Ten in a Bed: Literacy, Intermediality and the Potentials of Low-Tech

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Abstract: *Ten in Bed* was a project led by participatory arts organisation Phakama, in partnership with Queen Mary University of London. Over an eight-week period we ran a series of intermedial arts workshops and staged a performance with under five year olds and their families at a community centre in Bethnal Green, London. We attempted to enhance creative and communication skills, which are a key feature of critical literacy. In this article, I use Lars Elleström's 'modalities' to parse the project's material, perceptual and social aspects and to consider the ways in which the intermedial process operated affectively to develop critical literacy skills.

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In the main activities room of the community centre on a housing estate in Bethnal Green, we have erected a giant bed. The 'headboard' is both a screen and an ad-hoc drawing board; hung with coloured sheets that turn over, like the pages of a book. A massive, brightly patterned duvet is suspended a foot or so in the air, reinforced by a wooden platform, so that it creates a stable surface that rests just above the low benches. The benches serve as seats that run along the bed's four sides, cushioned with pillows at the back – giving the impression that the audience of 15 or so children and

their parents is 'tucked in'. The children are wearing pyjamas and dressing gowns; they lay their heads on the duvet and pretend to fall asleep.

We begin with a song.

Then a dream-scape; a disjointed story, read by live performers and illustrated with the use of puppets and a series of digital projections: a dense forest, where light moves behind the trees, casting a shadowy web of branches across the room; neon-bright tropical fish blow bubbles underwater. Butterflies suspended from bamboo sticks dance overhead. The children sip imaginary tea from plastic teacups and clamber onto the duvet-platform to role-play as giants.

The lights dim and animations play out on the headboard-screen: A tiger roars. The great knight Sir Pomp-a-Lot beheads a ravenous monster. A little girl named Ellie releases a butterfly. Sounds are played through a multi-channel speaker. The images are stark cartoons; key words related to the story flash up under the drawings.

The lights rise. The children call out names of characters, places and events – an artist, using coloured felt-tip pens, sketches these onto the headboard. The children narrate the images into a story.

We finish with a song.

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The scene described above is my recollection of the final performance in a project called *Ten in a Bed.* This was a collaborative arts project run by participatory arts organisation Phakama, in partnership with Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), where I worked as a lecturer at the time. Over eight-weeks, from February to March 2015, we worked with children under five years old and their families in Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets, seeking to enhance literacy through early intervention in one of London's most diverse

and deprived boroughs. The project was funded by the Big Lottery Fund and QMUL's Centre for Public Engagement.

Phakama are an arts organisation based in London. Founded in 1996, they specialise in facilitating participatory arts projects. Their philosophy is built around the concept of 'Give and Gain', a non-hierarchical approach to arts practice, where each participant, including the facilitators, is understood to have something to offer and something to learn from the creative process. Working in contexts including with teenagers in South Africa, intergenerational groups in East London and young women in an Arabic art gallery in London, Phakama seek to engage those 'on the edges of society' (Phakama 2015a). *Ten in a Bed* was the company's first project focused on pre-school aged children, and was conceived under the directorship of recently appointed Artistic Director, Corinne Micallef, and structured by Micallef and myself. It marks a shift in Phakama's work, with more explicit pedagogical aims than previous projects.

Each week we ran an 'intermedial' arts workshop, including live storytelling, story writing, performance, digital projection, animation and puppetry. Initially, myself and four students from QMUL's Approaches to Applied Theatre module would lead arts and crafts activities at designated 'stations', while Phakama artists took responsibility for short storytelling performances that brought the craftworks together. As the project progressed, each student was tasked with conceiving and leading a session, supported by Phakama artists and myself as their tutor. At each stage the implementation of both new and old technologies was deliberately 'low-tech'; our focus was not on the sophisticated application of new technologies, but on using a variety of methods to create moments for participants to engage with, imagine and articulate rich fictional worlds.

It was our intention that through engaging children and their parents in complex sensory experiences, encouraging them to articulate their daily experiences and create stories of their own, we would facilitate the children's cognitive, expressive and perceptual development in a way that would

enhance literacy skills; giving them the confidence to use words to articulate ideas and experiences in formal educational settings and beyond – including, importantly, the home. Our understanding of the changing pedagogical requirements of the digital age drove our intermedial approach. As Nicola Shaughnessy points out, so called 'digital natives' – those who have been born into a world where digital technologies are dominant – 'perceive, think and learn' (2012, 162) differently to their parents and grandparents and so require different pedagogical methods to learn effectively. The intermedial methods we employed during *Ten in a Bed* were designed to appeal to children used to receiving information quickly and in a variety of 'modes' (Elleström 2010), working in networks, and multi-tasking (Prensky 2001). We aimed to create a stimulating, playful environment where the children could utilise different techniques to engage with texts and communicate their understanding of the world around them.

In this way, our conception of 'literacy' extended beyond the 'functional' definitions of literacy that have come to dominate education policy in the UK under the Coalition and Conservative governments, discussed in more detail below. It was not our intention to 'teach' reading and writing – not least because the children, with an average age of three years, were too young for this to be a realistic prospect. Rather, in line with the National Literacy Trust's (NLT 2015) emphasis on communication as a core feature of literacy, we wished to develop holistic communication skills that might underpin and enhance the reading and writing skills the children would develop during formal education, and to offer parents tools for engaging with texts at home. This included exposing families to written texts in a variety of ways (as songs, performances, immersive 'worlds'), as well as facilitating the recording of their own stories as written and performed texts, using an adapted version of the 'helicopter technique' developed by Vivian Gussin Paley (described in more detail below). Our approach also explored documenting and telling stories using visual means, encouraging a development of visual literacy alongside verbal literacy.

In what follows, I discuss and contextualise the approach to literacy we took during *Ten in a Bed*, and share critical insights from the project, focusing on what Lars Elleström has called the 'critical meeting of the material, the perceptual and the social' (2010,19). I parse the material, perceptual and social aspects of *Ten in a Bed*, using Elleström's 'modalities' as an analytical tool. I propose that our 'low-tech' intermedial approach to using new and old technologies offered significant opportunities to produce 'affects' that positively impacted the child participants' habitual development, developing critical communication skills central to the acquisition of meaningful literacy skills.

Literacy and Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets is one of the UK's most unequal boroughs. Situated in the heart of East of London, it is home to some of the most expensive real estate in the UK. Its span includes the UK's two main financial districts, the City of London and Canary Wharf; meaning that many of those who are employed in the borough are amongst the highest paid workers in London – indeed, Tower Hamlets boasts one of the smallest proportion of low-paid workers in the capital (New Policy Institute 2014). However, many of those who work in Tower Hamlets live elsewhere, and, despite the wealth of the businesses and many of the workers, according to the London Centre for Social Impact, it is the third most deprived borough nationally; its residents experience the highest rate of child poverty and the highest rate of unemployment in the capital (2011). This wealth inequality is compounded by the area's rich history of serving as an entry point for generations of immigrants, resulting in huge ethnic diversity. Tower Hamlets has the largest Bangladeshi community in England. Over two thirds of the borough's population identify as belonging to Black and Ethnic Minority groups, with a further 14% from White Ethnic Minority communities. Meanwhile, over a third of residents cite languages other than English as the main household language and just under a quarter have low or no proficiency in spoken English (Tower Hamlets Council 2013).

The relationship between ethnic diversity, poverty and literacy is complex, and beyond the scope of this article. However, as a recent financial inclusion strategy released by the Tower Hamlets Partnership – aimed at addressing poverty in Tower Hamlets – noted, there appears to be a link between education, poverty and ethnicity in the borough. The report argues that 'those with poor levels of education, literacy and numeracy, typically have lower levels of financial capability' than more literate residents (2013, 12), and that 'low levels of financial capability among BME groups are linked with comparatively lower educational attainment and aspirations, higher levels of unemployment and lower income levels' (2013, 16). Literacy levels in Tower Hamlets have been subject to public scrutiny, with the Evening Standard including the borough in a damning report, based on a Freedom of Information request, claiming that '[o]ne in three children in 11 [London] council wards […] started secondary school with dramatically impaired reading abilities, meaning they are on course to be "functionally illiterate"' (2011).

Literacy is a 'complex and dynamic' term, which 'continues to be interpreted and defined in a multiplicity of ways' (UNESCO 2006, 147). As Bryan Street (2005) points out, definitions of literacy are also, importantly, bound up with political agendas and ideologies; definitions are often hegemonically leveraged to marginalise or promote particular worldviews. In the UK, since 2010, the Coalition and Conservative governments have worked to move conceptions of 'literacy' away from the more complex, fluid definitions, which included speaking and listening, that had developed throughout the late twentieth century and contributed to the rise in progressive pedagogical methods, towards so called 'functional literacy'.

Rather than viewing literacy as a broad set of critical communication skills, underpinned by competency in understanding and communicating in English, Conservative ideology has focussed instead on positioning reading and writing as the end-game of literacy. Changes to literacy education propelled by the Coalition Secretary of State for Education, Conservative politician Michael Gove, included increased testing, a renewed focus on accuracy and

‘rigour’, and formal checks ‘to make sure [children] are decoding words fluently’ (Wintour 2014). In *So Why Can’t They Read?* (2010), a Centre for Policy Studies report authored by journalist Miriam Gross and introduced by Boris Johnson, the Conservative Mayor of London, a ‘scientific’ approach to ‘reading’ was put forward as the most effective way of addressing the poor literacy skills of primary-aged children attending London schools. Gross is highly critical of ‘progressive education’ (2) and advocates ‘phonics’ (a method by which the learner ‘decodes’ units of sound and develops a ‘scientific’ understanding of the sound-word relationship) as the most effective way to teach primary aged children to read; despite acknowledging that phonics remains a contested method amongst education experts (Gross 2010, 11-24).

Reading and writing are, of course, important foundational literacy skills, however, an over-emphasis on ‘functional literacy’ risks ignoring core social and creative skills that are also important aspects of literacy. As Nicola Shaughnessy argues, ‘Paolo Freire long ago demonstrated in relation to literacy [that] teaching needs to be sensitive to the social, cultural and economic contexts in which learners are situated’ (Shaughnessy 2012, 160). Indeed, educational theorists including Lankshear (1993) and Hoggart (1998) have drawn on Freire’s (1971) work in order to criticise functional literacy as dangerously utilitarian. Hoggart argues that without ‘critical literacy’, ‘literacy becomes a way of subordinating great numbers of people’, who risk being ‘conned by mass persuaders’ (1998, 56). As poet and former Children’s Laureate Michael Rosen has pointed out, literacy in the Early Years curriculum and beyond is increasingly tied to ‘measurement’, with the presumption that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way of communicating and a ‘correct’ way to interpret literary texts, which are presumed to have a ‘fixed’ meaning (Rosen 2015). Measurements such as the Phonics Screening Check (see, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-2015-materials) Rosen argues, potentially limit children’s enjoyment of literature, increase anxiety about reading and are counter-productive because they isolate sounds from context inhibiting the interpretation of meaning (Rosen 2012).

Ensuring that children in Tower Hamlets are given the opportunity to develop functional literacy skills will play an important role in addressing inequality in the borough. However, literacy must have a critical, social aspect if it is to meaningfully address structural inequalities. As Linda Flower argues, we should view literacy as 'action' (1994).

> Literate action opens the door to metacognitve and social awareness. In other words, literacy as a social, cognitive act creates some opportunities for strategic thinking and reflection that are absent in the pedagogy of textual conventions and correctness. (Flower 1994, 27)

For *Ten in Bed* to develop foundational literacy skills in any meaningful way, we were aware that we must work to enable *critical* literacy skills. Critical literacy skills are embedded in action and grounded in what Flower calls the new 'basics' - which start with 'expressive and rhetorical practices' (1994, 25) and are not tied to strict notions of 'correctness' espoused by functional literacy advocates. For the purposes of the *Ten in a Bed* project, we were interested in exploring the potential intermediality might have to facilitate critical literacy.

Intermediality, Criticality and Pedagogy

In his 1966 essay, 'Intermedia', artist and scholar Dick Higgins offered an account of twentieth century artworks – such as Duchamp's ready-mades, Joe Jones' sculptural instruments and Kaprow's 'happenings' – that challenged the existing boundaries between disciplines. For Higgins, these 'intermedial' works served as a means of innovating art forms, which had become stagnant in a time where 'rigid categories' were 'absolutely irrelevant' (Higgins 1966). As Higgins notes, traditional means of receiving artworks, such as viewing a painting in a gallery, were insufficient for addressing the social problems of the time, as they did not 'allow of any sense of dialogue' (Higgins 1966).

The concept of dialogue suggested by Higgins – of an artwork facilitating an active, critical, conversation, which might address social problems – has been central to the disintegration of disciplinary boundaries that has characterised

the art movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Grant Kester (2004) argues, ‘dialogic’ works have become a significant feature of contemporary art practice, as artists have increasingly created projects that ‘unfold through a process of performative interaction’ (10), in which viewers actively participate. Participation places an emphasis on the subject position of participants, and, like intermediality, opens up possibilities for conversation and alternative ways of perceiving. Underpinned by the adaptation of Friere’s critical pedagogy by Augusto Boal, notions of dialogue, participation and reciprocity have contributed to the development of applied theatre practice, and have often included intermedial techniques. Meanwhile, influential twentieth-century progressive educational theorists and practitioners, including John Dewey, Harriet Finlay-Johnson and Dorothy Heathcote took intermedial approaches to the use of drama in the classroom, which included literature, dancing and folk singing as well as staging plays (Nicholson 2011, 45). The use of arts practices to enhance learning and critical awareness is now widespread. The ability of the arts to ‘effect change through experiential and sensory mediums’ is becoming clearer as our knowledge of cognition and brain function improve (Shaughnessy 2012, 32-34). We now understand that there is a ‘clear relationship between physical action and cognition’ (Shaughnessy 2012, 33), and can confidently utilise artistic methods to develop cognitive skills.

Intermediality and *Ten in a Bed*

Higgins (1984) points out that intermedial work is not ‘good’ by virtue of its intermediality. Rather, defining work as intermedial, he argues, allows us to better ‘understand the work and its significances.’ In describing *Ten in a Bed* as intermedial I am referring to the ways in which we brought together a variety of nominally separate arts mediums in order to facilitate the cognitive development that Shaughnessy suggests is possible through play and pleasure. I use the term intermedial, after Lars Elleström (2010), to emphasise the importance of the meeting of the ‘material, the perceptual and the social’ in our pedagogical practices.

Elleström's outlines four 'modalities' of media; the *material, sensorial, spatiotemporal* and *semiotic*. These modalities are 'the essential cornerstones of all media' (Elleström 2010, 15) which, he proposes, are brought into interaction in various ways during intermedial practices to create specific sensations and experiences. Although Elleström does not outline a hierarchy amongst the modalities, he does suggest that there is movement through them: that the material gives way to the sensual, which is structured by the spatiotemporal and leads to the creation of meaning (36). For Elleström these modalities are useful for 'understanding, describing and interpreting the most elementary intermedial relations' (16). Below, I employ Elleström's model for this purpose, in order to parse the material, perceptual and social elements of *Ten in a Bed*.

Ten in a Bed: **Material, Perceptual, Social**

A Note on Participants

We recruited participants to *Ten in a Bed* through a variety of means over a ten-week lead-in period. Phakama sent a mail-out to local community groups and education centres, and posted details of the workshops on local online message boards and websites concerned with parent-child activities. We also advertised on the housing estate where the sessions took place, by putting posters about the workshops on the notice board in the community centre. A total of 49 families took part, with over 80% attending more than one session, and 50% attending at least half of the workshops. There was a core group of approximately twelve families who attended almost every week.

We did not scrutinise the social, economic and ethnic backgrounds of our participants – we felt this would be inappropriate and draw unnecessary and unhelpful attention to socio-economic and ethnic divides in the group. There is therefore no accurate data about the demographics of participants. However, from observing and chatting informally to the group, it appeared that we did have a diverse range of attendees; a mix of ethnicities, families from the estate and those who had travelled from other, wealthier parts of the borough, and several families who had English as a second language. The project was free of charge to all participants.

The Workshops

In order to create a stimulating sensory environment for the children who attended our sessions, digital natives immersed in a world of distractions, we were aware that we would need to structure the workshops to facilitate various 'modes' of perception, which the children could respond to by 'giving' according to their individual personalities, perceptual capabilities and interests. Although it was not deliberate (in that we didn't design them to adhere to a theoretical model of intermediality), our workshop sessions were structured in a way that can retrospectively be mapped onto Elleström's modalities model. Our intermedial approach involved a 'combination and integration of media' (Elleström 2010, 36); each session moved from a predominately material to a predominately semiotic modality, with interactions between modalities facilitated throughout.

Each workshop session was an hour and half long, and began with a series of 'activity stations' themed around the story of the week. These might be thought of as the primarily 'material' sections of the workshop; in that they mostly concerned the 'material modality', which Elleström defines as 'the latent corporeal interface of the medium; where the senses meet the material impact' (2010, 36). Our stories were usually simple European folk and fairy tales – but also included popular contemporary children's books such as Eric Carle's *A House for a Hermit Crab* and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are.* At the stations children worked with the supervision of their parent/guardian or a facilitator to make or to decorate food and objects, or to sing a song. For example, during the *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* week, they might decorate gingerbread bears, personalise a wooden spoon for stirring porridge, draw food onto a paper plate or join in with the singing of a 'bear' song. They were also required to interact and negotiate with other participants over the use of materials; which added a social element to the material section of the workshops, as the children were required to become sensitive to each-others' needs, and compromise in order to maximise their enjoyment of and engagement with the activity.

While the stations offered ‘low-tech’ activities, they served to stimulate the children’s senses, moving them from the material to a primarily sensorial modality at the ‘realized material interface’ (Elleström 2010, 18), which was fast-paced, required multi-tasking and offered ample rewards (sweet food, props to take home, movement and song). Stimulating the sense faculties (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling), immediately impacts cognition, as receptors are activated and new sensations emerge as a ‘complex web of perceived and conceived sense-data combined with retrieved sensations’ (Elleström 2010, 18). During sessions it was clear that the children were making ‘sense’ of the activities around them in relation to their understanding of the world, and using the activities as a medium through which to express that understanding, and often explain it verbally. Rolling out cookie dough, four-year-old Jo[i] told me the recipe they used at home, much to her grandmother’s surprise – the family hadn’t realised she was absorbing that information. Thus the stations created moments during which the child participants were able express existing and emerging knowledge, both through the *action* of the activities and through the opportunities for discussion they provided.

Once the activity stations section of the workshops was finished, we would transition into the storytelling section. This involved moving the children from the activity space, to the ‘story’ space partitioned off by a movable wall. The transition and storytelling sections moved the participants through the ‘sensorial’ into a primarily spatiotemporal modality, where their ‘perception of the material interface’ manifested into ‘experiences and conceptions of space and time’ (Elleström 2010, 36). Time was a particular feature of this shifting spatiotemporal modality in the story space, where it was always both bedtime and a bedroom (with duvets and pillows) and the fictional time and place of whichever story was the focus of that week. For each storytelling session we would use simple scenographic technologies: shadow-puppetry, projection, ‘signifiers’ such as curtains, to suggest the fictional place.

For the transitional moment we used several ‘low-tech’ techniques. For example, during the *Princess and the Pea* week, we erected a castle made

from cardboard, which the children had decorated, between the two spaces, and had them crawl through the door of the castle from the activity space to emerge in the story space. Several children became fascinated with this transitional moment, crawling between spaces throughout. However, they appeared to feel and respond to the shifts in time and atmosphere in the two spaces – as their behaviour changed from loud and raucous in the 'activity' space, to quiet and reflective as they entered the storytelling space where other children were pretending to sleep on 'peas' made from ping-pong balls.

The most successful transition technique was the use of digital projection. For example, to transition into the story space during *Little Red Riding Hood* week we used a 'forest' projection (designed by a Phakama artist and implemented using a small, hand-held projector) and guided the children on a 'walk' through the forest into 'Grandma's cottage'. These were low-tech, deliberately unsophisticated projections, which looked messy and unconvincing and cast unevenly over the space. However, they provoked a significant affective response in the children. During the *Red Riding Hood* session they gasped and moved slowly, reaching to touch the shadowy branches of projected trees and lowering their voices to a whisper. Their embodied response to the projection seemed to echo Elleström's description of the sensorial experience of sculpture: '[…] mainly seen but it is impossible to grasp its entity without moving and hence also involving the inner senses. Even if one does not actually touch its surface one sees and indirectly feels its tactile qualities' (2010, 18).

As the children entered the storytelling space they began to move into a semiotic modality; making sense of the signs and symbols from the activity session and the scenography to 'guess' what the story might be that week, or to articulate what they knew and understood about the space we had created – the kinds of animals who live under the sea, for example, or what one might eat at a breakfast table. The stories were told by professional and student performers – however, we let the children 'fill in the gaps' of the narrative; allowing them to name characters, or to tell us versions of the more well-known stories they might have heard elsewhere, or that they had invented.

Here the children were actively operating in the semiotic modality, creating meaning ‘by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation’ (Elleström 2010, 36), stimulated by the material, sensorial and spatiotemporal modes that had preceded it. In final evaluations parents commented that they were surprised by their children’s willingness to input during the storytelling, and by the vivid creativity they displayed. One parent told us she felt that our approach allowed the children to feel comfortable to participate; unlike more conventional literacy sessions she had attended, where children are passively ‘read to’ (Phakama 2015b). By facilitating this kind of participatory storytelling, we hoped to lay the foundations for critical thinking; we were engaging in an active, social literacy, which, as Flower points out, ‘creates some opportunities for strategic thinking and reflection’ (1994, 27).

The final stage of our workshops were focussed on encouraging the children to make meaning and express themselves by telling their own stories. Here, they moved between modalities, drawing on their experiences during the sessions to articulate ideas. We also asked parents to tell us stories during this section, so that we might get a mix of narratives and stories from different cultural perspectives. Here, we used an adapted version of Gussin Paley’s ‘helicopter technique’ (see http://www.makebelievearts.co.uk/early-years-storytelling/), writing the stories the children (and their parents and guardians) told us word for word, without correcting errors, but stopping to re-read sentences aloud to check they were as the storyteller intended. We then read the stories back to the storyteller verbatim, allowing them to make corrections as they saw fit. Unlike in Gussin Paley’s technique we did not ask the children to immediately perform each-others’ stories. Instead, we collected them and adapted them into our final performance, where they were animated, performed and given to the children in a printed ‘story book’, which also included craft activities and storytelling exercises parents might try with their children at home. Although the use of this adapted ‘helicopter’ technique was a new method for Phakama, it resonated with their ‘Give and Gain’ approach, where the children might offer their stories and find pleasure in seeing them told in print and performance. In this way it usefully enabled the company to extend the principles of their practice to work with very young children.

The ‘helicopter’ stories were a means through which the children could practice their fledgling expressive and rhetorical skills, make links between ideas and play with the structure of storytelling and story writing. In their stories, the children brought together moments from the workshop session, their lives away from the project and their imaginations, to create new worlds. For example, after an ‘under the sea’ themed workshop Malakai, two, dictated the following story:

> Bronte the fish. Him live in a waterfall and him swim away, and he’s goed home, and his mum comed, and his dad, and his slipped and his fall down and his six old, and there’s his two old, and his hold his hand, and then sparkly.

While Jo told the story below after the *Red Riding Hood* session, which had involved icing cakes:

> A cake and Red Riding Hood. She was having trouble with her icing. Her favourite colour of icing was blue. Little Red Riding Hood had cake with her Grandma. Grandma liked chocolate cake. They went into the forest to eat and to sit down.

Although by no means grammatically flawless, these stories illustrate that the children were beginning to comprehend storytelling conventions, and utilise signs and symbols to create meaning. They were also grasping the basics of sentence structure (albeit with errors), which will form an important foundation for developing ‘functional literacy’ once they begin formal education.

Affect: Conclusion

> *What lives in the forest? We ask the children, and Ellie jumps, excitedly, up. ‘Butterflies’, she cries, flinging the butterfly she has made up into the air and leaping after it before collapsing on the duvet in fits of laughter.*
>
> *John leaps after her, ‘tigers’, he giggles, ‘tigers and lions as well.’*

Throughout *Ten in Bed* the children expressed pleasure and wonder as the intermedial environment unfolded and they moved through modes of

engagement with the materials. These affective responses are important. Reflecting on her pleasurable experience of performance works, referring to Barthes' writing on the psycho-physical pleasures of utopian performance, Shaughnessy writes of her, 'personal archive of performance memories', where embodied pleasures have remained as 'moments of being that have stayed with me as formative or transformational, enabling me to perceive differently' (2012, 42). The affective qualities of performance are intimately linked to their ability to make us think, feel and perceive differently. As Elleström (2010) suggests, our cognitive and perceptual abilities are intimately connected to our senses and to the ways in which we engage with our environments. Intermedial techniques can facilitate opportunties for perception, reception and meaning-making in a variety of modes, and are thus important for developing critical literacy skills that will also serve to enhance functional literacy. *Ten in a Bed* was evaluated using both informal verbal feedback during sessions and formal evaluation forms condensed by Phakama into an evaluation report (2015b). Many of the parents commented that their children had become much more interested in engaging in creative activities after participating in workshops. Several parents also noted that their children had begun speaking about and interpreting their dreams. Our use of low-tech, including simple puppetry and set crafting meant that parents were able to (and reported that they did) adapt and recreate workshop activities at home. Phakama plan to run a second iteration of the project in 2016.

The ability to 'perceive differently', and to access creative and strategic responses to our inner worlds and to the world around us are fundamental skills, essential in the development of a critical literacy that is embedded in social contexts. The current UK government's focus on functional literacy risks stripping the critical and social potentials of affect, which can 'awaken individuals to possibilities beyond themselves' (Thompson 2009). Although many teachers are finding innovative ways to embed progressive approaches to literacy into their teaching practices, the constraints and pressures of Government measurements, testing and targets makes this increasingly difficult. In this context, pre-school and extra-curricular opportunities will become increasingly important in developing critical, creative individuals with

the ability to overcome the escalating inequality in London and elsewhere. Projects such as *Ten in Bed*, while unable to offer 'measures' to 'prove' the benefits of progressive approaches to critical literacy, demonstrate how the use of mixed, low-tech technologies can enhance individual children's enjoyment of literature, offer them safe, creative spaces to experiment with 'getting it wrong' and give families methods with which to support children's creative play and learning beyond the confines of the classroom.

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[i] Names and some identifying details of participants have been changed.