Quilting with the Mosaic approach: smooth and striated spaces in early childhood research

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What might happen if working with visual, participatory methods are combined with relational materialist theories? What new understandings might emerge about early childhood research and environments and entanglements between people, places, policies and things?

This paper reexamines empirical studies carried out within a participatory paradigm involving the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017), a particular visual, participatory approach, originally developed to research young children’s perspectives of their early childhood institutions and subsequently adopted more widely.

A different theoretical lens is applied here, drawing on relational materialist theories and in particular on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to discover alternative narratives for thinking about how young children make sense of the material world in which they are immersed.

Empirical data is taken from the Living Spaces study (Clark, 2010) a three year longitudinal study based in the UK, that set out to involve young children under five years old in the design and review of early childhood environments. A series of visual and participatory methods were brought together in order to support children’s reflections on their current and possible future environments. The research artefacts created including audio transcripts of child-led tours and maps composed of children’s photographs, emphasized the importance of surfaces, textures, furnishings and fittings.

This paper takes as its central theme Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of smooth and striated spaces and the relationship between the two.

These concepts are applied at the meta and micro level. Firstly in terms of methodology how might working with the Mosaic approach create both smooth or open-ended spaces for improvisation and striated or prescribed spaces? Secondly at a micro level, what might the concepts of smooth and striated space contribute to understandings about the material and pedagogical environment in early childhood?


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