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Against Binaries: Images, Affects and Sites of Engagement

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Introduction

In this chapter we draw on arts-based ethnographic data in order to think about the material-discursive assemblages that produce ideas and experiences of being on the edge of school systems. This terrain is complex; economic disadvantage, racism and trauma intersect in material and discursive assemblages to which institutions can struggle to respond. Students and teachers are positioned in complex ways amidst these material and discursive formations and can often struggle to resist problematic constructions of young subjectivity in the face of a lack of viable alternatives. Our fieldwork site in Hulme, a city council area of Manchester in the UK, is multicultural and diverse, with a young population made up of different ethnic, cultural and language groups. According to the local council website, Hulme has high levels of ethnic diversity, as the area is

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home to many first- and second-generation migrants from China, Somalia, India, the West Indies and Africa.[1] This diversity was also reflected in the cohort of students who took part in the fieldwork. Anna Hickey-Moody's Interfaith Childhoods project is funded by the Australian Research Council (FT1601293) and RMIT University to research stories of belonging and religion in communities in Australia and in the UK. Since 2016, research participants have shared stories of surviving war, rebuilding life after undocumented migration and living as part of a diaspora. Throughout the project, we have come to see the many different ways people find the faith to keep going, even though life can be difficult. Parents' stories show that in working through trauma and adjusting to change, new migrants and asylum seekers often reconcile competing worldviews through their religion.

Material Assemblages of Risk

The school that we discuss in this chapter was a difficult research site and the reasons for this were material, cultural and interpersonal. The difficulties with the site began during the school recruitment process. In working to develop a partnership with the school, Anna made three different appointments with staff members, and on two occasions, having arrived and waited for the meeting, she was told that perhaps the best idea was to meet someone else, not the community engagement officer, not the principal. Thus, the first experiences with the school were those of the researcher being positioned on the 'edge' of the school community, and being at risk of not succeeding. Eventually, she had a successful meeting with a year teacher who was also an art teacher, but it came about after an extended wait and insistence on being seen. Anna's fieldnotes recall:

> *[T]he shameful moment when, after waiting in a school staffroom for two hours with no Wi-Fi and no offer of water, or a cup of tea, for a meeting with a school community liaison that kept being pushed back, I said 'I am a Professor. People usually care about me'. This statement about my own importance came*

[1] https://manchester.gov.uk/

as rather a shock. I felt ashamed that I articulated my relative privilege so brashly, yet I was also intensely irritated by the fact that presenting as a friendly woman signifies to many that I would not have a lot of responsibility, there are not multiple demands on my time, and the assumption followed that I could wait in a staffroom for two hours.

The school had a difficult atmosphere. It was built in an old war aircraft bunker, and the walls were made of lead to stop radio signals being tracked by bombing planes. A side effect of this repurposing of the building was that there was no open WiFi or telephone network in or near the school. When calling a translator or looking up a resource online, it was necessary to walk a few blocks away from the school to communicate with the outside world. For Anna, this felt symbolic of the closed nature of the school community. It felt like the school environment itself was contributing to the discourses through which its students were positioned on the margins, or the edge, of its community. This contributed to our sense that spaces have their own agency and form part of the material assemblages involved in education, and that learning environments can come to co-determine what and how children learn, which we argue in this chapter. This was confirmed during our experiences working at the school. The students were nearly entirely Black and the vast majority of the teachers and school leadership team were white. This imbalance was expressed in racial tensions that caused disciplinary difficulties which became apparent as soon as fieldwork started:

Otter Brook Primary School: First day of fieldwork, 2018

A Black boy was carried through our classroom by two white teachers, to a corner at the back of the room where a green PVC curtain was drawn around him. I was working with Huong, Emily and Lisa setting up the room, getting ready for the workshop. The boy's screams pierced the airways and it was very unsettling to hear him so unhappy. He screamed 'Let me go, let me go', 'I'm going to miss my lunch', 'Let me go' repeatedly at the top of his voice. The boy did, indeed, miss his lunch and by the time our class filed in we, the research team, were all quite a-jangle, having been bathed in the desperate wails of the boy for the past 30 mins. I felt very concerned about him being restrained for so long and I couldn't imagine what he had done that was so naughty it led to him being physically held down.

This incident recounts a material and discursive assemblage of risk in which the student was constructed as being a risk to others and himself and physically removed from the classroom. Trying to recompose ourselves after this alarming start, the research team discovered that the teaching staff was much more invested in discipline and control than other research sites in which we worked. Strategies of discipline and control were, indeed, the ways that risk assemblages were enforced at this school. Anna's desire to rearrange the classroom so that students could share resources and collaborate caused genuine anxiety for the teacher and the teacher's aide, both of whom were adamant that the *entire* green rug had to be left clear for roll call. Anna asked if, perhaps, the students could sit on half the rug, as they would surely fit on half the rug, and the teaching team replied that no, this simply wasn't possible because the students all sat in an *order* and changing the spacing would *ruin the order*. This level of corporeal organisation was unexpected. The class teacher preferred to leave the classroom rather than sit with the rearranged desks designed to facilitate collaboration. The teacher's aide rewarded silence and stillness above all else and had a pink wand that she used to tap students on the nose when they had been good.

The following excerpt from Anna's fieldnotes explains the learning environment and explores how the feeling of failure is produced in the teacher-student interactions:

> *We need to bring tables close together so that students can share materials—we do this with a view to providing the richest range of materials possible. We also have to make sure that the three students without ethical consent are not captured on camera. The art teacher is delighted to hand over to us for the afternoon and assures us that her T.A. [teacher's aide] will be 'all we need'. The T.A. is deeply distressed by the fact we have rearranged the space. Where will the students do their registration?, she asks. Can they not sit on the free half of the green mat, I ask? No, they need the whole mat. She is adamant. We liberate the whole green mat and the students come in for registration. The screaming pupil is let go. Our workshop begins. We are told we have to seat the children. They are not to choose their own seat. I am to choose their seats for them.*
>
> *I am encouraging the children to express themselves through colour. 'Use more colours' the teacher's aide says. That is not really what I am suggesting. Rainbows appear on pages. What colours express what feelings? I ask. 'Everyone*

knows black is angry' the teacher's aide asserts. I feel like she doesn't understand me. Instructing the children suggests they are incompetent, or at risk of being incompetent or wrong. Halfway through the workshop I pause the video recording for snack break and resume when students have come back in to start their self-portraits.

'You're not green. Don't draw yourself in green' the teacher's assistant scolds a child who is drawing themselves with the colour green. I remind the teacher the children can be any colour they want in drawing, and that they are showing their feelings and tastes through colour choice. The teacher looks at me sternly. … At the end of the day, at home, I discover the video camera has recorded only the snack break. Despairing, I text my mother to complain. 'Snack breaks are very important', she replies.

Here we see both the researcher and the children being positioned as being at risk of failing, or, in the case of the video camera, being materially compelled to fail. This is an example of the material assemblage of the school; the screaming howls of the boy who is being detained caused affective arrest in the research team; Anna forgot to hit 'record' at the right time; the teacher consistently treated the children as if they needed explicit instruction, implying they were incompetent or at risk of failing. It was a stressful environment to be in. The previous excerpt from Anna's fieldnotes also appears in a journal article on failure (Hickey-Moody, 2019), and is useful in this context because it gives some insight into how the material and discursive assemblage of the school seemed to make 'edges' for students and, indeed, produce failure. As a researcher, Anna was remade as difficult and as experiencing failure, and the students were constantly positioned as 'doing the wrong thing', being on the edge of competence or at risk of failing. As we have shown, the school environment interpellated and entangled children in complex material and discursive assemblages that were difficult for them to reframe. At the same time, teachers were often also made vulnerable in the process, limiting their ability to form nurturing and satisfying relationships with their students. The material-discursive assemblage of schooling thus fixed both students and teachers in antagonistic roles.

We argue that risk discourses often facilitate deficit framings, and point to the importance of reconceptualising the classroom environment

and the teacher-student relationship by calling into question, as well as materially interrupting, the material and discursive assemblages on which risk discourses are constructed. We suggest that the 'risk discourse' can contribute to these entrenched structures, and propose an engagement with arts-based methods as a way of foregrounding culturally responsive pedagogies to deconstruct this deficit-focused approach.

Material and Discursive School Assemblages

In this chapter we draw on Deleuze and Guattari to argue that the school creates material and discursive assemblages through which children, young people and their parents are positioned in relation to risk discourses. At the same time, school sites and systems enmesh teachers in complex entanglements that are larger than any one person's agency. For Deleuze and Guattari, our world is made up of material and discursive assemblages. This is a physical as well as conceptual argument. Deleuze and Guattari move from discussing 'machines' to 'assemblages' in expressing the connectedness of the material world and ideas. In Deleuze and Guattari's early work (*Anti-Oedipus*, 1983) they talk about machines:

> [M]achines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth machine coupled to it. (1983, p. 1)

This concept of the connectedness of matter to meaning, this functional ontology, is brought into focus through their work with the idea of the machine to start with and again with the concept of the assemblage in their later work (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987; *What Is Philosophy*,

1996).[2] Both assemblage and machine are concepts that focus on context and the connections that context creates. The concept of the assemblage expresses something larger than the machine, as assemblages are composed of lots of smaller machines. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that assemblages are both conceptual and material; they are composed of connections in thought and in the material world. To use their words, there are 'machinic assemblages' (physical things) and 'assemblages of enunciation' (ideas). The two always intersect and overlap in complicated ways, as material cultures change thought and vice versa. In this chapter we explore machinic, or material assemblages (the physicality of the school space, the ways children's bodies are positioned by the teachers) and assemblages of enunciation, or the discursive assemblages through which children are constructed. This includes being told what to do, being reprimanded and being rewarded for silence.

On Making Edges

'At risk' discourses are often assembled in relation to trauma and marginalisation. Rather than helping young people deal with complexity and trauma, this may translate into antagonisms in the school environment or classroom and complicate the relationships between students and teachers. Rather than reinforcing moral judgements, classrooms might instead function as socially and culturally inclusive environments. One way that edges are created is through the creation of 'risk discourse' (Lupton, 1993), which can play out across a range of issues often related to behaviours that are thought of as socially undesirable, or that can result in negative outcomes such as low educational achievements (Brown, 2010; O'Connor et al., 2009), teenage pregnancy (Macvarish, 2010), substance abuse (Schehr, 2005) and more. The term has found such

[2] Deleuze and Guattari (1987) discuss the differences between machine and assemblage as they conceive them through stating, 'That is in fact the distinction we would like to propose between machine and assemblage: a machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it. For there are no mechanical effects; effects are always machinic, in other words, depend on a machine that is plugged into an assemblage' (p. 333).

purchase in the public debate and in the media that it is often not even necessary to spell out any specific kind of risk; instead, simply stating that someone is 'at risk' is evocative of a whole range of negative implications (Te Riele, 2006).

The debate around behaviours that situate young people at risk has been framed around either 'humanistic' or 'economic intention' (Kelly, 2001; Hickey-Moody, 2013). In other words, managing human risk can be a result of caring for people at risk (humanistic) or can be a result of wanting to make more functional workers (economic). While the humanistic intention foregrounds potential harm to individuals and is concerned with providing care and support, the economic intention relates to the economic impact on communities and society more widely (see Kelly, 2001). However, situating some young people as being at risk is problematic in a range of ways. It can reinforce existing vulnerabilities and further marginalise young people (Te Riele, 2006), making it even more difficult for them to live up to their own aspirations. Also, not all behaviours that are deemed risky are necessarily detrimental, but can become so once they have been evaluated negatively, through social marginalisation or simply because support structures fall away. In this way, the 'at risk' category, and the 'risky' behaviours that some young people engage with for one reason or another, may be a way of reinforcing social stereotypes to the detriment of some groups and to the advantage of other groups. Even so, it is often unclear if it is the behaviours themselves, and the kinds of moral judgement they engender, that are at the centre of the issue, or whether the risk discourse may serve as a way of social positioning or signalling (Schehr, 2005), and whether this particular way of framing of young people's behaviours is useful in fostering social inclusion. Indeed, such discourses may result in a deepening of social division and increased marginalisation of already marginalised groups (Lupton, 1993; Te Riele, 2006).

As Blitz et al. have argued, non-white students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform below the academic standards of their peers, but also to receive harsher punishments at school, and are often perceived as being more disruptive (Blitz et al., 2016). At the same time, many students, in particular those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are much more likely to have witnessed or

experienced some form of violence (Blitz et al., 2016). This means that those students who are negatively perceived in their school environment are also more likely to be facing adverse experiences in their daily lives.

The data we examine in this chapter focuses on the lived experiences of children and their parents who are enmeshed in complex learning experiences that often include children being positioned within risk discourses, and in some instances the children are being taught to see themselves as problematic. Indeed, the data presented previously also illustrates the school environment constructing the researcher as problematic and the students as incompetent. As Villanueva (2013) has pointed out, one way to disrupt these negative discourses is to problematise or question the normative discourse that foregrounds academic performance and, instead, to focus on individual voices and to make room for students' lived experiences. Villanueva's work not only is based on a decolonising methodology that is particularly suited to addressing racial inequities but also resonates with regard to students with migration backgrounds and those with experiences of trauma. Implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy, as Blitz et al. have suggested, coupled with a strength-based approach that focuses on abilities instead of shortcomings, is one way of mitigating 'at risk' discourses and instead working towards making classrooms more inclusive environments (Blitz et al., 2016). A focus on relationships, collaboration and mutual respect can help to deconstruct subconscious assumptions based on race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background (Berryman et al., 2018). As Berryman et al. have pointed out:

> Respect and courage are needed when entering into an ako[3] relationship with someone who we perceive as other. It involves listening beyond the words and responding to the person in front of us rather than responding to our assumptions of who they might be. (Berryman et al., 2018, p. 6)

A culturally responsive pedagogy, representing a strength-based approach that emphasises cultural diversity and individual experience as an asset rather than a barrier, is another example of how teachers might contribute to the deconstruction of edges and also provide a mechanism

[3] The term 'ako' translates from Māori as 'to learn, study, instruct, teach, advise'.

for enabling individual relationships to develop. As Abel and Wahab (2017) have pointed out, positioning young people as 'at risk' may stand in the way of building trusting relationships with social workers or other adults charged with providing support or links to services. This means that the risk discourse can be detrimental to students and teachers working together to achieve positive outcomes, for example raising academic achievements, minimising absenteeism and improving engagement with the education system. At the same time as the literature on culturally responsive pedagogies and affiliated theoretical frameworks has proliferated (Morrison et al., 2019), and while the term has often been taken up as part of the curriculum, it has lost some of its depth and focus and led to superficial celebration of culture and diversity (Evans et al., 2020). In the Australian context, some commentators point out that culturally responsive pedagogies are paid lip service but that:

> while ostensibly promoting cultural inclusion, Australian educational policy approaches are in reality directed toward assimilation, standardisation and a narrowing focus on the measurement of prescribed Eurocentric learning outcomes. (Morrison et al., 2019, p. v)

It is thus important to embed culturally responsive pedagogies in the curriculum in a way that is meaningful for students and that positions them as competent holders of knowledge. In this context, arts-based methods can facilitate culturally responsive pedagogies as a material assemblage that repositions student's bodies in space. Arts-based methods are based on visual communication rather than on the use of words as a primary means of communication, and they also require a collaborative environment and often constitute an enjoyable activity without necessarily giving students the feeling of being marked or graded on their work. This kind of creative and body-based learning can help students regain a sense of themselves as competent and engaged (Rigney et al., 2020). In addition, arts-based methods focus on lived, embodied experiences (Lenette, 2019). This can help to break open the rigid order of some classroom environments, thus enabling new relationships to form.

Parents' Stories and Discursive Assemblages of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

As Abel and Wahab (2017) have noted, the 'at risk' discourse can be detrimental not only to the young people who are seen to fall into this category but also to the adults who engage with them in a professional capacity. This may include not only teachers but also other school staff, social and health workers and others in the social services sector. Teachers, in particular, often work with large student cohorts who have diverging capabilities and learning styles. As such, teachers have to cover copious amounts of material in the curriculum and also accomplish testing and marking. Arguing in favour of a more culturally responsive pedagogy may thus easily be misunderstood as placing an additional burden of responsibility on teachers. There is no easy answer to this, other than arguing for a move towards increased awareness of the impacts of learning assemblages and for more attention to be paid to social and emotional learning. This should be accompanied by a move away from a scores- or grades-based assessment of academic success. The basic assumption here is that teachers care for the wellbeing of their students and that they want to see them fulfil their academic potential, but also foster social and cultural inclusion in their classroom. Thus, while culturally responsive pedagogy is anti-racist and emancipatory and aimed at furthering social justice, it can also be a method for teachers to engage better with multicultural students or those from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to create more nurturing classroom environments and as a result to enable better academic outcomes as well (Harwood et al., 2016). We need to reshape the material and discursive assemblages in which both students and teachers are enmeshed.

Arts-based methods are one way of renegotiating the material assemblages involved in educational experiences. Another way in which the Interfaith Childhoods project attempted to reshape discursive assemblages around the risk discourse in the school was to engage with parents' worldviews and take up these positions in developing culturally responsive approaches to children. Many superdiverse communities consist of migrants who are reconciling complex diasporic families and histories.

The parent focus group for Otter Brook Primary School included parents who were born in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kurdistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, Holland, England and Nigeria. Languages spoken included Urdu, Punjabi, Bangla, Kurdish, Tigrinya, Somali, Dutch, English, Hausa and Swahili. Most parents were Sunni Muslim, with one family being Shia Muslim, one family Roman Catholic (of Irish and American parents) and one family Orthodox Christian (from Eritrea). In the focus group discussion, parents explained their divergent faith worlds and ontologies. Emma, born in England of American and Irish heritage, explains:

> *I had like a bit of a near death experience when [I had Libby] and then I just decided to believe in myself, every day. Now, I don't have a religion. … But I wouldn't say I was atheist because that kind of means that you're not into anything. So I just kind of wake up and just tell the kids to believe in themselves and believe in the day and do the best you can, without any kind of actual body, I suppose. But you know what they say? When we all die, the last thing you say is 'Oh, God', whether you believe in it or not. So that unites us all.*

A similar grounding in religion is experienced by Rahim, another parent with very different background in the same discussion:

> *Religion directs you. Islam tells you what to eat, what not to eat, what to drink, what not to drink, what to wear, what not to wear. How to cut your hair, how not to cut your hair. How to interact with people and how not to. How to live with your wife and how not to. These are instructions. And it tells you what to do in life. Buying and selling, working, teaching, any kind of job you want to do. It guides you through, how to, how to [eat] or where to eat. Now, without those things, without that religion, I feel [people in] the world would just be living like an animal can live.*
>
> *Religion, from a philosophical view … this religion is over 1465 years old. Now, somebody cannot sit down and just formulate these things. It was written down [over] 200 years. It is saying 'This will happen, this will happen, do this, do that'. Now we look at them manifesting today, and we know this is why God said [these things].*
>
> *Where I come from, we can't start a meeting without a prayer. If we meet here, somebody will open with a prayer. It might be a Muslim or a Christian. When we are closing, there are closing prayers.*

In quite different ways, the excerpts above present parents' worldviews as grounded in faith of various kinds. Taking this perspective into thinking about the children, they can also be understood as coming from a place of faith and, in some instances, as coming from a context in which decisions are made because of faith rather than free will. We do all that we can to mobilise parents' perspectives in order to develop culturally responsive pedagogies. For example, we explore the children's perspectives on faith and belonging. We do this through individual and collaborative art making, and this process materially repositions the children in the school space and offers the material and discursive opportunities to express their perspectives (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

Children's Experiences

As we have made clear, the students in Otter Brook Primary School were nearly entirely Black children, while most of the teachers were white. In examining the children's artwork as a way of materially repositioning the children in the space, we also have to acknowledge the racially problematic nature of the divide between the teaching team and the students. Some of the Interfaith Childhoods research team are not white; however, this was only a temporary intervention in the politics of the school. Highlighting the socio-cultural difference between students and teachers further points to the importance of not only emphasising individual experiences of race and inclusion, or indeed exclusion, but also critically examining the kinds of stereotypes that are often held implicitly about students' abilities and the way that these stereotypes can turn into realities in the class environment (James, 2012). Such racial stereotypes also count among the discursive assemblages that often position students as below par rather than acknowledging their inherent expertise and experiential knowledge (Lenette, 2019). The Interfaith Childhoods project aimed to shift this dynamic by using arts-based methods as a way of unravelling the existing material assemblages of the classroom at Otter Brook Primary.

During the fieldwork, children were encouraged to collaborate to produce images of 'future cities', incorporating all the elements they felt were

Fig. 3.1 Interfaith Childhoods workshop at Otter Brook Primary School, 2018

Fig. 3.2 Interfaith Childhoods workshop at Otter Brook Primary School, 2018

important or might be important for the future; everything 'that really mattered'. Over the course of the project, children came up with imaginative depictions of flying recycling factories, cities with rivers for roads, houses shaped like fruit, flying superheroes and many other ideas. Their images often included green spaces such as forests or parks, mountain ranges and lakes, as well as everyday buildings like schools, shops, hotels and airports (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021).

The collaborative future cities from Otter Brook Primary School were different from those produced in other schools in that they were almost unrecognisable as 'cities' or 'built environments'. There were lots of coloured smudges and blobs, scribbles and squiggles, patches of indeterminate colour with string glued on top and random jagged scrawls. It seemed like the children in Otter Brook had been unable to come together to agree on 'what really mattered' in their lives, or were unwilling to collaborate in order to render their vision legible on the page. The workshop

process always included a planning phase where all children were encouraged to discuss their proposed future city with their group, facilitated by an adult. In other schools, students had planned the contents of their picture and then distributed roles, each working on their section of the image. While in other schools there were regular disagreements about each participant's choices of colour, medium or style, the Otter Brook children *painted into each other's sections*, and different media were applied across the picture without consideration for the drawing or painting that was already there. These kids were screaming out to be heard. They didn't want to make a collaborative story; they wanted to have an individual voice.

There are many ways of interpreting children's artwork without necessarily uncovering all their inherent meanings (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). Interpretation can take different approaches; for instance, an image may be analysed according to literal, abstract or content strategies (Burkitt et al., 2009). In this instance, looking at colours, shapes and arrangements of the future cities created by the students in Otter Brook Primary suggests a sense of pressure inherent in the sharp edges and the lack of discernible structure among the chaotic line work, as if the children had to express their inner sense of conflict and confusion which had spilled over onto the page (see Figs. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). Perhaps the stress and control surrounding the children had blurred into their thoughts and was being expressed in the whirring mess on the page. While some parts of the artwork suggest an attempt at realising an idea or concept—for example the caterpillar-like creature on the bottom-left corner of Fig. 3.3 or the spire in brown felt-tip in the bottom-right corner of Fig. 3.4—these did not tie in with the overall image but stood separate and had sometimes been painted over by other children who were careless of the efforts and ideas of the other participants.

While the images are suggestive of the children's stress and anxiety resulting from their learning experiences, they also gesture towards the complexities of living a shared life and civic participation, and demonstrate human entanglement with the more-than-human in a raw and even confronting way (Figs. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). Elsewhere, we have written about how the always-already posthuman view of the world that children have draws significantly on their inherent entanglement with their

Fig. 3.3 Future city, Otter Brook Primary School, 2018

environment (Hickey-Moody, 2020, 2021). As the children play, make, refuse, fight, resist and learn, they are not separate from the materials with which they learn; instead they are caught up with them and co-produce their worldviews in collaboration with materials. As is evidenced in the differences in the artwork examined here, learning environments diffract through children's work and influence their ways of being, becoming and making in place.

The disorganised and confrontational images created in Otter Brook speak of disruption and pressure, where children were unable to realise their own ideas but also unable to collaborate in a way that would enable them to carry through a shared concept or project plan. The images could be interpreted as the children failing to put together a visually appealing artwork, but even young children have a sophisticated understanding of intentionality in artwork (Vivaldi & Allen, 2021). This suggests that even seemingly random scribbles are a means of communication and that such

Fig. 3.4 Future city, Otter Brook Primary School, 2018

means can be used to evoke conflict, anger and stress. Through the images, these emotions become evident in ways that would have been difficult to verbalise for the children, in particular since they might not have been aware of any alternative way of engaging in their classroom environment. The environment of the classroom, as we have suggested, positioned the children as needing to be controlled, as being at risk of failure and in need of instruction.

While the group pictures do not, at first glance, seem to express more than a lack of cooperation, the individual artwork the children produced during an earlier workshop at the school is indicative of their creativity and their ability to express themselves in a more coherent and less confrontational way. Figure 3.6 shows an artwork produced to the theme of 'emotions', by a child at Otter Brook Primary School. A large face drawn in yellow crayon and framed by black hair is shown with yellow eyes with long, black lashes, and a wide-open red diamond-shaped mouth. The most

Fig. 3.5 Future city, Otter Brook Primary School, 2018

striking thing about the picture is the eyebrows made from red pipe cleaner and angled upwards towards the right, to give the image its look of surprise. The image is funny and imaginative, and shows one of the less commonly expressed emotions. Children asked to visualise emotions often choose sadness or happiness, which are easy to depict through an upturned mouth or crying eyes. Surprise, which may be understood as an emotion or as a mental or psychological state, can have any valence: it can be a neutral, a positive or negative experience, and thus it is more difficult to express through visual means. The picture here is not only suggestive of the

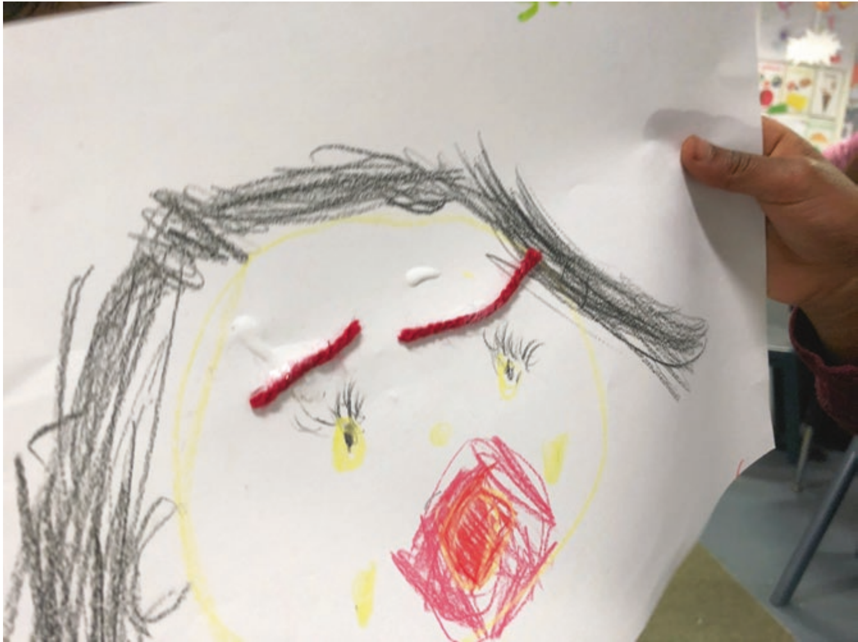

Fig. 3.6 'Surprise', an emotion picture drawn by one of the children in Otter Brook Primary School

talent and capability of its creator but, comparing it to the group pictures, is also evocative of the feeling of surprise the student had experienced when being engaged one-on-one and encouraged to contribute on their own terms. The art produced by the children, including group and individual images, thus illustrates the power of this method for unearthing problematic emotions and experiences that are difficult to verbalise.

Material Assemblages of Culturally Responsive Pedagogies

Our research with Interfaith Childhoods has shown that arts-based methods can be an important way of examining difficult emotions and themes and developing context-specific culturally responsive pedagogies that are

attuned to parents' and children's perspectives. The topics that have emerged in children's work during our research include migration and displacement, trauma and climate anxieties, but have also foregrounded the things that are meaningful in children's lives and that provide connection with their communities, such as the meaning of friendship, their families, sports, food and culture. Often children create eclectic assemblages of things and people, places and feelings that are filled with meaning, and which do not always come to the surface during day-to-day interactions in the classroom, but which are important because they can reveal children's strengths as well as their vulnerabilities. This can provide adults around them, in particular, the teachers and other school staff, a key to understanding difficult or antagonistic behaviours and the children's triggers and vulnerabilities. In some instances, it can explain why some children struggle with academic pressure or with classroom discipline. With regard to the material and discursive assemblages through which 'edges' are created, creative and arts-based methodologies can help reshape the assemblages within the school setting to emphasise processes and relationships over outcomes. However, in order for this to work, collaboration and experimentation need to be foregrounded over academic achievement. Arts-based methods also draw on children's lived experiences, further positioning them as experts of their own narratives. Moving towards a culturally responsive pedagogy holds the promise of shifting the context in which students and teachers interact, thereby augmenting the kind of connections that can be created.

The shifts that we call for require more than just embedding culturally responsive strategies in the curriculum or providing teachers with training to respond to students who have experienced trauma or who come from diverse or marginalised ethnic or cultural backgrounds, even though these are important first steps. It requires a rethinking of the power structures inherent in educational spaces, in risk discourses and in the systems that mark students as either achieving or failing to achieve academic standards. The focus needs to shift towards students' strengths and abilities, also foregrounding the social and emotional learning that takes place in classrooms. The children's paintings from Otter Brook show how the social relationships between students did not allow them to work together to compose a future filled with 'things that matter' but only make

scribbles and marks cancelling out each other's efforts and ideas. On an emotional level, the paintings evidence aggression, a lack of focus and an inability to work together. In all likelihood, these kinds of emotions and social relationships were evident as well during other classes, disrupting the children's efforts at learning and limiting their teacher's ability to engage students with class material or bring them to work together on tasks or projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to explore the material and discursive conditions through which failure is produced and within which children are positioned as being 'on the edge' or 'at risk' of failing. These material and discursive assemblages of risk and failure are physical, systemic, institutional and pedagogical. They are not one person's fault and cannot be easily repaired. In trying to interrupt these assemblages we attempted to create material and discursive assemblages of culturally responsive pedagogy, through bringing parents' perspectives into the classroom, through repositioning children in space and engaging them in ways that clearly value their voice and their social and emotional worlds. There are many ways culturally responsive pedagogies can be developed and our examples are just suggestions. However, having the capacity to engage with students on their own terms is the most enduringly important component of being a culturally responsive teacher, along with being brave enough to interrupt existing discursive formations when required.

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