late to school as parents and guardians fought with a sticky wet snow and the ensuing traffic. I, a seasoned winter driver from Vermont, had made it to school early enough to make sure the microscope provocation was well established before the children arrived. Not being a proficient user of microscopes, or truly any lab equipment, I felt it was necessary to set-up this provocation with ample time for trouble shooting. By the time a group of six children had arrived in the class, I was ready to greet them at the microscope.



I began by holding up a faded denim shirt. This particular button-up style shirt had been a favorite of mine for many years. My mother had bought it oversized to wear when she was pregnant with my brother over twenty years ago. I remember being six years old, leaning against the soft cotton weave and her growing belly. I “borrowed” the shirt from her as an undergraduate student and never returned it. Over many, many years of wear and repair the shirt had finally broken down to an un-fixable state. Nevertheless, it was a recognizable shirt-shape and I hoped that including it in this project would bring the soft magic I knew the shirt had always held for me.

I held up the shirt, surreptitiously smelling it as I did so, and asked the six children what I was holding. Of all six children gathered five said “shirt” and one said “sweater”. I then proceeded to silently take scissors and cut a small square of cloth from the corner of the shirt. Una, never one to shy away from conversation, gasped when scissors first met cloth. As I placed the small square under the microscope and adjusted the focus, six sets of eyes stared at me quizzically. No one spoke. Somehow the novelty of the tool, my own silence or perhaps the bizarre situation they found themselves in (I can only imagine it is not often an adult cuts clothing in front of children!) led each of them to silence.

I then invited each of them to peer into the microscope. By way of explanation I simply said: “This is a microscope” and here Lucy responded, “Oh! To see things we can’t see with our eyes like germs” and River added, “A microscope is for looking at





really small things”. I chose not to expand or comment on their responses. I smiled and invited River to look in the microscope first. It was clear by the hushed, reverent tones the children were engaged and curious about their peers’ understanding of the microscope.

Each child silently peered into the tool. Some lingered for up to a minute. Others gazed in for a brief moment and then looked up at me. As each child finished their turn, they told me what they thought they saw. I did not prompt their responses. Una, who had an overall tendency to comment on everything, looked into the microscope second and commented aloud. Perhaps the children were following her lead. Though River went first, he shrugged and walked away.

Una: “It looks like worms”

Evelyn: “Like stripes”

Lucy: “I see what’s inside it. Threads.”

Bentley: “The ocean”

Cyrus: “Fur”

All of the children’s responses intersect at the themes of *perceive*, *connect*, and *know*. Though some children’s responses might be more in line with one theme than another, this narrative moment is best taken collectively as each child responded to one another in some sense. This is to say that as the children took their turn, their narrative was informed by the child before them. Similarly, they continued to listen and live through the narrative after their turn. This sense of collective narrative was, in many senses nonverbal (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Despite it remaining difficult to articulate the reasons for the children’s collective narrative, I nevertheless feel compelled to call it thus (Shelton & Flint, 2019; Manusov & Patterson, 2006).

When the verbal responses to the textile under magnification began, River was silent. We cannot know this moment’s themes with clarity, but River’s previous response regarding his knowledge of a microscope imparts that he certainly *knows* something about the nature of microscopes and what they are for. His shrug did not seem to come





from a place of not knowing, but from a place of choosing silence. We might infer that he silently *connects* something about what he has seen to what he knows and feels.

Then, when Una takes her place at the microscope, she states that what she sees is “like worms”. Here we see she is drawing a *connection* between her knowledge of worms, her perhaps subconscious understanding of simile and her view of the fabric under magnification. What she expresses is not perfectly encompassed by the theme *perceive* or *know* as it is neither particularly factual (or not) to claim fabrication under magnification looks like worms. Evelyn has a similar thematic response to Uma’s when she says “like stripes” drawing a *connection* to her understanding of stripes and what she sees under the microscope. Interestingly, both children choose things (worms and stripes) that are linear in shape, with an observable thickness and definite boundaries. The difference might be that worms have the potential to intersect with one another while stripes are necessarily parallel to each other.

Lucy takes a narrative step further to describe not simply what she sees, but a mechanism for how she is able to see it. For her moment of added narrative, the theme *know* is particularly relevant. She expresses a factual experience that the microscope allows her to see “what’s inside” and, even further factually she sees “threads”. Certainly, the woven cotton fabric she is looking at is indeed woven of these “threads” she is able to see and identify. How Lucy arrives at this statement is less evident and thus we can imply she is drawing some type of *connection* to her previous experience with microscopes, fabric, her peers’ responses and thread.

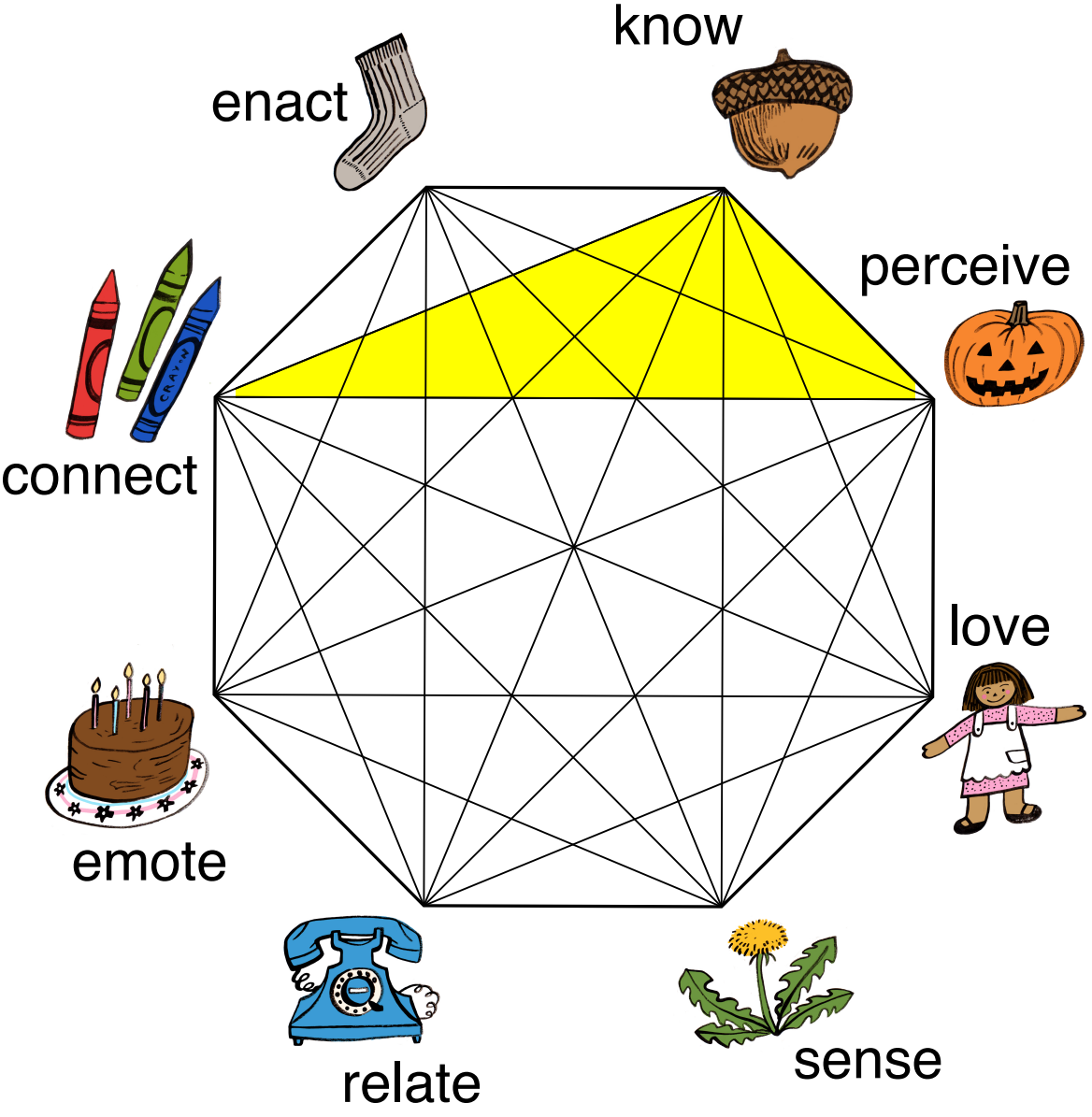
Bentley and Cyrus’ narrative additions mark a more intense thematic turn to the theme *perceive* as they express the fabric up close looks like “the ocean” or “fur”. As neither of them use the work “like” to describe this reaction we do not have a clear moment of simile in their narratives; unlike Una and Evelyn they are not saying that what they see is similar to another item they can imagine, but simply this it is that item. They might be employing metaphor, or they may be making a concrete statement about what they see. They explain that they see “fur” or “the ocean”. Though we





might be inclined to say they likely do not imagine it is actually fur or the ocean, their language does not reflect this as clearly as Una or Evelyn. Thus, their narrative additions centre on the theme of *perceive*. As a collective narrative the children’s stories intersect on the themes of *perceive*, *know*, and *connect*. A figure that illustrates this intersection is shown below.

Figure 19
Thematic Web for “Ocean, Worm, Fur”





5.2.6 Jingle Wool



The seventh provocation offered to the children centered around the sensory experience of feeling and manipulating unspun sheep’s wool. The large Sensory Table was emptied of any previous material and filled with loose carded sheep’s wool, referred to as roving. Roving is a loose unspun form of wool, but it has been carded (combed) and washed. Although some lanolin and plant material might remain embedded in the wool from when it was attached to the sheep’s body, much of this is gone.



Children at Gather Round are allowed to work at the Sensory Table in groups of three. The table was open and available to all children and I positioned my chair near the centre without being so close that the children necessarily interacted with me. The wool provocation proved popular and it did become necessary to place a time limit on how long any one child could work at the centre in order for all children to eventually be able to access this space. This type of “timed” work is not encouraged in the preschool classroom, but it does happen when certain provocations require finite supplies or space.



River and Cyrus joined the Sensory Table provocation after it had been on offer for about thirty minutes. River, three years old, lived with his older brother and their “mummy”. Often River’s interests and verbal mannerisms reflected this older-sibling dynamic (e.g. River told me on two separate occasions about watching “horrid movies” with his brother and how they “weren’t scary because they weren’t all about real stuff”). Cyrus was the oldest child in the classroom, having passed his fifth birthday, and lived with a baby sister, his mom and his dad. Cyrus brought a blue and yellow blanket to school each day, discussed with his peers a deep love of Cookie Monster® and had displayed separation anxiety whenever his mother brought him to school.



Though the two boys did not come to the Sensory Table together, their play and dialogue quickly morphed into a two-child narrative. When River first approached the Table he picked up the wool and sniffed it tentatively. Immediately he exclaimed, “It





smells like farm!” Cyrus quickly leaned over to smell the wool in River’s hand and stated gravely “It smells like a wolf”. After a brief pause where both boys moved wool around the bin and took new handfuls each Cyrus continued, “We could make things and put them in there [points away from bin], then cook them, then wear them”.

This suggestion was taken into consideration by River who thought for a moment before taking a handful of wool from the table and stretching it around his right knuckles, as if to mimic the top portion of a glove. He turned to Cyrus to say “It stays on like a mitten. We could make mittens!” From here the boys spent considerable time playing with the wool, wrapping it around their hands in silence and trying different wrapping patterns in response to River’s prompt to “make mittens”. After six minutes Cyrus turned to me and the following dialogue ensued between the three of us:

River: [to me] “Is this from a real sheep?”

Me: “Yes.”

River: [to no one in particular] “This is heaven.” [he pats the wool around his hands and sighs]

Cyrus: [to River] “[I’m going to] wrap my hands like Wolverine®.” [turns to me] “Can you tie it like a bow?”

River: [interrupts Cyrus and me] “It’s made of tiny fur” [shows tiny-ness of this “fur” by holding thumb and forefinger about one centimeter apart]

...at this juncture the teacher calls both boys over to use the washroom before having snack and the conversation and play abruptly stop.

While the children’s two-voice narrative was interrupted by the teacher’s classroom schedule, there was nevertheless several moments of intriguing textile literacy woven into their play. This two-voice narrative is unique in that it embodies every theme identified within this work. The boys use language, gesture and interaction to invoke the themes of *enact*, *know*, *perceive*, *sense*, *relate*, *love*, *connect* and *emote* at different moments in the above narrative. At the closing of this work this remained the most nuanced and dense moment in the collective narrative of the children.





Beginning when the boys exchange dialogue about the sensory experience of smelling the wool we have the theme of *sense* within this narrative. As they use their sense of smell to engage with the wool, they each exchange what they *perceive* the wool to smell like. In the case of River’s expression that the wool “smells like a farm” we might also highlight the theme of *connecting* as he makes some sort of link between wool, livestock, and farming. Cyrus chooses to voice that the wool smells like “a wolf” to him. Both boys choose to structure their sentences as similes (using the expression “like a” in both cases). It seems, at least linguistically, that neither thinks the wool *is* a farm or a wolf, nor necessarily does it come from these places and animals. I choose to highlight the themes of *connect* and *perceive* in this portion of their narrative as we know that wool does not in fact come from wolves, though olfactorily speaking it very well may smell like wolves (I have no firsthand experience with wolves). Nevertheless, the boy’s language points to an intersection between their *sense* of smell and both their *perceptions* and *connections* about that smell.

When River continues the dialogue by claiming the wool stays on his hands “like a mitten” and inviting Cyrus to join him in a game of making mittens he is using what he *knows* about the wool to form a moment of *relationship* between him and his peer. Because he is correct in stating that wool and mittens are linked, this particular moment of dialogue moves away from the theme of perception and towards that of *knowing*. He uses this moment of knowledge to imagine a game (encompassed by the theme *enact*) that invites his peer Cyrus to *relate* to him momentarily. Interestingly, we might note that Cyrus had earlier invited River to “make things [...] then cook them, then wear them”. This initial moment of relationship is expanded upon by River in the imagining of a mitten-making game. However, it is Cyrus who first identified that the wool might be made into something wearable. It seems that the idea of taking the wool items to “cook them” sheds light on how the process of moving from wool to garment remains mysterious to the children (Brophy & Alleman, 2002). As few people knit and use wool in their homes anymore, Cyrus made a *connection* to other





production methods he was familiar with that move from a raw material to a useable item (uncooked food ingredients “cooked” to become an edible meal).

When the two boys turn to me and include me in their dialogue River starts with a question (“Is this from real sheep?”) that encapsulates the theme of *know* and *relate* as he uses his knowledge about wool and sheep to relate with me about the accuracy of his knowledge. From here though he moves to *emote* and *love* as he claims the wool feels “like heaven” and he dives his hands into the bin to feel the wool. Though I can’t know how he came to use the word “heaven” I can tell from his tone, his expression and the sensory experience of touching the wool that for him “heaven” is a signifier of delight, joy and emotional connection. It is important to note that the following day the teacher let me know that River had taken a bit of wool home in his pocket and his mother had brought it back. After assuring the teacher and River himself that this was fine with me, and that he was welcome to take some wool home with him, I was left feeling that the themes of *love* and *emote* were strongly tied to River’s experiences with the wool. By wanting to capture and retain a piece of the experience he called “like heaven” we see that River wanted to remain connected to the wool.

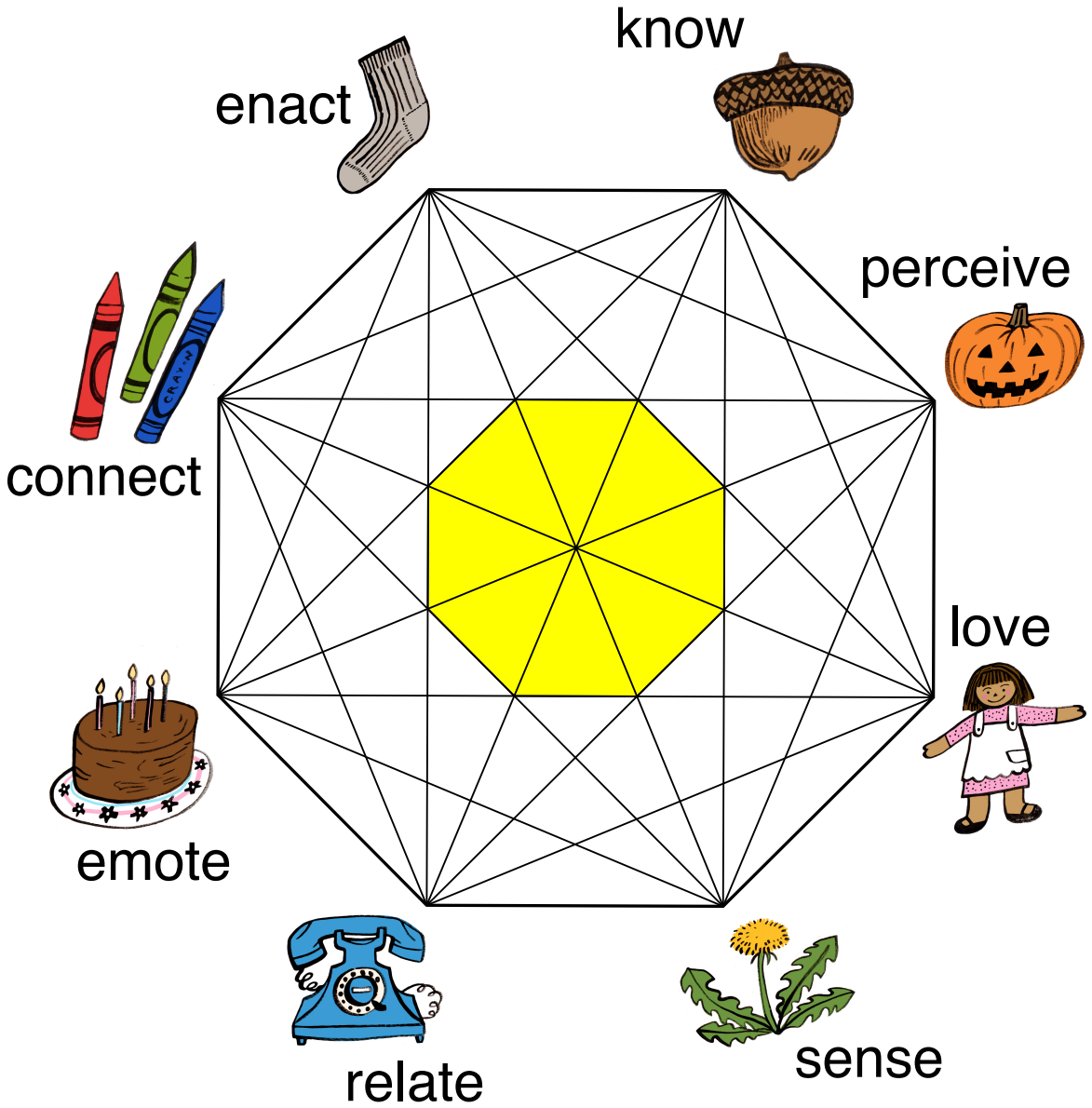
Finally, the narrative concludes when the two boys, led by Cyrus, try wrapping their hands and helping each other to tie the wool on.

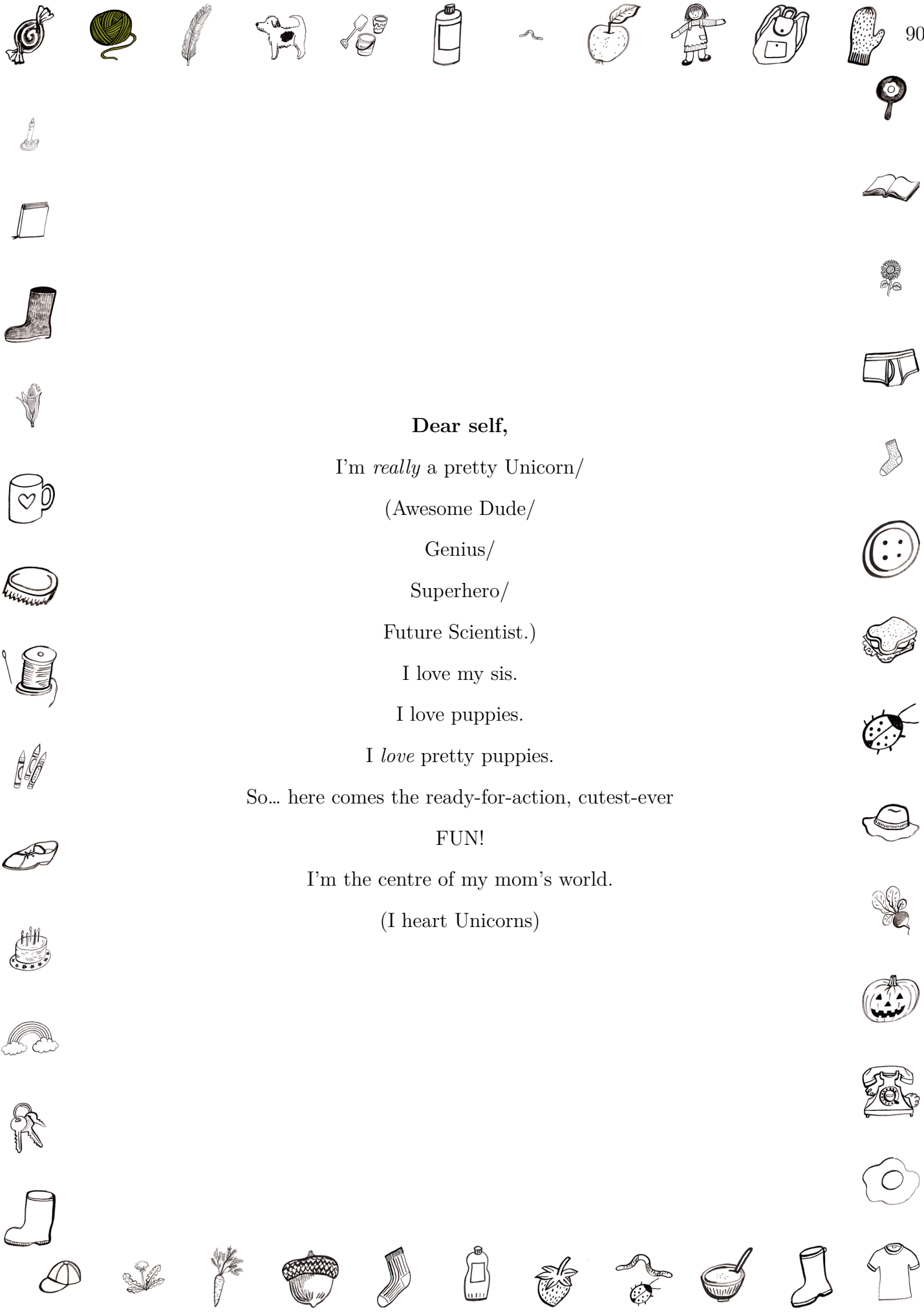




Figure 20

Thematic Web for "Jingle Wool"





Dear self,
 I'm *really* a pretty Unicorn/
 (Awesome Dude/
 Genius/
 Superhero/
 Future Scientist.)
 I love my sis.
 I love puppies.
 I *love* pretty puppies.
 So... here comes the ready-for-action, cutest-ever
 FUN!
 I'm the centre of my mom's world.
 (I heart Unicorns)



6 (Bandana) Conclusions

Bearly is my eldest daughter's most beloved stuffed bear. When he was a little boy, Bearly was my *husband's* most beloved stuffed bear. Bearly is slightly stinky. There is nothing unique about him, as far as stuffed bears go. In the day of his manufacturing, I feel certain that hundreds of thousands of Bearlys went out to shops. His fur is a matted brown polyester fiber that makes me sneeze. His nose is dull black plastic, dinged. Though his eyes in their prime looked glossy and soul-filled, under the plastered down fur they have become invisible. Yet he is my daughter's most beloved. She picked him herself. From the *many* gifts and new items we were given (first grandchild, both sides), she chose this bear. He is one of her textiled objects; he is "becoming with" her every day.

When my younger daughter joined our family, my eldest daughter felt, quite naturally, a bit displaced and jealous. She went through a phase of slapping first me, then my husband and eventually her sister or whoever was holding her sister at the time. She was told gently and repeatedly "we can hit things, like the couch, but we can't hit people". Over time she hit almost every surface available to her. The couch, the rug, the bath water, the changing table pad, her doll and her books... not once did she choose to hit Bearly. She has never hit herself. I have watched her get up and walk from the kitchen all the way to a couch cushion, while holding Bearly, to hit the cushion. Bearly, she seems to be saying wordlessly, does not deserve to be hit. His "thing-ness" is entangled with my being.

6.1 Children, Mundanity and Materials (again)

When we turn our gaze to the objects in our lives and stories, we must clean off our smeared glasses and really *see* the connections between everyday objects and knowing, learning and growth. Imagine a young woman spends years saving her pennies to finally buy an original work of abstract art from a gallery. The beautiful canvas, gilt-framed





and splashed with neon colors, hangs above her bed so she can see it when she wakes up. For several months she feels a little thrill seeing it and brings in her morning cup of coffee to sit nearby and just *be* with her painting.



Then it happens: in a rush for work one morning, she doesn't stop to sit with the painting. Slowly the ritual fades and her beloved work of art becomes less and less visible to her under the gaze of mundanity and the work of being alive. Even the most beloved and abstract objects become invisible under our everyday gaze.



But young children are a perfect audience for seeing freshly what has become invisible. How many parents can empathize with a toddler who will only wear the same two purple shirts over and over? The love for these items stays fresh. “[...] More than adults, children are still open and able to see themselves as integral to this world, and are therefore better positioned to develop a symbiotic relationship of “becoming-with” the world. Ironically, most adults seem to have lost this capacity to a large degree” (Weldemariam & Wals, 2020, p.22). Young children are primed to attend to the everyday because, for them, the work of being alive still requires growth, discovery and openness. Generally, they are not in charge of paying bills, of cooking dinner or of driving to and fro: they are ready to attend. Young children are well suited to paying close attention because, for them, the gaze of mundanity does not yet exist.



6.1.1 *Insight and Recommendation*

Until very recently most ECEfs initiatives have focused on either the child living in a loving relationship with nature or the child as a change agent with the power to protect nature (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2019; Malone, 2015; Taylor, 2013). Following what Bennet calls the “material turn” scholars and theorists have begun paying attention to the entangled reality of childhood and to the assemblages in which young children exist (2010). “[This] decenters the human and relieves children from being or needing to become the primary agents of change. This alternative perspective [...] stresses the importance of children’s entanglements within multiple human and non-





human assemblages and relations” (Weldemariam & Wals, 2020, p.15). This interwoven relationship between the human and non-human world helps situate early childhood as entangled within nature; neither subordinate nor dominant, but better seen as an “ebb and flow” of agency (Barad, 2007). By paying attention to the materials, here the textiles, at Gather Round preschool this study is situated within this “material turn”. Furthermore, it helps us navigate any potential conclusions this work could offer: there are no hero narratives or quick fix solutions to be found. This is the work of “becoming with” and of entanglement (Bennet, 2010).

The visual is this: I take a rock, just big enough that it fills my palm and I clasp my four fingers around it. I am standing at the edge of a small pond. Small, but deep. I lift my arm shoulder height and let the rock fly into the pond, aiming as best as I can for the deep, dark centre. There is a slight breeze. There are trees and ducks and even a few other human visitors to the pond: there is movement other than my thrown rock. But the rock hits the water and splashes satisfyingly, the water rippling out in small circles. “Oh, oh, oh...” the water seems to be saying. The larger droplets of water that flew off from my splash make their own concentric rings in the water “Wee, wee, wee...” the tiny circles say. I leave the pond, the rock now deep in the centre of the pool. The rock will stay there.

This visual is the best corollary I can draw for this work. It is the chief insight of the entire project. Seeking questions and listening for textile relationships has led me here: the concentric rings that are caused by one thrown stone *matter*. The stone that stays in the pond *matters*. When we listen to children and seek the textiles in their narrative relationships, we are throwing one stone (*listen, listen, listen*) and stepping back to perceive the rings as best we can. As we leave, we hope that the “textile stone” stays, we hope the connections that we listened for and, in gentle measure, solicited, will stay too.

This stone metaphor offers us as researchers a good way to think about the provocations in this project that do not seem to “do” anything. This is to say that so many





moments of narrative richness, centering on textiles, do not include the provocations I set out for the children. I believe this is simply because the provocations themselves are only stones. We cannot guess how they poke or prod the stories the children tell and live, and perhaps the answer is “not at all”, but setting them out and considering them matters. A particularly salient example of this are the standing looms set out for the children to engage with weaving on their own terms (see pgs. 47-48). While these looms were much admired by teachers and parents entering the classroom, I cannot claim they were particularly engaging to the children in that moment. While children did engage with the looms, no particularly rich narrative (verbal or non-verbal) emerged from the loom provocation. *But*, I cannot know how the looms shaped or presented themselves in later narrative moments. Having occurred as one of the later provocations of the project, it may be that I was no longer present in the classroom space when the looms became part of the children’s dialogue. It may also be that the children’s experience/expression of the looms was too cryptic for me to notice (a failing of mine, not theirs).



All of this means that textiles- “stones”, thrown and listened for, may make for a project that seemingly does little. As I stated in the prologue, I wanted to resist activity. This is a work of listening and I am comfortable with the discomfort of not knowing what has happening. We can all remind ourselves that knowing is a troublesome term, at best, and that what is known might be momentary, is certainly better understood in context, and is ever-shifting. For this project, I was a listener and the output of this same project is only to help you hear what I heard, and then let you go. I cannot know what you will hear. I do not know what the children heard either.



Certainly, the children were not the only participants, not the only ones changed. I hope that the educators who were along for the textile-narrative ride were inspired to listen to material/relationships in their classroom. I equally hope that readers of this work, be they researchers, teachers or perhaps both, will listen to the material/relationships in their own work. My main recommendation is simple: you do not





need any special materials, the textiles and their relationship to you (or others) is present without interference. You simply need to *listen*. Of course, if you'd like to inspire others, it will greatly help to document what you heard. Mary Oliver, in her poem *Sometimes*, advises on "Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." (2008, n.p.) So again, we arrive at narrative inquiry as a form of living, stories to "live by" reminding us that life is lived narratively (Clandinin & Huber, 2002).



Now we can add that listening to materials deepens this narrative attention, while also widening the narrative lens, to include the more-than-human world. As mentioned above, you are (very likely) already clothed. Children in schools are clothed, are sitting on carpets and are waving cloth parachutes in gym class. No new materials need to be added and, what's more, no special skills are required. While I do not refute that my ability to knit and sew informed this project, the textiles were present and awaiting my attention regardless of my skill set. You will see in Appendix D that textile projects can be undertaken without special skills sets and with only repurposed materials. The chief recommendation of this project is simple: Just listen. You don't need special skills, tools or materials. Listening and finding a method for recording are immeasurable contributions.



6.1.2 Textile literacy and multimodal literacy

Text and textile share the same latin root, *texere*, meaning "to weave" (Barthes, 1967). This is no coincidence. Metaphorically this is easy to imagine as a text is, at its core, a weaving of words. Drawing upon this metaphoric and linguistic connection, it might help educators to consider how textile literacy might inform of deepen multimodal literacies in the early childhood classroom. A forward-looking research gaze leads me to imagine future projects that seek to weave textile literacy provocations with other forms of multimodal literacy provocations within the early years classroom. What themes might emerge here? Would a web visualization still serve?





Let us remind ourselves that multimodal literacy is, at its simplest, simply language study that utilizes more than one mode of meaning (Mills & Unsworth, 2017). “In the case of young children, printed words, spoken words, drawings, building blocks, gestures, numbers, alphabet letters, songs, music, dance, graphs, tastes, and smells are some of the different signs or modes that come together in various combinations during language arts activities in the early childhood classroom. Multimodal expression is natural for young children since they do not necessarily privilege one mode of expression over another” (Taylor & Leung, 2019, p.2). Drawing on the propensity of young learners to express and learn through several modes at a time, textile literacy adds a dimension of physicality that other modalities might ignore (Bennett, Gunn, Gayle-Evans, Barrera, & Leung, 2018). Furthermore, new materialist studies, such as this one, give researchers a language for discussing the addition of textiles to multimodal literacy study. Multimodal literacy then can simply add the textiles already present in children’s lives and learning to the overall discourse of young children’s literacies. We might ask: how are textiles implicated in meaning making for the young child? Future work in textile literacy could look to early childhood educators and classrooms to include the textile as one of the many modalities available within early literacy learning.



6.2 Only Questions

This document, the physical text created at the conclusion of this work, has tried to complicate how we learn while we listen. I have been trying to take on “grounded relational research” within and without the Gather Round preschool room (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor & Blaise, 2016). As stated in the prologue this project resisted activity to focus on listening. I chose not to impose a singular research question at the start of the work. In order to turn my attention, and hopefully the reader’s attention, to the promises of listening as method I choose to close this work with a series of 3 questions that act as their own metaphorical provocations (see pages 38-40). In





the spirit of setting out materials for preschoolers to engage with at their leisure, a form of “come and join me if you wish”, the 3 questions below move from the specific (individual) to the broad (systems) to invite the reader to “come and join” too. They are designed to meet you wherever you are if your own work would like to value listening. In order to remind us all that a “pedagogy of place does not stop at the front gate” I wanted a project that *continues* listening by asking questions instead of proposing answers (Duhn, 2012, p. 26).



6.2.1 Individual: How Might Textile Listening Act on the Individual Level?



Language. I invite you to consider your own language. When we attend to the materials, here the textiles, in a relational way we gradually become aware of them.



This awareness can come to impact how we talk about our relationship to the nonhuman world, and ultimately *how we relate* to that world. When we turn away from a



human hero narrative (in ECEFS, but also in our own adult lives) we can start “to think about how our experiences about sustainability can be made meaningful and share-



able through shared storytelling so that we can actually engage in more sophisticated ways” (Sandilands, 2016, cited in Nelson & Hodgins, 2020, p.155). Said differently,



Sandiland’s point is simply that focusing only on catastrophic natural events and a human need to “save” the world does not provide opportunities for meaningful relationships;



most people feel defeated in the face of that enormity (not to mention our youngest citizens). Aligning with Sanilands, I agree that changing our language can go



far in changing this dynamic and forming engagements between humans and nonhuman worlds. What might this look like?



I have come up with a pragmatic way that has, thus far, worked for me. I simply change the order of my sentences when I discuss action. For example, instead of telling



my daughter “you are playing with your silk cape” I might exclaim “There is silk cape around your shoulders!”. In this way the cape is acting on my daughter and not the

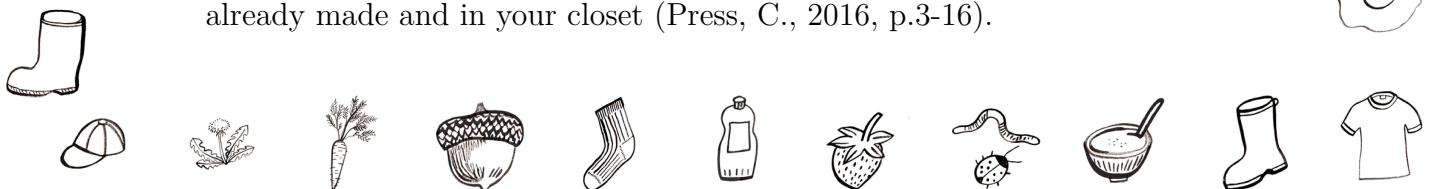




other way around. While it seems like a simple tool, helping others see that things act on them as well, might slowly change our collective narratives. Instead of “you are planting a garden” we might have “a garden is blooming in front of your house”. Instead of “please put the plate in the dishwasher” we might have “that plate will get washed if it is put in the dishwasher”. Aligning with Latour again, we can change our language to highlight the tracing of the actors (2005). We can normalize the presence and agentic qualities of the more than human world. I know it seems simple, but I am deeply arguing that changing our relationship and narrative ultimately changes how we feel able to connect and “do” sustainability. Instead of being called upon to save everything, we might need only be called upon to notice our *relationship* to everything.

Fashion. I equally invite you to reimagine what “sustainable fashion” really is. As I said before, we are all clothed for a huge portion of our time on this Earth. Much has been made of “sustainable fashion” in recent years, yet, having a sustainable wardrobe is not always what you might imagine. As I looked at literature concerning ECEfS and general EfS initiatives, it was impossible to dismiss the plethora of work specifically aimed at sustainability within the fashion industry. While this project aims to shift our relationship to textiles by offering listening as an alternative to activity, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the deep work of many authors, researchers and activists who take up sustainable fashion. Below, I offer a curated list of sustainable methods one can consider when engaging with their own clothing. These eleven tenets of sustainable fashion are simplified to make them memorable and accessible regardless of budget. The list below is based on the work of several authors whose work often overlaps. Thus, few ideas *belong* to any one author. The authors listed after each bullet point indicate where I personally first encountered the idea. Any of the works listed are a wonderful starting place if you wish to read further.

1. Wear what you already own- there is no more sustainable item than the one already made and in your closet (Press, C., 2016, p.3-16).





2. Wear it again – don't be afraid to be an "outfit repeater". Wearing things 30 times or more is considered the "magic number" to decrease fast fashion manufacturing (Eyskoot, M., 2018, p. 18-40).



3. Buy goods secondhand – they have already been made (Eyskoot, M., 2018, p.63-67).



4. Don't buy things you aren't going to wear often – no matter the occasion (Press, C., 2016, p.3-16).



5. Fix items when they break – if you want to learn to mend something there are incredible resources on the internet or at your local library. Mending circles exist in many community organizations. Tailors and repair shops still exist, I promise. (Rodabaugh, 2018, p.27-42).



6. Trade with your friend or family member– this is especially useful for high use items with excellent durability, like winter coats (Eagan, G., 2014, p.71-125).



7. Rent it – many online (and occasionally local) shops will rent items that have short use windows (e.g. formal gowns or maternity wear) (Cline, E., 2019, p. 138-140)



8. Wash your clothes as they were meant to be washed – clothing will last the longest when care directions are followed. If an item's required care isn't going to work for you (Ahem, "handwash only"!!), then don't buy it. (Cline, E., 2019, p. 213-228)



9. Keep your closet tidy – this surprises people, but, if you know what you own and where it is, you are less likely to buy things you don't need, or wash something that isn't dirty (Eyskoot, M., 2018, p.57-63).





ing washing and drying. Synthetic items you own or need can be washed using a GUPPYFRIEND®¹¹ to reduce breakdown and shedding of microplastics. (Burgess, 2019, p. 129-197).



Then, when all of this is exhausted, *buy the thing you truly want and will use*. A sustainably made dress that you never wear, does not end up worn, no matter how sustainable the production. Any sweater that you wear hundreds of times is a better choice. This project has been a testament to the premise that owning something, here clothing, is a relationship. The best way to honor that relationship is by choosing items you will want and use over and over again; items that you want for life (Button, T., 2018).

The Fibershed. Lastly, I invite you to learn about your local textile story and own relationship to what Burgess has termed “the fibershed”. When California-based Rebecca Burgess began her work as a textile artists and hobby farmer of indigo plants, she likely did not imagine how large her project would grow. Burgess, who began with a few trays of indigo seedlings in her apartment, now works as a writer/artist/activist promoting the idea of the “fibershed” (2019). The concept of a fibershed is Burgess’ solution to fast fashion and pollution. She writes that we all need “place-based textile sovereignty, which aims to include rather than exclude all the people, plants, animals, and cultural practices that compose and define a specific geography” (p. 7). For Burgess, we need our textiles to be deeply local; keeping our farmers, ranchers, weavers, artists, seamstresses, investors and/or crafters connected to produce the textiles we wear and use daily.

What Burgess is investing in, what she believes in, is “place-based textile culture” (p. 221). This is such a useful concept, a wonderful way to exit-but-enter our particular project. Her book has a helpful guide to local fibersheds and projects that are already

¹¹A GUPPYFRIEND® bag can be purchased from <https://en.guppyfriend.com>. Note that the author is not connected in any way with this product and does not benefit financially from your purchase. At the time of this writing the GUPPYFRIEND® is the only product of its kind and it highlighted above due to this.





being worked on; you can look yours up. This is such a small useful point of entry to “becoming with” the fibers local to you. You might be surprised by what exists nearby that you can join. Projects range from farming initiatives, dye gardens, mending circles and even “grow your own jeans” projects that takes participants on a journey from soil to pants. You might be surprised (or delighted) to know there is already an “upper Canada” chapter.

6.2.2 Research: How Might We Better Represent Textile-Listening in Narrative Research?

As McKenzie and Bieler point out, if attention is focused only on how children can act as change agents (e.g. must *save* nature), the divide between humans and non-humans deepens (2016). While it is not the goal of this study (nor of any study cited within this paper) to ignore the agency and empowerment of young children, it is important to consider the potential when the human is decentered and non-humans (animals, environments and materials) are brought into focus. For narrative research, I have wondered how we might go about representing this textile-listening to readers of research. How can entanglement and materiality lift itself off the confines of 2-dimensional page? Figure 2 was created with exactly this entanglement of material and human agency in mind. It is in itself a form of conclusion. It has been designed to shift our focus from the child as agentic meaning-maker, to the items that participated in the meaning of this work in concert with the child actor. Using a web helps to make messy the work of this ontological shift.

The use of a web illustration helps the researcher envision entanglement and draw readers into the process of listening to materiality (here, to textile/children assemblages). First conceived of during a project that looked at knitter motivation, using a visual structure, while limited, does aid the researcher seeking entanglement and listening (Dunnington, 2018). The question the researcher must pose of the themes found within their narrative study is: *how do the themes relate to one another? how*





does materiality serve the themes? what shapes or structures help us visualize this entanglement?



For this particular project a web was an interesting structure to impose on the themes for several reasons. As stated earlier, it necessarily calls forth ideas of weaving (spiders) and thread (lace). It also helps the reader imagine that all themes are connected, thinly, but that plucking any one thematic thread will affect the entirety of the entanglement. Lastly, it helps us envision the connections between themes as minute areas of intersection on our interwoven structure.

For other projects the web imagery may not be relevant. Would a triangle best serve the materiality? Three thematic objects supporting each other to create stability. Perhaps the triangle is not equilateral, essentially favoring some thematic area over another. For research that seeks entanglement and materiality these types of structure relationships are of interest as we consider not simply what themes emerge in the narrative, but how they are entangled with meaning; how they structure the research assemblage.

Furthermore, this entire text has been imagined as an invitation into materiality. The illustrations help enact objects in your own life, haloing the pages like classroom dregs for you to contemplate, color in or ignore as you see fit. While this work remains a “small, local, relational and decidedly non-heroic research event”, the attention given to listening, materials and entanglement and, ultimately, how to represent them on the page might help other researchers in their own work (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor & Blaise, 2016, p.165).

6.2.3 Systems: What Possibilities does Textile Listening Offer Large Systems/Groups?

Simply put, this work joins the chorus of a larger body of work attempting to shift the ontological focus of ECEfS work (Malone, 2015; McKenzie & Bieler, 2016; Weldemariam & Wals, 2020). This is both messy and uncomfortable. As larger groups,





like schools or curriculum creators, look to listen instead of do, they will have to accept sustainability research “without the luxury of any perfect solutions or easy fixes” (van Dooren, 2014, p. 116). The answer is simple, yet painful: a call to listen to the children as they so effortlessly learn with and through their materialled realities. When Nelson and Hodgins undertook a project to rethink child/tree assemblages with young learners they offered the following closing remark: “We confess to not knowing exactly how to theorize the unruliness of child–tree relations. [...] we offer stories composed from our pedagogical narration process that (re)present some of our shared moments of coming-to-know trees” (2020, p.155). For these authors the presentation of entangled stories concludes itself, no Answers are to be found. My own work of listening for child/textile entanglements at the Gather Round preschool follows suit. The stories of children living with and through textiles offers a window in. Said beautifully by Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor and Blaise:

“There are no grandiose research findings from our multispecies experimentations, nothing to prescribe, nothing to apply universally. *Our situated studies are small, local, relational and decidedly non-heroic research events.* There is, however, much to learn in the doing of such grounded relational research, in entering into these productively unsettling, everyday common world spaces. Within these spaces we learn how to work in an active, re-connecting, generative way *in* and *with* the world we research. We learn how to be present in a world that is not just about us and to recognize that there is much about this world that we never understand” (2016, p.165, emphasis added).

When we were reminded that children learning sustainability needed “something to *do*, not something to *learn*” (see p. 24) we might not have imagined that this “doing” was simply a collection of mundane events and of becoming-with materials (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016, p. 71). This study has tried to highlight, through stories, how children are *already* entangled within their nonhuman materialled world. To mediate





the discomfort we might feel when we realize a sociomaterial narrative project has no simple conclusion we might remind ourselves that the goal of new material studies is to:



“understand our learning in the world by reflecting upon how we compose and circulate our stories by which we make sense of the situations we find ourselves in, [is] how we ‘join the dots’. Thus, studying our material relations is centrally a matter of studying how we learn to accommodate to tasks and the things we work upon (and which act back upon us) in those tasks” (Bennet, 2016, p.72).

What needs to change, systemically, is the attention given this entanglement. Better attunement on the part of educators and curriculum could simply extend and honor this attention while challenging the hero narrative so pervasive in sustainability efforts (Malone, 2015; McKenzie & Bieler, 2016; Weldemariam & Wals, 2020). It was my hope that this work has joined Sommerville and Green in “present[ing] a way of undertaking research that does more than disrupt, but presents new ways of thinking about young children, place and sustainability. (2015, p. 125). We can ask ourselves, as we prepare to leave this document, how our own thoughts might have shifted, how the research assemblage might have invited the audience into moments of”becoming with” the text, child and textiles. Now then, “[...] it becomes possible to move from sustainability as a discourse, to sustainability as multiplicities of vibrant matter, forces, affects, encounters and relationships, which concomitantly lead us to the question: What might”becoming sustainable” really mean for ECE? (Weldemariam & Wals, 2020, p. 21).

6.3 Final Words



I want to purchase a new duvet cover. The one we own is a beautiful dove gray made locally of Turkish cotton. It is thick and warm. There are no stains or tears. But I see it every day and suddenly I feel a yen to buy a new one. One that would





be exciting. I let the desire go as my day draws me in with all its requirements. I'll revisit new duvet covers later.



Turning my gaze in/on/ward; to the local, to the community and to the story remains a challenge. After months in the classroom and over two years processing the experience on paper, I can come up with no better conclusions because, I believe, there aren't any. How do you conclude an invitation to pay attention to children and their textiles, an invitation to story-tell, story-listen and story-record? I finally realize: *you keep going, you listen again...*



Now, weeks later, I am folding the freshly washed duvet cover. I run my fingers on it and momentarily I *see* it, separate from myself. Separate from the mundanity that makes it invisible. I realize again, this is what this entire project has been about. It is a project in paying attention. "Attention is the beginning of devotion" (Oliver, 2017, n.p.). This assemblage of children/textiles and myself has been an assemblage of attention. I know why I've been here and I know where we are going. I can hear the children at Gather Round and they are singing.



"We're going on a bear hunt.
We're going to catch a big one.
What a beautiful day!
We're not scared" (Rosen, 1989).



... I will never have said it enough: *listen to the children.*





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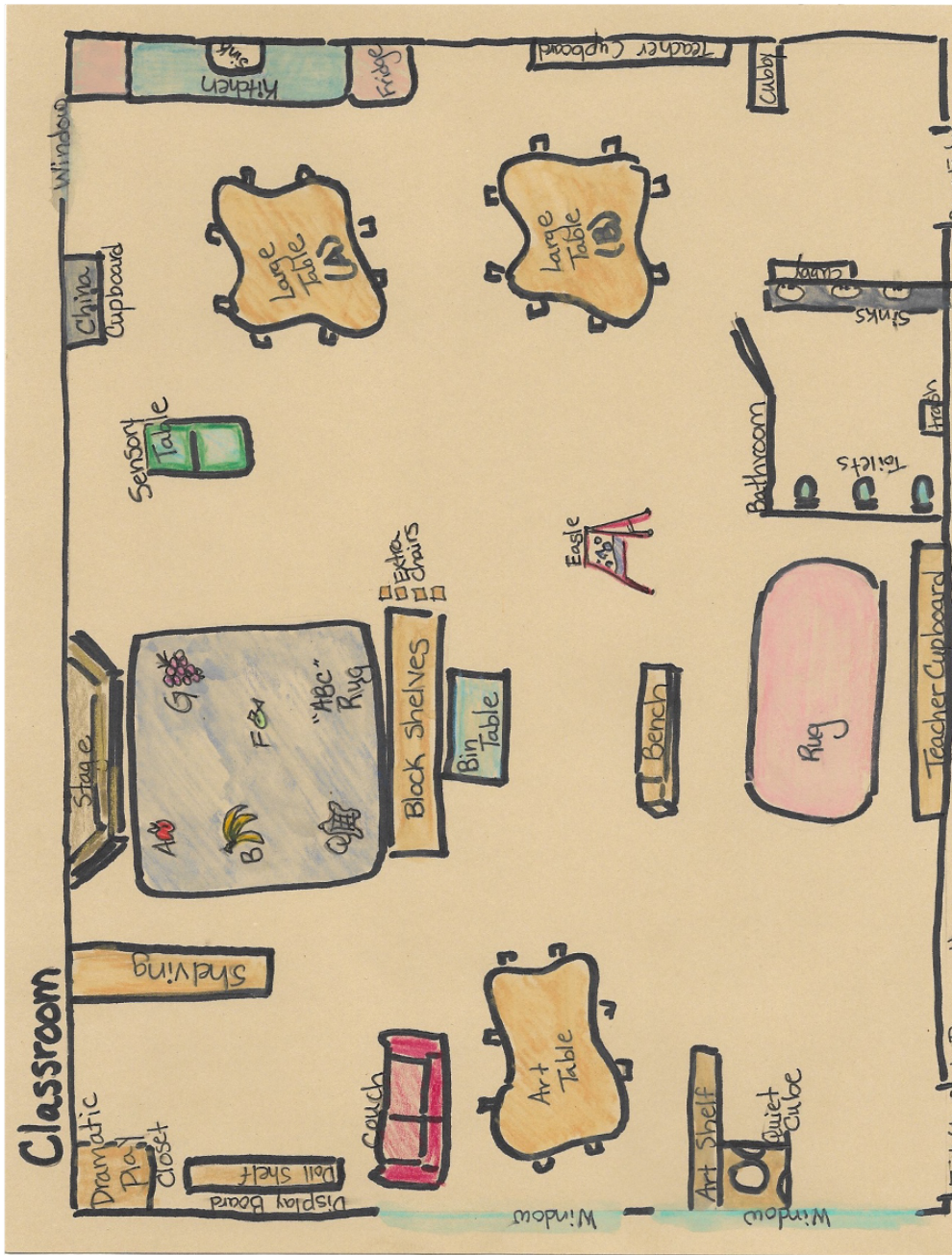
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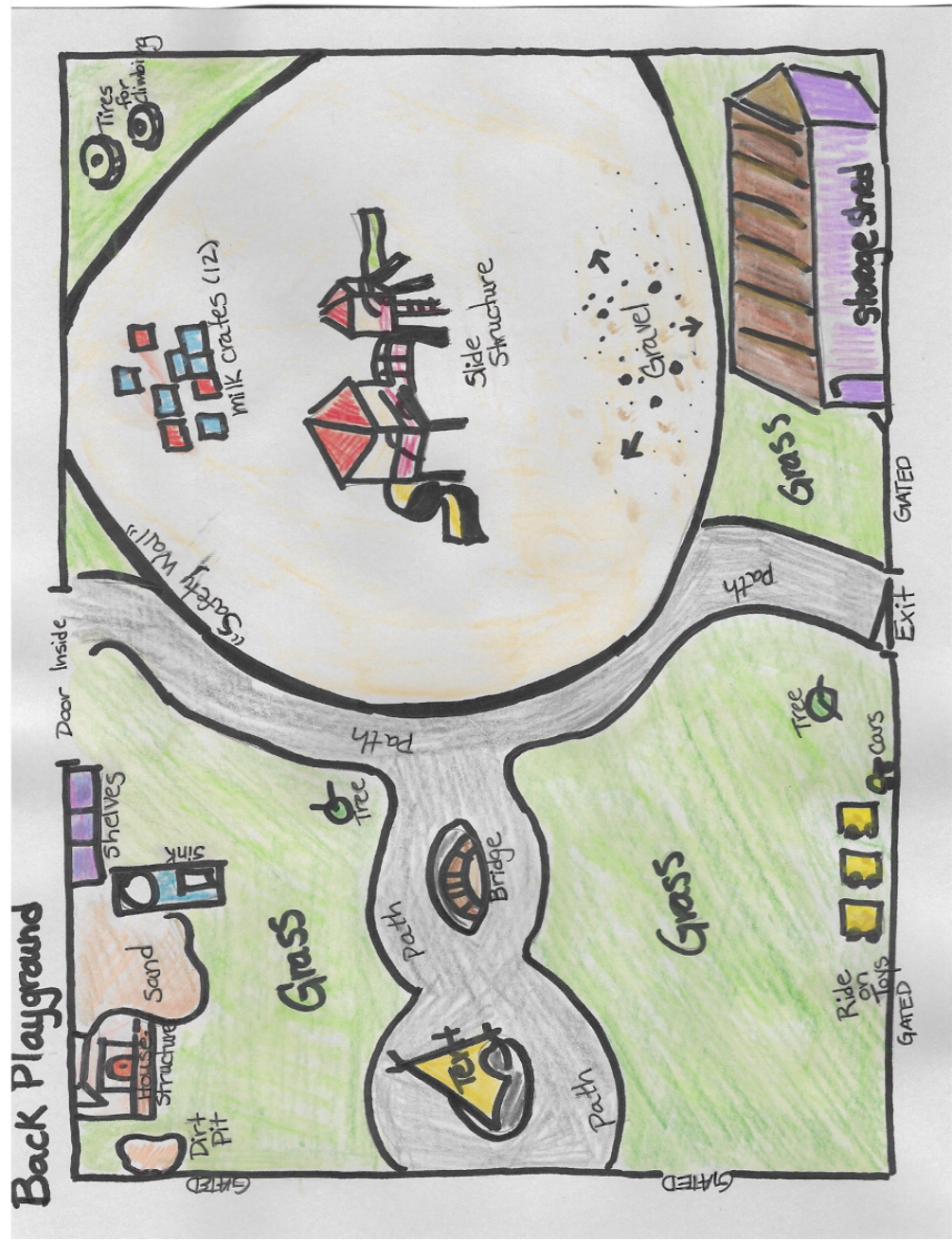


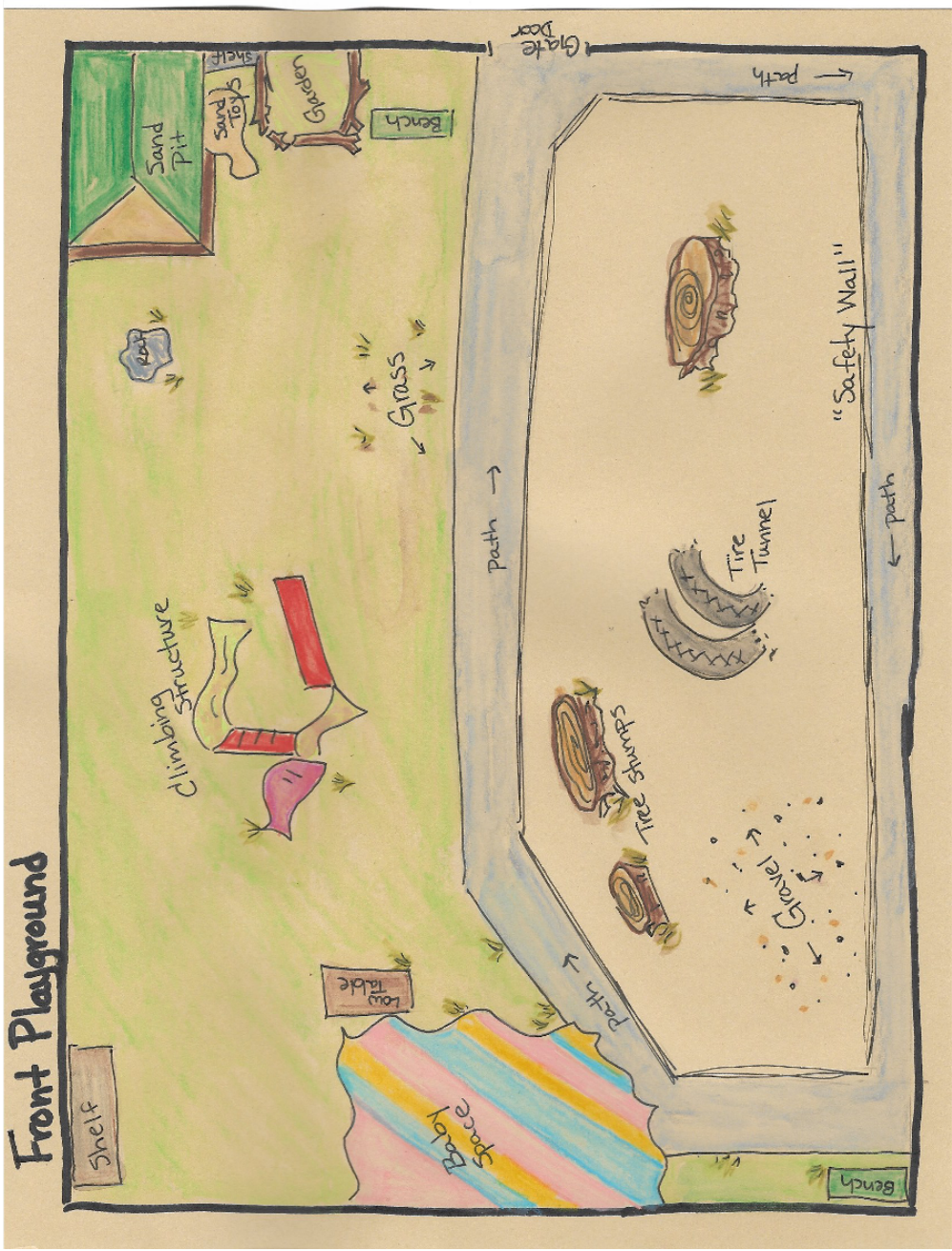
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Appendix A Classroom Maps









Appendix B



Assent



I want to tell you about a research study happening in your classroom. A research study is a way to learn more about something and a researcher is a person who wants to learn about something. I am a researcher who would like to find out more about what you know about your clothes.



If you want to join this study, you will be doing classroom work. You won't have to do anything you don't want to do. Your classroom teachers, INSERT NAMES, will be in the classroom doing the work too.



We might learn something that will help other children learn about their clothing. This study will help us learn about what preschoolers think.



You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now. You can also say no. You can even say okay and then you change your mind later. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to be in the study or if you change your mind. It is up to you.



Before you say yes or no to being in this study you can ask questions. We will also talk to you about this study and you can talk to us before you decide.



I _____ [name of researcher(s)]
have read this script to _____ [name of child].



_____ (name of child) assents to participate in our study



_____ (name of child) does **not** assent to participate in our study



date: _____ researcher signature: _____





Appendix C

Picture Books for Textile Literacy



The purpose of this section is to highlight several textile-themed picture books that I have personally read and used during this project. Some texts were read directly to the children aloud, others were left on tables as provocations while the rest were simply placed in open classroom shelves for children to access as they wished. In searching for picture books for this project the two criteria I had were that the books feature textiles in either the text or the illustration and that textiles were used integrally in the meaning of the text. Thus, books where children were simply *wearing* clothes in the illustrations were not selected. Similarly, texts that mentioned clothing in a peripheral or off-hand way, such as noting that a child got dressed one morning, were not selected either.

Books below are listed alphabetically by title, followed by their corresponding author (“auth.”) and illustrator (“ill.”). In the case a book was written and illustrated by the same individual this is noted by the abbreviation “auth./ill.”. A full reference list for these books appears in Appendix E. Three sections are provided to help educators decide if the book is right for the project, provocation or child they have in mind. First, a brief synopsis of the plot and overall impression of the text is given. Second, keywords that help sort the books into themes are listed. Finally, a few suggestions on how the text might best be engaged with, and occasional directed concepts for provocations, are provided.

The overall goal of this book list is to provide an entry point for textile literacy. The list should be considered in no way complete: many children’s picture books are published every year while even more are taken out of print. The list reflects my own research and my own opinions at the time of this writing. Every effort has been made to record only books that are in print so that educators have an easier time finding copies. When a book is featured that is currently out-of-print I have made note and





included it only because I have not found any book that features the same information, tone or theme.



A Hat for Mrs. Goldman: A Story About Knitting and Love by



Michelle Edwards (auth) and G. Brian Karas (ill.) – Mrs. Goldman and Sophia are neighbors and while Mrs. Goldman knits hats for everyone she meets, Sophia helps by making the pom-poms. Mrs. Goldman reminds Sofia that “keeping *keppies* warm is our *mitzvah*”. But when Mrs. Goldman gives her own hat away to keep help a neighbor in need, Sofia worries that no one will knit Mrs. Goldman a hat for her own *keppie*. Though Sofia has always found knitting too hard, with perseverance she makes a hat for Mrs. Goldman, pom-pom and all.



Keywords: knitting, modern, strong female character, wool

Engage: This story utilizes a few Yiddish terms to tell a story of compassion and service. Young children might be encouraged into service using such a book. The book also includes simple instructions for knitting a hat (“to keep *keppies* warm”), pom-pom included. Provocations might involve pretending to knit, sensory bins filled with yarn and knitting needles and hats laid out that children can draw or dictate stories about.



A Life Made by Hand: The Story of Ruth Asawa by Andrea D’Aquino

(auth./ill.) – This non-fiction text explores the life and passions of Japanese sculpture artist Ruth Asawa and the childhood beginnings that influenced her work. The book takes a narrative approach to describe how Asawa saw woven forms in nature (a spider web, bent grasses) as she grew up among farmers. Later in her life these forms and interests shaped her work as a sculptor who incorporated numerous elements of weaving into her sculpture.



Keywords: historical-link, strong female character, tools and notions, weaving

Engage: Inviting children to provocations set up with images of Asawa’s sculptures and materials that mimic hers would be a wonderful way to extend their engagement with natural weaving and sculpture techniques.





Brief Thief by Michaël Escoffier (auth.) and Kris Di Giacomo (ill.) – This

book is beloved among younger children because it stars everyone’s favorite silly topics: underwear and going to the bathroom. When Leon the Chameleon runs out of toilet paper, he decides to use an “abandoned” pair of torn underwear. What follows is a hilarious crisis-of-conscience as Leon finds out the underpants he stole weren’t abandoned... and weren’t underwear! A fun book to engage with clothing as useful-object.

Keywords: animals, clothing, dressing, magic, modern, silly

Engage: Odds are all the children in a classroom will have *something* to say about underwear. A read-and-discuss provocation could lead to children’s thoughts about undergarments, what they think the utility of clothing is, and how items of clothing might have more than one use. Other engagement with the text might include re-illustration or the sewing of underwear for toys.

Charlie Needs a Cloak by Tomie dePaola (auth./ill.) – This funny, irreverent

tale about Charlie the shepherd as he works to create a new cloak for himself is a classic of children’s literature. The story is carried by simple text and dynamic movemented illustrations which showcase the hard work it takes to go from sheep to cloak. The sheep are imagined as silly and participatory in Charlie’s antics as he shears, washes, cards, spins, dyes, weaves, cuts and finally sews himself a new red cloak. More relatable than other old-fashioned texts depicting the same sequences of events in a small-scale production cycle, most children will understand intuitively what a “cloak” is based on the colorful detailed imagery.

Keywords: carding, sheep-to-clothes, silly, spinning, small-scale production, weaving, wool

Engage: This text would best suit wool-centered provocations. Due to the detailed yet relatable illustrations any element of small-scale clothing production could be introduced and accompanied by this text. Thus, provocations that center on wool carding, spinning, simple weaving or sewing (preferably with wool fabrics) would work well. Alternatively, movement provocations focusing on the hard work and labor of the





shepherd and cloak-maker would equally serve learners working toward textile-literacy.



Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois by Amy Novesky

(auth.) and Isabelle Arsenault (ill.) – This non-fiction picture book looks at the life of acclaimed artist and sculptor Louise Josephine Bourgeois (1911-2010). Growing up in France with parents who owned a weaving repair workshop, Louise grew up restoring woven textiles by hand. These delicate woven threads, along with her deep connection to her mother, later influenced her most famous spider sculpture *Maman*. The book begins with Louise’s childhood imagination and moves to her later career, using metaphors of thread, wool, and weaving.



Keywords: historical-link, strong female character, tools and notions, weaving, wool



Engage: Because this book features the non-fiction life story of Louise Bourgeois provocations might focus on any element related to her story: weaving, sculpture with textile or sources of inspiration. Alternatively educators might focus on how familial influences relate to later work and provide engagements for students to think about familiar relationship to textile.



Crafty Llama: A Story about Crafting, Friendship and the Very Best

Gifts by Mike Kerr (auth.) and Renata Liwska (ill.) – This story features Llama, a crafty knitter who likes making things for fun, and Beaver, who only likes to make useful things. As woodland friends gather near knitting Llama, all her fun projects turn into useful items: a sweater for turtle when he’s not in his shell, a trunk-carrying sleeve for elephant, and even tiny mittens for butterfly. As beaver chews through wood to try and find a useful idea, he happens to make a grandstand where his friends can now have craft sales. Although the storyline is at times hard to follow, the illustrations help pull the reader through. Ultimately, this book tries to argue that making things you love, will be loved by others.



Keywords: animals, knitting, modern, spinning



Engage: This text can be hard to follow, but provocations that centre on the





difference between a useful textile and a fun textile might be deepened by a reading of this story. To highlight this difference, educators could set a table with a provocation to use rags and soapy water for washing while another table features fully dressed dolls and extra fancy clothing to change them into.



Dress Like a Girl by Patricia Toht (auth.) and Lorian Tu-Dean (ill.) –



This modern picture books features a group of young girls, having a sleep over party, and playing dress us. The text, written in rhyming verse, is unfortunately confusing at times. Occasions are described in rhyme, and then what a girl might think she “should” wear is subverted into a garment the signifies leadership or empowerment. For example, if the occasion is a symphony one might need a long black gown, and while the text underscores this need the illustration shows a young girl dresses in a long black robe obviously cast as the symphony’s conductor.



Keywords: clothing and dressing, modern



Engage: While this book is sometimes hard to follow, children might still enjoy the clothing worn by the girls and the creative take on costumes. Provocations could feature clothing-to-task matching.



Extra Yarn by Mac Barnett (auth.) and Jon Klassen (ill.) – A beautiful

fairytale-style book in which a town, depicted only in black, grey, and white, becomes the site of a colorful adventure. When Annabelle discovers a box of rainbow-colored yarn, she first knits herself a sweater. When she finds she still has some extra yarn, she begins knitting for everyone else in her life: her dog, her classmates, her teacher, a pickup truck and all the buildings. Soon the town is covered in rainbow yarn. When her magic yarn draws the attention of a greedy Archduke, we get a glimpse at how this magic box of extra yarn works. Featuring a fairytale ending this is one of the few books the melds storytelling with knitting technique to create a truly textile-literate work.



Keywords: fairytale, knitting, magic, strong female character



Engage: This book works within the textile-literate framework by truly blend-





ing storytelling with textiles. Children can engage with the story by working on knitting skills, creating illustrations using rainbow yarn, envisioning what they can do to make their towns more “colorful” or choosing a knit item from their own lives and writing an imaginary story about who created it.



I Had a Favorite Dress by Boni Ashburn (auth.) and Julia Denos (ill.) – The

main protagonist in this picture book is a young girl who has a favorite dress. As the seasons pass and the girl grows the dress no longer fits. Lucky for our main character she has a mama who can sew and with each new season the dress becomes something new. When it is too short, it becomes a shirt. When it is too tight, it becomes a skirt. When it no longer fits, it becomes a scarf. This story follows our character until her favorite dress becomes only a beloved childhood memory.

Keywords: clothing, dressing, modern, sewing, tools and notions

Engage: Children will likely resonate with growing out of a favorite clothing item. What might resonate less often is the character’s mother who is capable of sewing the item into something new. Provocations could centre on how items of clothing can be repurposed into new items. A sewing machine in the classroom could deepen children’s awareness of what the book’s cryptic pages featuring the text “snip, snip, sew, sew” really mean.

I Like Old Clothes (*out of print*) by Mary Ann Hoberman (auth.) originally

with illustrations by Jacqueline Chwast and reprinted with illustrations by Patrice Barton (2012) – This poetic ode to hand-me-down clothing is perfection. It is a jaunty read, it sings the praises of re-using clothes and has beautiful illustrations regardless of which edition you find. “I *like* old clothes. I really do. Clothes with a history. Clothes with a mystery. Sweaters and shirts that are brother-and-sistry.” A lovely book.

Keywords: clothing, dressing, modern

Engage: This book is a perfect companion to provocations that feature reusing and recycling. Children might engage with the text by sharing stories of used clothing they own, or where the clothing they own now might go in the future. Children with





younger siblings might enjoy provocations that feature passing on clothing to young children.



Jacob's New Dress by Sarah & Ian Hoffman (auths.) and Chris Case (ill.) –



At the dress up corner Jacob loves to play with Emily, until the day some boys in his class tell him he can't wear "girl clothes". Jacob works to convince his parents to let him wear a dress to school, something he really wants, and then to show his classmates that boys can wear anything they want, including dresses.



Keyword: clothing, dressing, identity, modern, strong male character



Engage: This text highlights ways in which textiles seek to mark us, and ways in which they can be used to rebel. Any provocation the highlights this difference would serve to deepen the text and the children's experience with textiles and identity.



Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear? by Nancy White Carlstrom (auth.)



and Bruce Degen (ill.) – Part of the *Jesse Bear* book series, this is the only book in the series that deals with clothing and dressing. Told in rhyming verse, often sung to the tune of "Jenny Jenkins", the story is simply Jesse Bear's answer to his mother's question "What will you wear?". As Jesse dresses the verse moves from clothing ("shirt of red" and "pants that dance") to less obvious items such as a rose or the sun.



Keywords: animals, clothing, dressing, modern



Engage: Provocations could easily include song and movement as children re-interpret Jesse Bear's song and tell each other what they will (or have) worn today. Familiarity with this text, as it is a popular title, might lead to ease of discussion for both children and educators.



Lester's Dreadful Sweaters by K.G. Campbell (auth./ill.) – Lester is a child



who likes order and safety; he measures his socks to check they are straight and keeps lists of suspicious things to avoid. When Cousin Clara moves in (her cottage was eaten by a crocodile!) and knits Lester a truly dreadful sweater Lester is stuck. Although it is "less than pleasant yellow" and "shriveled yet saggy" his parents force him to say thank you. And so begins a hilarious series of dreadful sweaters and the misadventures





that befall them as Lester tries to regain his sense of order.



Keywords: clothing, dressing knitting, modern, silly, strong male character



Engage: Although this story does not focus heavily on the process of knitting, the relationship Lester has with clothes he either likes or hates is a fantastic connection to textile literacy. Provocations should explore children’s relationship to their own clothes, both items they love and those they hate.



Let’s Dress Up and Have a Party by Remy Charlip (auth./ill.) – A happy story about children invited to a friend’s party and scouring their homes for inventive costumes. This story takes the notion of ‘textile’ to a different space as it explored the myriad materials and inventions that dressing oneself could employ. The children use a rug as a mountain costume, the “try on” the pots and pans, two children step into the same skirt and come as “close friends” and one child wears yarn and calls herself spaghetti. A unique way to connect the children’s imaginations to clothing and extend the discussion of why we get dressed, this is a festive story to invite into the classroom.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, silly, tools and notions



Engage: As many early learning centers already feature a dramatic play centre (sometimes a “dress-up corner”) it is easy to imagine ways to bring this text into the classroom. Provocations could include found-material costume making, children illustrating imaginary costumes, or story-telling provocations employing textiles children are currently wearing.



Love is a Tutu by Amy Novesky (auth.) and Sara Gillingham (ill.) – While this board book style story is about a young girl who loves ballet and all it’s accompanying paraphernalia, it is also about an affective relationship to clothing. Just as the tutu represents the girls love of ballet, Novesky calls on readers to imagine how one item of clothing can encompass an entire relationship. When we close this story, we see that this girl even wears her tutu to bed: that *is* love.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, modern

Engage: Because this book truly encompasses affective relationship with cloth-





ing as well as the symbolic nature of clothing provocations are nearly endless. Generally, children should be prompted to consider the ways in which one item of clothing might represent a relationship (does a doctor love his stethoscope? does a baby love their diaper?) as well as items in their own lives they might love. Conversely, items of clothing that are superfluous or odious could serve as a provocation (perhaps pairing well with K.G. Campbell's *Lester's Dreadful Sweaters* (2010) among others).



Mary Wears What She Wants by Keith Negley (auth./ill.) – Told with sparse text and attractive graphic illustrations, this is the story of Mary Edwards Walker, born in New York in 1832. Negley's text focuses on young Mary, frustrated with uncomfortable and impractical dresses that girls at the time had to wear. Her solution was simple: she put on some pants. The book closes with the children in Mary's school accepting this change and eventually wearing what they want. In her real-life Mary Edwards Walker was repeatedly arrested for wearing pants, yet never gave up. She graduated from medical school in 1855 and was a surgeon during the American Civil War. She is the only woman to have ever won the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration.

Keywords: clothing, dressing, historical-link, identity, strong female character

Engage: In line with a few other picture books that confront clothing and identity, any provocation that helps children consider how clothing might, or might not, identify us would benefit this text.

Mary Wore Her Red Dress by Merle Peek (auth./ill.) – A classic folksong made new by this color-additive book. Each page features one line and one color of the classic folk song *Mary Wore Her Red Dress* as an animal character is depicted wearing the item against a black-and-white background. Certainly knowledge of the tune is helpful, but regardless the book features a visual narrative as each animal dresses and gets ready to go to a party. By the end of the book each color has been added and the animal party is in full swing.

Keywords: animals, clothing, dressing, sing along





Engage: Provocations could include ordering and numeration as children dress animals, dolls, illustrations, or even themselves. Discussion could surround the order in which clothing is put on as well as the function of different items of clothing (e.g. the different purposes served by a “red dress” versus some “green sneakers”). The highly engaging nature of the illustrations could lead to provocations where the text is simply left out for children to engage with on their own terms.

Miss Patch’s Learn to Sew Book by Carolyn Meyer (auth.) – This book is a narrative take on an instruction manual style text. Meyer creates a character, Miss Patch, who (like you!) wants to learn to sew. Starting with simple projects like a cotton pillow and moving to a more advanced circle skirt, each approachable chapter features the story of Miss Patch learning alongside you. Tips and tricks are made relevant through the inclusion of details from the reader’s own life (expressions such as “your dog” or “you can tell your friends...”). This text, first written in 1969, is of manageable length and content for younger children, however it is strongly gendered and often implies that boys neither can nor care to sew.

Keywords: clothing, dressing, nonfiction, sewing, silly, tools and notions

Engage: Other than following the directions for any of the multiple projects laid out by Miss Patch, children could extend their learning to any simple sewing project they imagine. Cultural critique of the book could follow as children wonder why there are no boys or boy-themed projects in this book. Finally, Miss Patch could be a useful character to engage with during further sewing or knitting provocations.

Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress by Christine Baldacchino (auth.) and Isabelle Malenfant (ill.) – Morris lives with his mom and his cat. On Sundays they eat pancakes and on Mondays he goes to school. Although Morris likes many things about his class, his favorite thing is the tangerine colored dress in the dress up corner. It reminds him “tigers, the sun and his mother’s hair”. When the children in the class tell him that dresses are only for girls, Morris becomes sad and stops loving school. A modern story of clothing, gender identity and defying social





norms.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, identity, modern, strong male character



Engage: Another book that explores how clothing marks us and how we might work, sometimes using clothes, to defy those views. Any provocation the highlights this difference would serve to deepen the text and the children's experience with textiles and identity.



Ned the Knitting Pirate by Diane Murray (auth.) and Leslie Lammle (ill.)



– Aboard the pirate ship the Rusty Heap lives Ned. Though all the pirates are scruffy and strong, all enjoy swabbing the deck and each is fierce only Ned loves to knit. At first the captain and crew are appalled, until a scaly ocean beast shows up and knitting proves the solution to the intruder (and the crew's) problems.



Keywords: knitting, modern, silly, strong male character



Engage: This book focuses very little on the process of knitting, but hits on underlying assumptions of masculinity and personhood. As educators provocations can centre on activities that we traditionally hold as the work of a particular group, and widening interest and knowledge to all children or groups.



Pelle's New Suit by Elsa Beskow (auth./ill.) – First published in 1912 this

text is considered a classic of Swedish children's literature. This simple old-fashioned story takes the reader from raising a lamb all the way to a fresh new wool suit for our main character Pelle to wear (he has outgrown his!). Pausing for processes such as shearing, carding, spinning and weaving this book includes each step of a small-scale production cycle. Pelle is as mystified as readers as he makes his way to a new suit. Each page features one detailed illustration of the basic small-scale production cycle, while the text carries little description of what is involved in that process. A simple, sweet story with sparse text.



Keywords: carding, sheep-to-clothes, spinning, small-scale production, weaving, wool



Engage: This text might accompany many wool-centered provocations. It is





possible to bring in raw wool that needs carding, drop spindles for spinning, a basic rigid loom for weaving, or even plant-based dyes for coloring the wool. That said, this book does not engage deeply with any one process and would best accompany both a single provocation and companion text.

Phoebe's Sweater by Joanna Johnson (auth.) and Eric Johnson (ill.) –

Phoebe mouse is going to be a big sister and she is very excited. As Mother waits for the new baby, she casts on a fresh knitting project. Phoebe is curious as to what it is and soon finds that the new project is for her: a red sweater. While this story is sweet and does tie in the process of knitting a garment it seems best suited to gentle entertainment. A significant portion of the book features patterns for adult knitters to make a child in their life a “Phoebe Mouse Sweater” and matching doll. The knitting is relatively advanced.

More in this series: *Freddie's Blanket* (2010), *Phoebe's Birthday* (2012), *Henry's Hat* (2015)

Keywords: animals, clothing, dressing, knitting, modern

Engage: Although this book is more than half dedicated to knitting patterns, the simple story of a mouse and her future sibling could lead to provocations about siblings and clothing. It may be that children have experienced hand-me-down clothing, have given items away themselves or have been gifted something handmade for a special occasion. After a read-and-discuss style provocations further planning could include inviting children to bring beloved handmade or gifted clothing to school, asking children to imagine what they would like to give/receive or setting up handmade items and simple art supplies on a table for children to interact with.

Pocketful of Posies: A Treasury of Nursery Rhymes by Salley Mavor

(auth./ill.) – This text utilizes textiles not as subject matter, but as the medium in which the illustrations have been created. The work itself, a collection of commonly known nursery rhymes, does not highlight any feature of textiles or textile-literacy in and of itself, however, as Mavor uses wool felt and detailed embroidery stitches to





create her imagery children might engage with textiles as they study the images. Other examples of texts that utilize this illustrative medium are as follows:



- **Cozy Classics** (series) by Jack and Holman Wang (auth./ill.)
- **Fox and Raccoon** (Juniper Hollow series) by Lesley-Ann Green (auth./ill.)
- **Goldilocks and the Three Bears** by Lauren Child (auth.), Polly Borland and Emily Jenkins (ills.)
- **The Lonely Doll** by Dare Wright (auth./ill.)
- **The Mouse Mansion** by Karina Schaapman (auth./ill.)

Keywords: textile as illustration

Red Butterfly: How a Princess Smuggled the Secret of Silk Out of China by Deborah Noyes (auth.) and Sophie Blackall (ill.) – This is the legend of the Chinese princess who, between 100 and 500 AD, smuggled silkworm cocoons out of China when she married the king of Khotan (north of Tibet). Told in poetic verse this story abstractly delves into the princess’s fears, love of homeland, personal growth and ultimately her moment of defiance; China had guarded the secret of producing silk since 200 BC. The watercolor illustrations are beautiful, though the text is challenging for younger readers. An author’s note at the back of the text helps deepen educator knowledge of the legend and history.

Keywords: clothing, dressing, historical-link, legend, silk, strong female character

Engage: This text could serve as a provocation for connecting animals to their fiber, and the accompanying textile produced. Much literature focuses of sheep and wool, yet far fewer texts discuss rabbits and angora, worms and silk, goats and cashmere or bison and fleece. Additional provocations might focus on legend and history’s role in textile storytelling and production.





Something from Nothing by Phoebe Gilman (auth./ill.) – This story fea-



tures a young Jewish boy who loves a special blue blanket his grandfather has made him. As Joseph grows up, the blanket is no longer the right size for him, so he asks his grandfather to fix it. First his grandfather changes it into a jacket, and with each passing life stage the blanket is remade into something else: a vest, a tie, and eventually a button. Detailed illustrations show that as scraps of fabric fall to the floor, a mouse family living below ground reuses them to make items of their own. When there is no blanket left to remake into anything, Joseph is left with a beautiful story to tell.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, historical-link, sewing, strong male character, tools and notions



Engage: Provocations connecting this book to sewing, remaking “something from nothing”, or the process of how textile items are made would deepen this work.



Generally, this is a rich text with deep illustrations that invite readers in on many levels.



Stína by Lani Yamomoto – Stína is a young Icelandic girl who will do anything

to avoid being cold. Even in the summertime she bundles up under layers and layer of clothing. Hats, tights, socks, scarves and sweaters all feature prominently in the text and illustrations as Stína tries to escape the cold. One day, as she bundles herself under a down comforter, she is roused by two children knocking at her door. They aren't cold because they have generated heat by playing outside together. The simple ending of the story finds Stína drawing warmth from friendship.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, knitting, modern, strong female character

Engage: This story can be engaged with on multiple levels: to begin with the book itself is bound in cloth. Additionally, instructions for simple finger-knitting are included in the back and children could enjoy working to make chains and scarves using only their hands and yarn. The story of Stína raises questions about how clothing functions in society: does it protect us? is it an emotional connection? does it matter what others are wearing? do we all feel the same in our clothes?





The Dress and the Girl by Camille Andros (auth.) and Julie Morstad (ill.)



– Andros’ story features a young nameless girl, living in Greece, wearing an ordinary dress made for her by her mother. In Andros’ story “the dress loved the girl, and the girl loved the dress”. What follows is a true *relationship* between a dress and a girl who both eventually move to America seeking new adventures. The peaceful illustrations and simple text leave much room for the reader to imagine the strong bond between this simple dress and this ordinary girl.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, sewing



Engage: This picture book is unique among all those listed as it attributes emotion-language to both the girl *and* the dress. As such it highlights an important facet of textile literacy: the relationship between textiles and ourselves. Provocations that prod at this relationship, and perhaps query if textiles can really feel, will deepen a classroom’s engagement with textile literacy. Ultimately the question we are asking is: do we have a moral, ethical, or emotional responsibility for our clothing?



The Hat by Jan Brett (auth./ill.) –When Lisa’s wool stocking blows off the laundry line a curious hedgehog pokes his nose inside. Discovering that his needles won’t let him take the “hat” back off he is stuck. As one-by-one a host of farm animals come and laugh at the hedgehog’s new hat, the border illustration depicts Lisa’s search for her missing stocking.



Keywords: animals, clothing, knitting, silly



Engage: This story could lead to provocations about animals and clothing. It might also lead to discussions of waste: what happens when a mitten is lost, or an old sock is thrown away? Where do out lost or discarded clothing items go? Children might choose to respond in literal or imaginative ways.



The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco (auth./ill.) – This beautifully illustrated picture book tells the story of Anna and her family’s move from Russia to America. When Anna outgrows her dress and babushka, the remaining items from home, her mother pairs scraps from other sentimental family cloth to make a memory





quilt. The quilt, used as a tablecloth on the Sabbath, a wedding canopy and eventually even a baby blanket symbolizes the family’s immigration and lasting connection to Russia and tradition.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, quilting, sewing, historical-link

Engage: The text of this book is rather dense and as such young readers could benefit from provocations that focus on the tie between heirloom family cloth and heritage/tradition. It might be possible for children to bring items from home, or an educator might model what this connection might look like.



The Kindness Quilt (*out of print*) by Nancy Wallace (auth./ill.) – When Minna’s teacher Mrs. Bloom assigns her class a kindness project assignment, Minna is at a loss as to which act of kindness she would like to highlight. Through discussions with her family, and thinking through previous acts of kindness, Minna eventually decides to design a paper quilt highlighting many different acts of kindness in her community.



Keywords: animals, modern, quilting

Engage: Provocations using this book might simply invite learners to create paper quilts that highlight a relevant aspect of classroom or the child’s personal life. Bringing in fabric quilt samples to show students what the concept of quilt and patchwork mean could deepen this simple story further.



The Land of Lost Buttons (*out of print*) by Shigeo Nakamura (auth.), Kayako Nishimaki (ill.), and Alvin Tresselt (translator) – This comic tale follows a lost red button, falling from the eye of a beloved stuffed rabbit, and rolling into the “land of lost buttons”. Here a cast of button children play amidst pin-cushions mountains, a ribbon river and the jungle of tangled thread. When the stuffed rabbit writes to the King of Lost Buttons appealing for his lost red button the button leaves the land of lost buttons and is stitched back onto his stuffed rabbit. This is a comic story where little attention is paid to textile work, yet the tools and notions of sewing are envisioned as a magical landscape. This text could be a lovely storied introduction to





simple sewing.



Keywords: fairytale, magic, silly, sewing, tools and notions



Engage: This text could accompany a storytelling engagement where children bring in their own beloved stuffed toys very well. As argued above, the importance of storytelling intersecting relevant textiles in children’s lives is supported in this text. Children might illustrate, dramatically enact, write or dictate a tale about their own lost textiles, lost notions or stuffed toy adventures.



The Mitten String by Jennifer Rosner (auth.) and Kristina Swarner (ill.)



– This beautiful story reads like a folktale. Ruthie Tobor’s family is known for their beautiful wool and yarn, said to be the softest in the country. Ruthie helps card, spin and dye the yarn alongside her mother, but it is when they sit in the evening and knit mittens that she is happiest. When a deaf mother and her new baby come and stay with Ruthie’s family Ruthie worries the mother will not know if her baby awakes in the night. When the mother tells Ruthie that she ties a long string from the baby’s wrist to her own, Ruthie is inspired to knit a very special set of mittens for mother and child.



Keywords: carding, dyeing, folktale, knitting, sheep-to-clothes, small-scale production, spinning, strong female character, wool



Engage: The soft illustrations and modern-feeling folktale leave many spaces for engagement. The glossary of terms and techniques at the back of the book might be left out for children to engage with on their own terms. Provocations could include using yarn for alternative purposes, mittens left out for children to draw or dictate stories, and open-ended invitations to engage with clothes for problem-solving.



The Quilt Story by Tony Johnston (auth.) and Tomie dePaola (ill.) – This story follows two young girls, each living in a different era (the text does not explicitly say when), connected by a special quilt. When Abigail’s mother makes her a special quilt by hand she takes it everywhere: to have tea with her dolls, to bed at night, to wear as a gown or even to hide under. As she grows and moves away the quilt gets





folded and tucked up in the attic, until years later a new young resident of the house finds it, providing her with comfort and safety during a time of transition.



Keywords: historical-link, quilting, sewing



Engage: Provocations might center on hand-me-down clothing of the stories textiles might tell to a future recipient. Providing children with opportunities to think about how the quilt story would be different if Abigail had thrown it away, and no one could reuse it, might extend thinking about waste and reuse.



Three Balls of Wool (Can Change the World) by Henriqueta Cristina

(auth.), Yara Kono (ill.), and Lyn Miller-Lackmann (translator) – When a family moves from dictator-run Portugal to communist Czechoslovakia in search of a life with more freedom, they find that their life has new rules they must conform too. Choosing to dwell on only one facet of life in a communist country, author Cristina tells us that sweaters can only be made of yellow, green, or grey wool. At first the female protagonist in the story is disheartened, until her mother begins knitting elaborate sweaters with zig-zags, diamonds, cables and stripes all while using only three colors of wool. The book does a splendid job describing the magic of watching an expert knitter work and uses only correct knitting terms to identify the mother’s knitting process.



Keywords: historical-link, knitting, modern, strong female character



Engage: *Three Balls of Wool* can lead to provocations that involve knitting, limiting artistic supplies to see how many different things children can make, discussions about equity and justice, or links to other books about the history of knit garments. The book itself is based on a true story and thus provocations could focus on the “real life” element of the little girl in the text.



Today I’m Going to Wear by Dan Stiles (auth./ill.) – This board book

features a little girl getting dress for the day. A simple story, told in rhyme, of a child wanting to wear all her favorite things regardless of whether they match or are weather-appropriate (Rubber boots? A Halloween shirt? No problem for this child). A relatable story for any child who has been told they couldn’t wear a favorite item





on any particular day.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, modern, silly



Engage: Children will enjoy drawing from their own experiences of dressing themselves to connect with this simple text. Provocations could draw on favorite items of clothing and guardian’s responses to such items.



Vegetables in Underwear by Jared Chapman (auth./ill.) – This silly celebration of underwear features every kind of vegetable wearing every kind of underwear. Designed as a humorous exploration of undergarments, intended only to leave the reader with the message “we all wear underwear”, Chapman’s illustrations do most of the talking.



More in this series: *Fruits in Suits* (2018), *Vegetables in Holiday Underwear* (2019)



Keywords: clothing, dressing, silly



Engage: This book series would do well as a provocation to illustrate underwear using fabric scraps. As the works draw on imaginative underwear “styles”, much could be done to provoke children’s imaginations about utility and clothing. Self-cleaning underwear? Underwear for dogs? Underwear that near gets dirty? Children will know the answer.



What Do You Wear? by Taro Gomi (auth./ill.) – This simple board book beautifully ties together animals and clothing, drawing the parallel between an animal’s natural (feathers, fur, hide) clothing and our human need for applying made clothing on top of our skin. Playfully choosing to label animals with vocabulary from a human closet (a duck in a “fancy cardigan” or a goldfish in a “tie-dye skirt”) children are tasked with observing the illustration to realize that duck is wearing his own feathers, and goldfish her own tail. A truly layered text that should not be underestimated based on simplicity and style.



Keywords: animals, clothing, dressing, silly



Engage: Provocations could include movement activities where children enact





animals and their “clothing” as they move through space. Additionally, provocations that draw attention to the difference between human clothing and animal covering could deepen children’s engagement with relevant textiles in their lives.



Where Did My Clothes Come From? by Chris Butterworth (auth.) and Lucia Gaggiotti (ill.)

This nonfiction text utilizes text bubbles and captions to walk children through the main textiles and their production. The book takes children from cotton fields to the resulting denim jeans, silkworms to the resulting party dress, and chemicals to resulting nylon soccer jerseys. Overall it features child-appropriate text, while doing a good job of keeping information both factual and detailed. The cheery retro-feeling illustrations portray every person and animal, from western child to distant factory worker, as happy which might pose social-justice questions for many. However, the books closure on recycling and mending highlight the author’s intention to encourage children to have a relationship with their clothing.



Keywords: clothing, dressing, knitting, large-scale production, nonfiction, sewing



Engage: This non-fiction text is best suited to provocations that highlight any facet of growing and production the book highlights. Teachers might highlight either a particular material, process, or garment. Deeper provocations could focus on the makers/growers/farmers who silently and cheerfully (as depicted in the text) produce our textiles.



Wind Child (*out of print*) by Shirley Rousseau Murphy (auth.) and Leo and Diane Dillon (ill.)

This book reads like a retold folktale of mystical origins. Here our main character, a woman named Resshie does not know that her father was the east wind. Regardless, she has inherited his ethereal talents and to support herself creates exquisite weavings that move like wind. A tale that is ultimately of love and self-affirmation, Murphy’s work features stunning language while the Dillon’s have illustrated wind and weaving the floats off the page.



Keywords: fairy tale, magic, strong female character, weaving





Engage: Likely this beautiful picture book’s enchanting nature will lead to open-ended play and dramatic provocations on its own. Nevertheless nature weaving prompts and including silky materials in the dramatic play corner can deepen this engagement.

Woolbur by Leslie Helakoski (auth.) and Lee Harper (ill.) – Woolbur is the name of the young sheep protagonist who just can’t seem to be like the rest of his flock. Instead of standing still with other sheep, Woolbur runs around with the dogs. Instead of getting freshly sheared in the spring, Woolbur prefers to wear his wool long. As his parents grow increasingly worried about his outsider behavior, they push Woolbur to be more like the others. What these worried parents fail to realize is that the flock will end up wanting to be more like Woolbur!

More in this series: *Ready or Not, Woolbur Goes to School!* (2018)

Keywords: animals, carding, knitting, shearing, silly, spinning, strong male character, wool

Engage: This seemingly silly tale is useful both in highlighting the process that goes into wool garments, and even more importantly in humanizing sheep. Because Woolbur is very obviously a personified sheep, the nature of wool and production comes to life. Provocations could centre on wool itself, the character of Woolbur and animal rights, or more generally self-expression and non-conformity.





Appendix D

Personal Praxis

Crafting a written document that attempted to describe this project in a way that remained honest to the physical nature of the work, while remaining linearly coherent enough for a reader to feel they have somehow experienced the project themselves, was difficult. In order to get at the physicality of this textile literacy project I have designed a portion of this work to come, literally, off the page. As a way of allowing the reader entry into textile literacy, I have constructed a physical case for copies of these books to live in. The case and textile library I compiled (see Appendix C) were donated to Gather Round Childcare Centre at the completion of this project. However, the directions and photo tutorial are included here for any reader who wishes to create their own version of this portable textile library.

Make a Case

Drawing from a material base of exclusively repurposed material this case library requires only the most basic knowledge of using a sewing machine. There is no need for perfection. If, at the end of attempting the project, you have made something that showcases repurposed textiles and can contain your textile library then you have succeeded. My particular making process might easily be replaced with another one which works for you. Materials that you have on hand can be substituted liberally for the ones I use here. The goal is not to purchase any new textiles: old sheets, shirts and pillowcases work quite well.

The case itself should not be seen as a way of transporting a tall stack of books around. A tall stack of books is relatively heavy, and few methods of case construction would result in an adequate carrying case. Rather, this case is a way to manifest textile literacy's presence in the classroom. You are making a home for the books. Children who experience the books will know that they "live" in the textile case you've made and can interact with the physical presence of the case in the classroom. The scrappier the better: if you use varied sources of recycled textiles the children might wonder





more deeply about the textiles themselves. “Where did you get that stuff?” or “Was that ever somebody else’s?” are questions I can easily picture the children at Gather Round asking about this case.



Finally, in the spirit of camaraderie in seeking textile-literacy, I may be contacted through my website (<http://dunnington.ca>) with any questions regarding construction of this carrying case.



Material List



- 1. Thin cardboard (old flattened cereal boxes work well)



- 2. Dark colored marker (Sharpie® is great)



- 3. Scissors (for cardboard)

- 4. Ruler or Measuring Tape (a yard stick is particularly helpful)



- 5. Fabric scraps, any size/colour (thinner fabric is easier than thick fabric)

- 6. Sewing machine and thread (a heavy-duty needle is helpful, but not necessary)



- 7. Embroidery Floss and Embroidery Needle

- 8. Material to make a handle (e.g. old belt, nylon strap, or folded fabric scraps)



- 9. Sturdy needle and cotton thread



- 10. Scissors (for fabric)

One of the following items¹²:



- 11. Serger (this is a specific type of sewing machine that cuts and binds)



- 12. Modge Podge® glue and paintbrush



¹²You may choose to use both for a particularly clean finish on this case.





Step One: *Measuring and Cutting Templates*



Note: This carry case varies in size depending on the stack of books you are making it for. Thus, it is important to have the stack of books you will be using on hand while you work. For the purposes of this tutorial a sample of books from Appendix C were used.



First measure the length and width of the largest book in your stack:



For this tutorial we will use the book *Red Butterfly: How a Princess Smuggled the Secret of Silk Out of China* by Deborah Noyes as our largest book (2008). To help track our measurements I have created a few tables and figures for you to fill in. These are available as free downloads on my website (<https://dunnington.ca>). Note that all tables and charts appear filled in within this document.



Book:	<i>Red Butterfly</i> (2018)	
Length:	11 inches	12 inches
Width:	9.5 inches	10.5 inches
Height:	11.5 inches	12.5 inches



Use ½ inch seam allowance¹³



Once these measurements have been taken you will need to measure the height of the stack of books itself. This measurement will change significantly depending on how many books, and of what width, you'd like to make a case for. You might also choose to measure your stack and add a few inches in case additional books are added to your textile library in the future. For this stack of books, the height I measured was 11.5".



With these three main measurements the entirety of the case measurements can be calculated as follows: See separate figure page for image to be inserted below¹⁴



¹³Seam allowance refers to the area between the fabric (or here the cardboard) edge and the stitching line when two or more pieces [of fabric] are being sewn together.

¹⁴Note that this diagram shows the case opened and laid flat.





Once you have calculated the size of your case you will need to use a ruler, pencil, and sharp scissors to cut recycled cardboard base templates to size (old opened cereal boxes work quite well).



Figure D1

Tutorial image 1





Figure D2

Tutorial image 2





Figure D3



Tutorial image 3



This step will be repeated for each template shown in Figure # above. As you cut and check each cardboard piece, you will need to label it to be able to reconstruct the case set-up. I recommend labeling the piece you have just cut (i.e. base, top flap b, ect) as well as the measurements of the sides to be matched together.





Figure D4

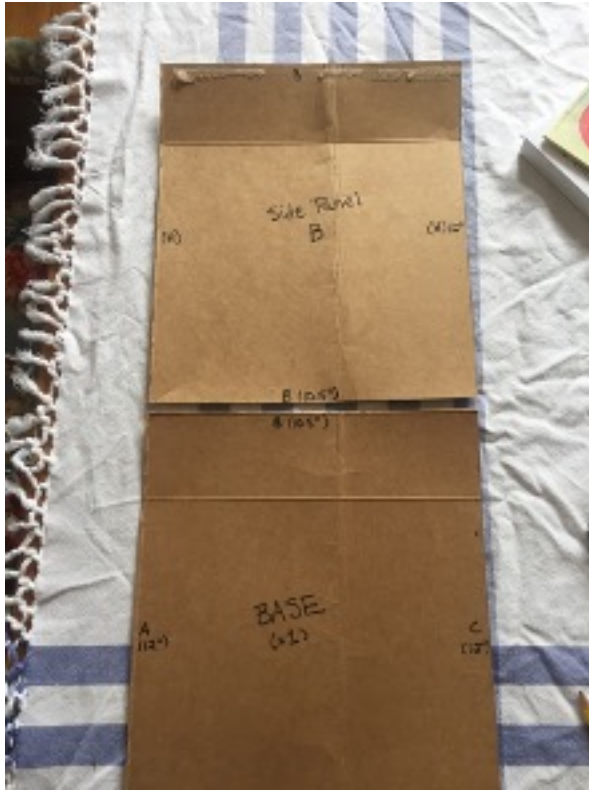
Tutorial image 4





Figure D5

Tutorial image 5



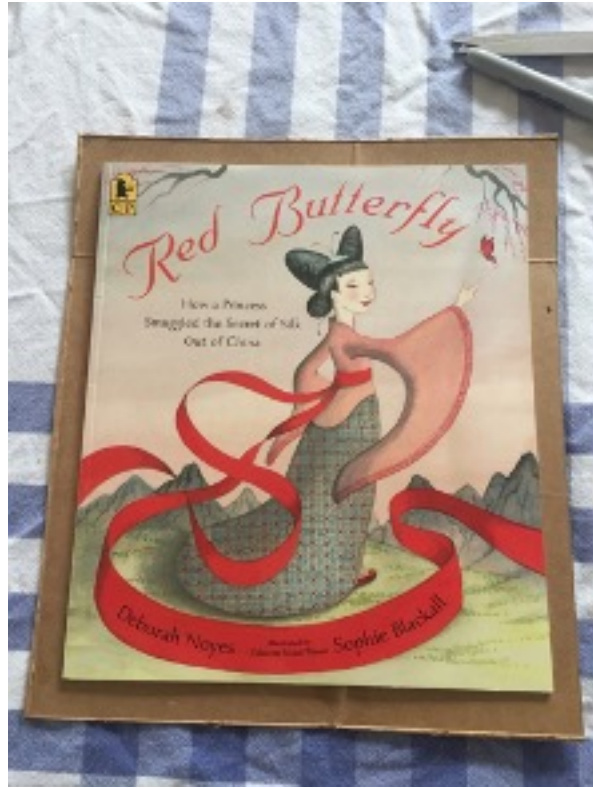
Tip: When you have cut the piece you have measured for the Base, use your largest book (here, *Red Butterfly: How a Princess Smuggled the Secret of Silk Out of China*) to test that it fits inside your base template with a 1/2 inch margin all around.





Figure D6

Tutorial image 6



Continue cutting and measuring until all templates, except for Top Flap sections, have been cut out. Lay them out in the same order as Figure # to make sure you have cut each piece with accurate measurements. Again, check that all labels have been recorded directly on the template.

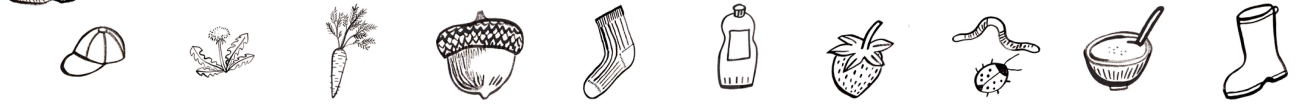




Figure D7

Tutorial image 7



You may have noticed that the Top Flap sections drawn on Figure # feature rounded top corners. While this isn't necessary, it does make for a case that easily opens and closes. If you wish to skip this step, then cut Top Flap templates as you did all other pieces above and continue on to Step Two: *Fabric Application* directions.

If you would like to recreate the rounded edges, cut Top Flaps (and label) as before, but using a circular object, such as a plate, trace off one corner of the top two edges to cut away. Repeat for all four Top Flap panels. See Images 8, 9 and 10





Figure D8

Tutorial image 8





Figure D9

Tutorial image 9





Figure D10



Tutorial image 10



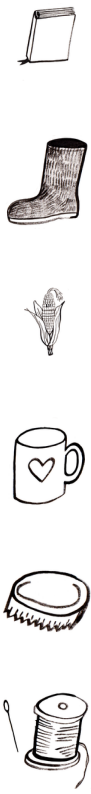
When you have completed all Top Flap pieces in this manner, each should look like Image 11. Don't forget to label each piece as you go.



Figure D11



Tutorial image 11



Step Two: *Fabric Application*

The templates you have prepared are used during the entirety of this project and become the foundation for the case. You will sew directly onto each piece. Though this project does not require specialized sewing skills, you will need to know how to operate a sewing machine. Any sewing machine that can straight stitch and uses a heavy-duty needle will work. The machine used for this tutorial is a Janome® M7200. The machine was able to handle the cardboard and two layers of fabric using a basic all-purpose sewing needle.

After turning on, threading and testing your machine, set your stitch length to 3.5. If your machine uses a different system than the standard stitch length counter, just know that what is important is to “open up” your stitch length so that you aren’t creating tight stitches on such a thick project. See Image 12.





Figure D12

Tutorial image 12



Now you will prepare one template panel and begin sewing. The scrap fabric you have assembled should be cut into small random pieces. It is not important the shape or size, simply that you have enough to cover each template with scraps leaving a 1/2 inch overhang all around. If you need to, take the time now to cut fabric scraps into manageable pieces. I found it helpful to fill a large basket with the scraps so I could choose a piece at random as I worked.

Starting with any template piece (I chose the Base) select one fabric scrap and stitch around it directly onto the cardboard. It is helpful to start toward the centre of the piece.





Figure D13

Tutorial image 13



Once the first piece is sewn down use a “collage” approach to layer and stitch separate scraps all around your centre piece, working outward. The goal is to cover the entire template so it is helpful to always overlap scraps by a scant ¼ inch and stitch them down. You may want to plan scraps in advance to see what the overall scrap coverage is like. As you work use a dark marker (a Sharpie® works well) to transfer all template markings directly onto the fabric.





Figure D14

Tutorial image 14





Figure D15

Tutorial image 15



When template piece is completely covered on one side, with a 1/2 inch overhang all around, turn template over and repeat on back side. For the purposes of this tutorial this is the "cereal box" side of the template.





Figure D16



Tutorial image 17





Figure D17

Tutorial image 18



When covered, the Top Flap sections with curved edges (if you chose to cut them) will require extra overhang, but will then have to be trimmed back. It is easiest if you cover one side and trim the curved edge 1/2 inch away on a curve, while it can be easily seen, before covering the other side. It will then be possible to trim the second side (the “cereal box” side) to match the curve you cut before.





Figure D18

Tutorial image 19



It is helpful to either serge (if you have knowledge and access to a serging machine) or stitch closely to the outside edge of the curved outer edges and trim them back. These four Top Flap sections have one large curved outer edge which will not be sewn to any other template piece.





Figure D19



Tutorial image 20



Repeat the above process until every template piece has been covered in the “scrap collage” style. This will be a total of 18 sides covered in fabric (9 pieces with 2 sides each). Lay out all your template pieces, labels and markings face-up, in the same layout as shown in Figure #.





Figure D20

Tutorial image 21



Step Three: Case Construction

When all template pieces are covered and laid out it is time to assemble the case. Select any top flap panel with its corresponding side panel to begin (e.g. Top Flap A with Side Panel A). Line them up so that the edges match (See Figure # to help you recall which edge “matches”).





Figure D21

Tutorial image 22



This lined up edge will become your interior seam. Place your Top Flap piece on top of your Side Panel piece with the exteriors up against one another (in sewing this is often called “right sides together”). You will know you have done this correctly if panels with markings are now showing on both sides.





Figure D22

Tutorial image 23



Stitch these two panels together on only the edge you have lined up. Try and keep your sewing needle close to the interior cardboard without actually sewing through it. If using a serger you may go over this seam with a serge line to cut and bind the fabric. If you are not using a serger you may trim excess fabric away from your stitch line leaving a scant 1/4 inch overhang. The reverse side (the exterior panels) will be a tidy seam. The side you have just sewn (the interior panels) will be either serged or trimmed back.





Figure D23

Tutorial image 24





Figure D24

Tutorial image 25



Repeat the above seaming process for each pair of Side Panels and corresponding Top Flaps panels.

You will now have four long segments of Top Flap/Side Panel covered templates. These each need to be sewn onto the base, one on each edge, continuing to follow the diagram in Figure #, to make sure each panel is sewn on the correct corresponding line. It will become challenging to get these panels in a suitable position under your sewing machine, but I assure you, *it is possible*. Remember that the panels themselves have flexible cardboard interiors and can be folded and shaped as needed. You might also try experimenting with different angles as the long segments lay to the side of the machine. When you finish you will have a flat, yet fully sewn, case as in Image 26.





Figure D25

Tutorial image 26



Step Four: *Final Assembly*

Now that you have sewn each panel together it is time to fold and assemble the case. To sew together your case, it is helpful to know how to blanket stitch. Though any sewing stitch you are comfortable with will work, the blanket stitch provides extra reinforcement and a clean edge. If you are unfamiliar with this stitch a wonderful tutorial is available online through Red Ted Art¹⁵ at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9zegUYdPmg>.

Prior to full case assembly you will need to finish the edges between your panels somewhat. If you are using a serger, they can be serged with a 1/4 inch seam. If you are working by hand you may simply trim them back to 1/4 inch from each template edge.

Only the edges between Side Panels B/C and Side Panels C/D need to be

¹⁵Red Ted Art. (2016, April 27). Blanket stitch how-to: Basic sewing [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9zegUYdPmg>





stitched together. To do this, choose any two to begin and lift them up to form the edges of the box. It helps to sit on the floor as the structure becomes more and more unwieldy. Use a clothes pin, or other clip, to secure your flaps together before you begin sewing.

Figure D26

Tutorial image 27



Using embroidery floss held double (for the purposes of this tutorial I have used bright pink, but any color is fine) and a thick embroidery needle begin stitching panels together. Thread your needle, knot your thread, and beginning at the bottom corner begin blanket stitching (or the stitch method you have chosen) your panels together only until you reach the join with the Top Flaps.





Figure D27



Tutorial image 28



The inside edge of what you have just sewn, or in other words the inside of the case, should now look like Image 29.





Figure D28

Tutorial image 29



Repeat this process from the second seam. If you began with the seam between Side Panels B/C you will now sew the seam between Side Panels C/D. Conversely, if you began with C/D you will now sew B/C. Your case should now stand more easily, with one front flap opening and three upright sides.





Figure D29

Tutorial image 30





Figure D30

Tutorial image 31



If you did not serge the edges of each Side Panel then you will now need to trim excess fabric and blanket stitch the edges of each panel to create a clean finish. Skip this step if you did serge. To review how to blanket stitch a raw edge visit the video linked on page #.

Step Five: Handle and Tie Closures

This is the final step in the construction of your case. You will need to create tie closures for the front flap by choosing either ribbons, string (braided together works best), or thin strips of fabric to fold on itself. If you are using a tie closure that is ready to use (such as a ribbon) you may skip the next step.

If using fabric folded on itself to make a tie closure you will need to cut long thin strips. I think 3 inches by 7 inches works best. Fold the fabric on itself either once or twice, depending on how wide you cut, and stitch it shut to make a sturdier tie closure. If your machine can do a zig-zag stitch you might use this to give your tie





closure extra stretch. You will need a total of 8 tie closures. They may all be made the same way, but you are equally free to mix and match with what you have on hand.



Figure D31

Tutorial image 32





Figure D32

Tutorial image 33





Figure D33

Tutorial image 34



You will now need to attach the tie closures to both the outer panel (Side Panel D) on both edges, and one edge (the unbound one) of each of Side Panels A and C. Attach one tie three inches from the bottom and top of each panel. It is helpful to use a variety of stitches to go over the tie closure attachment to make it secure. This can be seen in Images 35 and 36.





Figure D34



Tutorial image 35





Figure D35

Tutorial image 36



Make a handle for your case. You might choose to use a piece of nylon webbing, a section of an old belt, or again use fabric folded on itself to make a thicker handle. The size of your handle is up to you, but be aware that the size used dictates the opening you will cut to insert the handle. A larger handle will require a larger opening. For the purposes of this tutorial I used a folded fabric handle that was one inch wide (after sewing) and 5 inches long.





Figure D36

Tutorial image 37



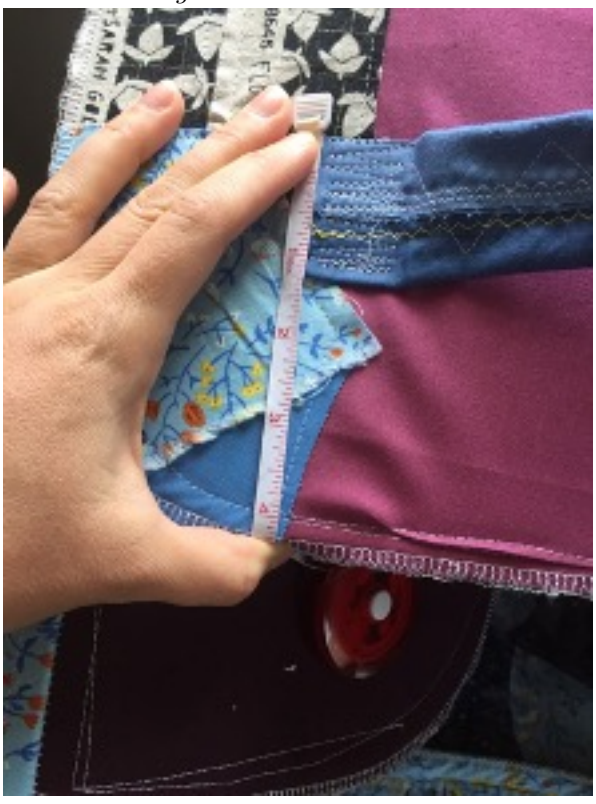
Attach the handle to Top Flap B, again using several back and forth stitches, about three inches away from the front edge, and centered on the panel.





Figure D37

Tutorial image 38



You will now need to cut an opening for the attached handle to fit through onto Top Flap D. The easiest way to do this is to measure three inches from the center outside edge of Top Flap D and use a dark marker to mark your spot. Then, using the measurements of your handle work with scissors to cut a rectangle that matches your handles size and shape. It is useful to flop Top Flaps D and B over one another to periodically check you are cutting the correct size at the correct location. Cutting out this rectangle is slightly fussy work but can be achieved if you work in layers: cut first one layer of fabric, then the cardboard, then the second layer of fabric until you are satisfied with your cut.

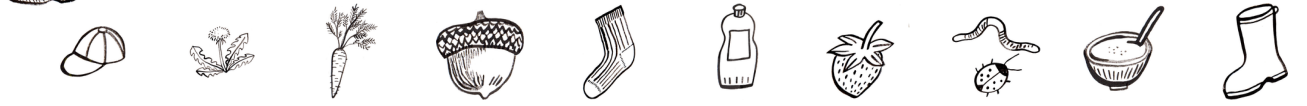




Figure D38

Tutorial image 39





Figure D39

Tutorial image 40





Figure D40

Tutorial image 41



You will now need to stitch around the opening you have just cut to secure the edges of fabric to the outside edge of the cardboard. Using a zig zag stitch is helpful. It may take some maneuvering to fit this panel under your sewing machine foot but alternating directions and gently folding the cardboard can help.

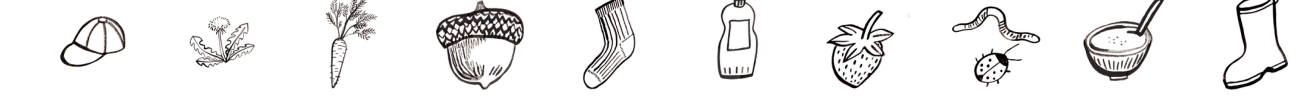




Figure D41

Tutorial image 42



The final step in completing this case is entirely optional. In order to make some of the edges of your case cleaner and sturdier it is helpful to apply Modge Podge® glue with a paintbrush to outer edges and corners. This is particularly useful around the edges of the hole you just cut. It is up to you how much Modge Podge® to apply but not that it will change the texture of the fabric. As such, it is best to use it sparingly so that the nature of the textiles you have chosen remain largely unaltered.





Figure D42

Tutorial image 43





Figure D43

Tutorial image 44





Figure D44



Tutorial image 45





Appendix E

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Appendix F
Copyright

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