

# Spatial and material pedagogy and practices in The Corner



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## Abstract

The research of the The State Library of Queensland's space for families with under eight year olds, The Corner, progresses previous socio-constructivist studies of children's museums and public programs, by bringing ecological psychology and posthumanist thinking to interpret the dynamics at play in child, artist, family members' co-construction with matter and space. Such work contributes to contemporary thinking and research on literacy as material and spatial, along with insight to the pedagogy of artswomen and young families in making meaning with materials in artist curated installations.

## Background

The State Library of Queensland (SLQ) has had a dedicated Young People and Families team and dedicated spaces for children and young people since 2006. Their collaborative working model with artists is particularly innovative and of which the research sought to understand, and locate processes, practices and principles of pedagogy between interdisciplinary artists and young families in co-creating literacy practices.

Some of the largest and most influential research studies on children in public programs in the UK, New Zealand and Australia, have largely focused on identifying evidence of learning as linked to mandated curricula (Clarkin-Philips et al., 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001). The influence of social constructivism has foregrounded the focus on social interaction, talk, purposeful and symbolic meaning in these previous studies. Socio-constructivism views the environment and learning as co-constructed by pedagogues, children, artists and community (Gandini, 2012). Matter and environments in exhibitions, children's spaces and activities are positioned as utilitarian objects.

The disconnect from environments, in which they are understood only in utilitarian ways, what Mulcahy, Cleveland, and Aberton (2015) define as realist perspectives has largely dominated educational discourse and policy. Attention to materials and places in education has gained momentum recently through a number of relational theories, such as socio-material theories, perceptual theories, new materialism, posthumanism and place-based pedagogy. Socio-material perspectives (e.g., see Massey 2005, Soja 1989, Thrift 2008) invite attention to the broad conceptualisation of the relationality of classrooms and children's spaces in museums and public programs. With attention to socio-materiality, Mulcahy, Cleveland, and Aberton (2015) noted in their Australian study of public school classrooms that pedagogic change is not elicited from learning spaces alone, but rather that 'pedagogic change is encompassed within multiple sets of relations and multiple forms of practice' (p. 575). Perceptual theory in ecological psychology offers a means to see the ecology of beings, places and materials (E. Gibson and Pick, 2000; E. Gibson, 2003; J. Gibson, 1979/1986/2015). Key new materialist and posthumanist ideas of "matter matters" (Barad, 2003, p. 803), and the flattening of human privilege and hierarchy (e.g., see Braidotti, 2013) offer an ontology for being and engaging with matter and environments. Illustrative examples include Olsson, Dahlberg, and Theorell's (2016) work of aesthetic experimentations in early childhood education rooms and Jones et al's (2016) readings of children's community-based spatial practices in out of school hours care as social and political acts. These studies recognise the materiality and relationality of pedagogy, without specificity as to what the pedagogy is—how it is enacted and what guides such pedagogy.

Phillips and Finn's research of The Corner was particularly interested in the pedagogy that artswomen bring to the space. Artists are also purposefully employed in the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, referred to as atelieristas (artists), they promote the aesthetic dimension, and "an intense relationship with things" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 9). Children, too, in the preschools of Reggio Emilia are understood to look at the world "with great intensity," with a "greediness to

understand it and to inhabit it" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 114). We suspect, as did Merleau-Ponty (1948/2004) and more recently Ingold (2011) and Stolz (2015), that clues to this deep connection of person, place, and pedagogy are particularly garnered by artists. Artists are typically more sensorially aware and explore the myriad of potential of materials and spaces beyond what they are intentionally designed for.

## Research Aim and proposition:

This study sought to understand pedagogies at play between artswomen, children, families and matter in The Corner, through ecological psychology and post-humanism in dialogue alongside each other.

Drawing from *affordance* theory (see J. Gibson, 1979/1986/2015) and *specificity* theory (see E. Gibson and Pick, 2000; E. Gibson, 2003) interactions between children and artists in The Corner were observed with a focus on perception of *affordances* (detection of information from resources and people around to inspire activity) and participation in affordance networks (using tools, seeking instruction, collaborating towards a goal), as well as how participants demonstrate effectivities (applying skills and knowledge and sharing competencies). We looked to exchanges between artswoman as pedagogue and child as artist in The Corner, to locate principles that describe pedagogical intent and strategy of learning from an ecological psychological stance.

For posthumanist readings of the interactions (or rather 'intra-actions', that is, what emerges in the child-artist/artist-child actions), we looked to Karen Barad's (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014) writings on "the interplay of material and discursive, the natural and cultural, in scientific and other social practices" (2007, p. 42). Her work offers a commitment to the material nature of practices and how they come to matter. In her theory of agential realism, matter is an active participant in the world, that "is a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still" (2007, p. 170). So, to understand the tensions, possibilities and dynamics of pedagogy at play in The Corner we looked to materiality at play to broaden understanding and insight. A post-humanist position in this research is about being with child-artist, artist-child and matter and sensing and being open to what emerges in the child-artist/artist-child and matter actions.

The research thus aimed to progress previous socio-constructivist studies of children's museums and public programs, by adding ecological psychology and posthumanist readings of the dynamics at play, with particular focus on artists as pedagogues and the operations of collaboration. Recently, others (e.g., MacRae, Hackett, Holmes and Jones, 2017; Murriss, 2016; Hackett & Somerville, 2017) have brought posthumanist readings to children's museums and public programs, and some have started to apply affordance theory in museum education (e.g., Villafranca, 2016). Both theoretical approaches are concerned with materiality, though from different premises and approaches, we wondered what the two theoretical stances brought to understandings of the pedagogies at play between artswomen, children, families and matter in The Corner.

## Methodology

We spent six days (spread across two weeks) in The Corner in September 2018 to notice what emerges in this space of loose parts for young children and families. Our purpose was not to locate utilitarian agendas and learning outcomes, but rather to be emplaced with The Corner, to sense its rhythms; its culture; its wonderings; its energy – the ontologies, epistemologies and ethicalities of The Corner.

### *Participants and research methods:*

Across the six days of observations (18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018), six artworkers, 79 children, and 32 parents/guardians consented to participate in the study. The research team (Louise Phillips, Roxanne Finn and research assistant Cathy Delzoppo) gathered data of the participants' participation through observations and conversations in The Corner from 10am to 1pm each of the six days. Louise and Roxanne observed participation taking field notes in situ and immediately after, and Cathy videoed vignettes of group participation in The Corner. We endeavoured to be a part of The Corner's community, dually performing co-participant and researcher roles, so as not to disrupt the culture and relationality of The Corner. During our three hours in The Corner each day, Louise and Roxanne conducted audio-recorded conversations (approximately 10 minutes in duration) with parents/guardians at times and places consented to, and guided by the following conversation prompts:

- What draws you to visit The Corner?
- What role do you see SLQ staff playing?
- What do you appreciate about the space?
- What do you observe your child doing/learning from visits to The Corner?
- What do you talk about on your way home?

Immediately after the artworker's shift, Louise and Roxanne audio-recorded interviews (approximately 30 minutes in duration) about their pedagogical practice in The Corner with the following questions:

- Tell us about your background as an artist, and in terms of teaching your art practice with children
- How do you apply your arts practice in The Corner?
- What about the space? What's important to you with planning activities you want to do in the space how you use the space? How do you and the space work together?
- Tell us about your practice of co-creating with children. What are the starting points? What is your focus/foci?
- How do you collaborate with other artists and SLQ staff?

The artworkers observed and interviewed were:

Tiffany Beckwith-Skinner  
Vanessa Cox  
Anthea Patrick  
Walter Stahl  
Mari Hirata  
Tim Mulhooly.

Stella Read, Coordinator of the Young People and Families team was also interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

### *Site: The Corner*

The internal entrance to The Corner begins with a glass display cabinet packed with child and artworker co-constructed creations with their accompanying stories. Following the glass cabinet around a corner a sunken floor, framed by tiered seating and a zigzagged ramp defines the space known as The Corner.

The space of The Corner is installed with themed sets, props and books that change three times a year. Themes are generated from the schedule of the library collection and exhibitions and what is relevant for children. They are designed with materials to inspire the artists, children and families to engage both in artworker sessions and in self-directed play, with social interaction and child agency being core principles. Themed installations start with enough of an idea that offers a cohesive aesthetic but so that there is plenty of room for artist, child and family responses to layer and fill the space. Diverse opportunities for play is a key driver for the design of the installed themes, explained Stella Read.

When we studied The Corner in September 2018, a 'Let's play house' theme of large replicas of home-made play items and varying loose open-ended play things was installed. Before you entered the sunken floor area, there was a large television set that you could enter on one side for live television show creation. In the sunken floor space there was a large egg carton boat with paddle pop sticks for mast and fabric for sail. Alongside there was a large replica of a toilet roll car, that could be climbed on and crawled through. Against the ramp wall was a large soft sculpture bath, with handmade bath toys dispersed. Up the tiered seating, was an array of child sized furniture and a collection of children's picture books in line with the installation theme. Under a curtained bench against the outside window were baskets of animated household cleaning devices: dusters, dustpans, brushes, and wooden spoons. Making materials were offered along the bench looking out to the Knowledge walk, with a diorama made from household items and toy farm animals.

To animate and ignite play and making literacies, The Corner rosters artworkers and program assistants on daily. Each artworker brings unique elements and additions to The Corner.

Tiffany brings a playful approach to making

Vanessa divergent thinking

Anthea relationality

Walter playful technical expertise

Mari a gentle love for making, guidance and affirmation and

Tim animates and authorizes the joy of the carnivalesque.

These roles are entities in the space that extend the invitation of playfulness and exploration with matter—a valued social affordance in the space (Gibson, 1979/2015). Volition is privileged (Barab & Roth, 2006). As Stella Read defines, child and family agency and collaboration are key principles of the intentionality of The Corner. Artworkers offer materials and shared attention with matter, space and relationality without coercion. They work sensitively with families to dispel confusion about how particular tasks may be undertaken. Open-ended exploration is the welcomed activity in The Corner. Artworkers and program assistants simply begin or respond to child/family initiated activity with song, playful characterization or offers of ideas, and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> The themed installation changes every four months and is designed by SLQ Young People and Families Team Leader, Stella Read and created by a team of artworkers, many of whom work in The Corner as arts workers.

## Findings

From our six days of observations, we came to know The Corner as: a community hub and as a site for play and making with material literacies, along with understanding the responsive organic pedagogy at play in The Corner. Illustration of these three key features are explained in the following sections.

### *Community hub*

The relationality that the physicality and sociality of The Corner produces was clearly evident in how parents/guardians and children engaged with and spoke of The Corner in our research conversations with them.

Parents appreciated how it created a space to meet other parents. This was particularly noted by parents new to Australia, who struggled to locate neighbourhood family spaces that were more evident in their home countries.

Jacob: We don't have any family here so it's good for us to go down here and meet new people rather than stay at home and play with the same old toys. It's very inclusive which is fantastic.

Anna: Its one of the best places to find kids and kids from other countries that are struggling with same problems we are facing, struggling with a different language... That's why we are here. It's the first place I go with my kids to find some friends, because here people in their own houses so you don't have playground close to you.

The space also nurtures relationality through its size and village forum design.

Jayden: It's not a massive space so you aren't spread out and are close enough to notice others and to interact.

The tiered seating surrounding the sunken floor, means everyone is facing in towards each other. Children observe other children's play and artworker offers and choose what to partake in. Parents alongside each other notice others' shared interests and invite conversation. The surrounding floor to ceiling windows enable relationality with the public, so that children's play is visible and part of public spaces.

Melody: We do come through that way and we see a lot of people – a lot of kids playing. It's nice. It's actually good with that more public aspect out there.

Jayden: It's wonderful having the windows so we can look out and people can look in – connecting the general public to play.

Eileen: They love just going up those stairs and looking out the window and seeing what's out there.

The windows invite passersby in, provide a preview for families visiting and connect children to the public. And the materials provided included children of a broad age range, so families with babies, toddlers, preschoolers and school age children felt there was something for all their children.

The attraction to The Corner is sustained through the changing installations. This was consistently noted by the majority of parents.

Kei: I really like how the installations change

Claudia: I really like how they change the installations every once in a while...Its so creative and welcoming. It's not so restrictive like museums, it's a space where children create the rules.

Eileen: There's always something different.

The parents spoke of how their children excitedly anticipated changes to the themed installations.

The artworkers support the experience of a community hub through enacting relational pedagogies. Parents experience the artworkers' practice as very inclusive, helpful and inspiring.

Jacob: They are basically very helpful when you need some practical things like the parents room, questions like that. Anything you want to do basically they assist. They're flexible. And they basically fill whatever needs the parents or the different visitors have.

Claudia: The staff are so nice, every time we are late or early – they allow him to help with setting up or packing up.

Kei: I love how they have staff here and how they keep interacting with children.

A strong sense of freedom and agency is felt, through the artswomen being there to respond and enhance but not direct.

Jayden: Great a space for kids to be kids and for them to be free. Good mix of structured and unstructured... Staff sort of blend in with whole space – they are not directive. They could be another parent. So you a stumble upon things they initiate.

Many parents also spoke of how they get so many ideas from the artswomen and the materials in The Corner that they can readily apply at home, enhancing the play and making experiences they engage with at home.

Parents and children clearly held a great fondness for The Corner, with it for many being a regular and favourite place to visit.

Attention to the quality of overall softness would further enhance the relationality of The Corner. Many parents spoke of a need for cushioning on the timber benches. We also observed the timber bench seats as noticeably uncomfortable on for both child and adult bodies. Tolerable for short visits, but would have ongoing health tolls on staff who have three to five hour shifts. Parents also expressed that a space to feed children would support managing children with differing needs at differing times.

### *A site for play and making with material literacies*

As a space for Under 8 year olds in a state library, The Corner offers an innovative and contemporary approach to literacy. Contemporary scholarship in literacy recognizes literacies, as embodied interactions with materials and The Corner certainly recognizes and supports a more holistic and organic approach to material and multi-modal literacies. Traditional early language and literacy practices are also included through rhyme time and Hickory Dickory Rock, which parents notably appreciated for expanding their children's English vocabulary.

Anna: I learn from staff how to talk with my kids in English.

The themed installations are curated interactive exhibitions of loose parts (Nicholson, 1971) that invite movement with materials (Hackett & Somerville, 2018). Children's, artswoman and family exploratory movement with the loose parts of The Corner are all part of the literacy process of meaning making, "as a world-forming communicative practice" (p. 375). What can this object do? How does it relate to other objects? What can we all do together? So that as Stella explains:

The artefacts left at end of play show a very interesting story of engagement.

Meaning-making in The Corner happens organically, without explicit agendas but rather with attention to being in the world. As Hackett and Somerville (2018) explain:

"young children's literacies are seen not only as embodied sensory experiences but embedded in and inseparable from their entanglement with the world" (p. 388).

The following provides two illustrative vignettes of artists enhancing children's material literacies in The Corner.



### *Paper boat making*

Visual artist, Walter gathers paper and crayons by the top tiered timber bench. Crayons are rubbed onto A5 pieces of paper. Walter demonstrates rubbing with side, tip and angle of crayon to give different width mark making. Five children aged three to eight and two adults all lean in to watch and learn (see Figure 1). Walter then pulls out his keys from his pocket and scratches lines into his crayon coloring, he shares: "I couldn't find anything else in the store room, so I could pass around my keys to etch lines". He then looks at a grandparent watching and remembers: "You put me onto coins another time" as he puts his hand into his pocket searching for coin, "but in today's cashless society I do not have a coin." Another artworker suggests "use your credit card". Walter pulls out his credit card and tries etching with it.



Figure 1 Engrossed in waxing paper [Phillips, L.G., digital photograph, 2018] The Corner, State Library of Queensland.

Walter: I just noticed something all of your colouring is more solid than mine, because you are colouring on rubber, whereas I am leaning on wood, so it seems colouring on rubber is better.

Children and adults stop colouring and look at difference. Sebastian then scrunched his crayoned paper. "To create and destroy is totally acceptable, that is what I learnt from Walter another time" voiced Sebastian's grandmother, then asked "Do we need to colour other side?"

Walter: This is what we are making (shows folded paper boats). So, to make it waterproof with the wax yes, we need to colour both sides – at least the middle part that touches the water. Okay it is now time to start folding. It is much easier to fold if you have three hands. Do you have three hands?

Children frown puzzled and cry "No!" Helpful nearby adults offer an extra hand.

Walter: Oh well. This bench is going to be your third hand. What we are doing is nautical engineering – we are building a boat. So, we have to take care to do this properly. We have to make the bow and the stern. Nautical speak for the front and the back of the boat. The folds have to be parallel. They have to be the same direction as the bottom line.

Axel walks around to the other side of the bench, as he sees it will be a better height for him to lean to fold – a more suitably proportioned third hand.

Walter: Paper is malleable. Paper has memory [referring to how the folds are held in the paper]. This boat is going to be symmetrical – whatever we do on this side, we also do on the other side. If you launch the boat from a really high bridge holding it at both ends – the boat usually lands the right way up.

Walter generatively shares material knowledge of paper and paper boats. Children are mesmerized with rubbing wax crayons on paper, and folding to Walter's nautical instructions, sparking their own material knowledge building. They patiently wait instructions, carefully attending to the boat making sequence. Walter presents somewhat like a caricature of a mad professor. On referring to the front and back of the boat with "It's called a bow and a stern", one child collapses forward laughing hysterically. Families come to know boats by making boats. Material literacies of paper, rubber, wood, keys, coins, crayons and boats come to be known exploratorily, playfully and communally.

### *Big nose and the Tower of London*

Alongside the making bench by the outside window, performing artist, Tim shreds up strips of paper bag then tapes pieces together at one end playfully suggesting to two girls making: “Eye brows” [placing on his eyebrows] “or dragon fire” [held next mouth with gusty breathing noises], “or a hula skirt” [dances skirt to ‘aloha oe’], “ahh in fact it is the tentacles of a jelly fish” [and shakes it in front of the faces of the children]. In this making and imagining frenzy, an irregular shaped piece of paper drops to the floor. One girl notices it declaring “it looks like a big nose”. Tim instantly colours the nose red, sticks two eye stickers on and colours the bottom black for trousers (see Figure 2). Then grabs his ukulele and starts to sing a crazy song about Big Nose and Big Nose’s friends bringing the two girls into the adventures of Big Nose. Then he invites Louise to hold a piece of blue furry fabric stretched out to create seascape, as he told/sang story of jellyfish in the sea with the paper jelly fish.



Figure 2 *Animated Big Nose* [Phillips, L.G., digital photograph, 2018] *The Corner, State Library of Queensland.*

Later, Tim comes to know that one of the girls used to live in London and misses it, so Tim grabs available paper, a brochure and pulls the pages apart, and folds and tapes to remodel it into rectangular prism then draws some small windows and cuts and draws spires: “There you are the Tower of London, so you are not so homesick”. A beaming smile spreads across the girl’s face. The paper jelly fish reappears, shaken next to the girl’s ears: “Jellyfish earrings perhaps” Tim offers.

Wild curly haired Tim animates paper and spreads joy.

Tim: Like “there’s a piece of paper” and eight times of ten they’ll go scribble scribble scribble, then they’ll get another piece of paper and go scribble scribble scribble. But then, if you can get them to go ‘what is that?’

And then go ‘oh, it’s a something’. You’ve started the narrative. But then you go ‘it hasn’t got any eyes’, so they put eyes on it and now they’re building a character. So, you go ‘but what does it do?’ ‘Swims, but where?’ ‘It swims in the ocean like that’ ‘Yeah, but there’s a shark in the water going to eat it! What’s it going to do now?’ So, you’re building the story.

It’s not just joy for joy’s sake, but joy in imagining. Tim cultivates children’s capacity to imagine.

Tim: We’ve got to get a generation of kids to grow up using their imagination so they still use it as an adult. It’s no good using it as a kid, and then say now don’t use that anymore. You’ve got to use it, it’s a tool. It’s a wonderful opportunity for human beings to keep themselves happy and in balance with the world and nature and be empathetic. You learn empathy by being imaginative.

Storytelling is understood to have a unique capacity to cultivate sympathetic imagination, to imagine another’s perspective and build a greater understanding of the complexities of humanity (Nussbaum, 1997). Storytelling brings imagination and meaning making to the materials of *The Corner*, as part of a world-forming communicative practice (Hackett & Somerville, 2018).

These examples illustrate the spontaneous playful ways artswomen fuel children’s meaning making with materials, that is material literacies in *The Corner*. Learning happens without explicit direction, but rather by young and old being with the matter – asking what does it invite of me?

## *Responsive organic pedagogy at play in The Corner from an ecological psychology stance*

From an ecological psychology understanding we recognized the followed four principles guiding the artist/child/environment pedagogy of The Corner.

### *1. Provocative clues: Inviting exploration*

As an artist curated space we found that much attention was given to the materials within the space as well as to the space's overall aesthetic. The space and the materials within it are specifically designed to invite exploration. Common household objects such as dustpans and brushes that have been animated with the addition of facial features, provoked a heightened sense of the agency of the materials, a provocative clue to explore this notion at play. The giant egg carton boat and a giant toilet roll vehicle were ridden by children and adults alike at times, inviting exploration and provocative clues to material agency. The oversized sensorial bathtub, housed children, parents, and grandparents, provoking connection and communality between people known to each other or not. This afforded conversation and visceral empathy for complete strangers – a powerful metaphor for the notion that it takes a community to raise a child. Children were immediately emplaced in a community but their position as 'children' was not less than that of 'adult'. Artworkers, too were provocative clues, being very much a part of the provocation of The Corner.

*Jayden:* Staff sort of blend in with whole space – they are not directive. There no clear signs – this is craft space, this is readings space. They could be another parent. So you a stumble upon it. It took me a few visits to work out we could join in on the activities.

The Corner's installations, materials and artworkers all invited attention, not clearly stating specific uses, but rather invited wondering about and exploration with.

### *2. Showing without telling: Inviting shared attention*

We see the curatorial value of these provocative clues as a means to invite conversations between children and their parents, or children and other children, between families and artworkers or between complete strangers. The material agency conveyed by talking dustpans and giant toilet roll cars does more than invite exploration, it works to connect embodied and emplaced beings in a deep relationality where emotions are viscerally felt and anticipated – the beginning of conversations is this connection of shared attention. This notion of shared attention is illustrated in this observation:

*Aikito (1) holds a spongy ball and an imitation persimmon.*

*Persimmon drops.*

*Sponge ball squeezed in hand.*

*Another child collects the persimmon.*

*A Dad offers an imitation pear to Aikito.*

The offer of a Father (not Aikito's) to replace one sphere for another, something that brought satisfaction to Aikito and no doubt the Father who made the offer, shows to Aikito, that there are other fruit, without words, that invites a deep relationality. This shared attention was invited in the artist curated objects such as a giant TV screen where children and adults could 'put on a show'. Showing was also key to how artists engaged children and adults in arts practices, offering hands on support to embark on creating, lending a hand to tape cardboard wings onto a paper ring bird for example. The placement of artist bodies and their tools of paper, markers, etc, on the floor of the space invited children to join them in a making adventure where shared attention was invited, such as was observed with Tiffany.

*Tiffany sat on the floor in front of the oversized play television screen. She had a box of sorted containers of paper of about twenty plastic trays with different papers, sorted according to colour, patterns, shapes and textures. Tiffany cut paper. A boy in a striped shirt came and sat next to her and glued a strip of card. Tiffany leaned forward offering playfully animated ideas for folding and gluing to his strip of card. The boy looked and*

*listened carefully. They were perhaps only a foot away from each other. Their connection was focussed and intense. In this moment nothing else seemed to exist for either of them.*

Artworkers rarely explicitly tell children and families a play or making practice, but rather they start playing or making and children and families attention is drawn to them, and the children and families then choose to join in or not.

### 3. *Offers to enhance: Inviting connection to affordance networks*

Once shared attention is there, artworkers *attune* to the materials and children interests and provide offers to enhance the play or making. Such was evident when Walter talked about the effect of rubbing on different surfaces, explored different scratching tools and provided nautical speak, in Tim's array of playful suggestions for making with brown paper and Tiffany's ideas for cutting and gluing. In The Corner, a daily artworker and program assistant were on hand to support families engage with the space, promoting play, multiliteracies and community through offers to enhance by noticing affordance networks of the spatiality, materiality and relationality of The Corner. In the interviews, the artworkers expressed their purpose in The Corner as facilitators of play or making.

Tim: For me it's to facilitate play. It's to play.. and facilitate it and not get in the way of it. Mentor it, mentor parents, mentor adults. Try and get adults playing as well.

Tiffany: To make...in an organic way.

Walter: Generally the free play here is emphasised and encouraged...And the core and the backbone here is for children to choose.

Mari: Play! Play is so important. We forget how to play...I'm just sharing my love of what I do... That's how I like to work...I love the freedom...

Anthea: Playing with them then they are open to continue playing in a different way... I think the freedom to choose is really important. It's so important.

Vanessa: It's about making for everybody, that can also be easily done at home.

Artworkers were particularly concerned that participation is voluntary and that children's volition to engage in play or in an arts experiences was primary. To this end, the primary goal of artworkers in The Corner was to enhance playfulness. For example, when Tim noticed that rising voices of children engaging in a game of hide and seek with puppets under the void of a low curtained cupboard. Tim, walked over and joined in momentarily, adding an animated feather duster to the play and letting out a roar as if to celebrate the increased playfulness and subsequent increase in volume. Tim's actions to enhance the play also legitimized that intentionality of the curtained voids to provoke this very playfulness. The affordance network of space, artworkers and puppets enhanced the playfulness of children and celebrated its potential to contribute to multiliteracies and community.

### 4. *Aligning with perception-action cycles: inviting interest and wonder*

Perception action cycles increase specificity of attention and are noted as key to perceptual learning (E. Gibson, 2003). They are mediated by the features of socially produced space – in this case the artist curated space in The Corner at the State Library of Queensland. The free movement of people in the space and the increased attention to spatial and material agency encompassed exploratory and performatory activity in cycles of perceiving and acting. Children's learning was subsequent to their engagement in spontaneous puppet play, a mini theatre production, or musical ensemble, the creation of a paper bird or boat, the carrying and dropping of a ball, that sharing of a story or simply gazing out the windows from a cozy nook, taking in the cityscape. The key role of the artworkers each day was to celebrate the joyful and spontaneous opportunities for learning that arise in play. In this way, just for the short time that families availed themselves to The Corner, they were supported to loosen up, to connect with each other, and with complete strangers, and to become familiar with this affordance network for play, making and creativity. In this way artworkers worked to sense what was needed in any moment, to reduce tension, to add

frivolity, to spur a conversation, or mini celebration of achievement in any moment. By doing so, the artworkers aligned with the perception-action cycles of participants in the Corner to orchestrate the pedagogical potency of spatial and material agency. The fact that families expressed so much appreciation for this space reveals the importance of inviting a little bit of interest and wonder into lived experiences to support material literacies, and community among otherwise disparate entities passing by The Corner.

This research develops further specificity around the previous work by Phillips and Finn (in review) to identify pedagogical practices of artists in a parent initiated making space in a primary school. The identification of four pedagogical principles for learning with space and matter provides guidance to define such emergent and responsive practice that is uncommon in formal education settings, to support educators to work with space and matter pedagogically in meaningful and enriching ways. These principles, now further exemplified through this research, support articulation of the pedagogy of The Corner and gains produced from such an approach.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The design of the space and materials and employment of artworkers in The Corner creates a place that enacts a very unique spatially and materially focussed pedagogy that cultivates relationality, playfulness and material literacies. Materials underpinned and informed all of the social exchanges, and afforded, via its accessibility and curatorial appeal, the ultimate communality that has been identified and articulated by this research. Articulation of the key features of the practices and principles of The Corner provides insight to the workings of The Corner and the community benefits the program offers.

The welcoming creative community space of The Corner provided to young families is clearly well-treasured by thousands of Brisbane families. It provides much more than a library's conventional brief of story and information sharing, with opportunity for all family members to meet new people, build friendships, learn English, and come to know new stories and ways for playing and making with accessible materials.

Children's engagement in play and making in artist curated installations elicits rich material literacies: applied organic literacy practices. Through doing things with the materials in The Corner with artworkers, other children and family members, children build communicative practice that feeds their growing understandings of the world. Through play and playfulness, attention to material literacies is invited, nurturing joyous and positive foundations to learning and communication.

Definition of the responsive organic pedagogy practiced in The Corner draws attention to a shift in focus to space and materials, where the artworkers, children and families are steered by: "what do the space and materials invite me to do?" As opposed to a conventional teaching practice being steered by: "what concepts will I teach and what materials will I use to support the teaching of such?" Artists do have a greater propensity to be attuned to creative and innovative exploration with materials, so they are well chosen to facilitate material literacies in The Corner. The contribution that the artworkers bring to the workings of The Corner requires ongoing promotion and advocacy. Employment of artworkers as facilitators of play and making through responsive and organic pedagogy is unique, as such is scarcely applied in public programs for children elsewhere in the world. We encourage SLQ to make much more of this initiative through honouring the quality of the artworkers contributions, and national and international promotion and advocacy of employment of artists to elicit rich material literacies.

The Corner demonstrates how attention to joyful and spontaneous interactions inspired through emphases on play, materials and relationality can produce material literacies and community.

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## Glossary

**Affordances:** named by James Gibson (1979/1986/2015) as action possibilities in the environment, available to be realised by living beings according to their *effectivities* (abilities and intentions). More recently, in education, Barab and Roth (2006) have described affordance networks as: "...the facts, concepts, tools, methods, practices commitments, and even people that can be enlisted toward the satisfaction of a particular goal" (p.4). It is the access to affordances and networks of affordances that situates learners in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and this accessibility is enabled and constrained by the social agreements that constitute the possibilities for action that make the perception of affordances actionable or even permissible.

**Attunement:** to affordances is part of a socialisation process where attention is guided, for example parents and caregivers point out what to attend to in the environment, what is of significance (Zukow-Goldring & Arbib, 2007).

**Specificity:** Eleanor Gibson and Pick (2000) describe the process of learning as a stream of *specificity*, a process of continual discrimination where perception and action are reciprocal.



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