

## Treading softly in the enchanted forest: exploring the integration of iPads in a participatory theatre education programme

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## **Treading softly in the Enchanted Forest:**

### **Exploring the integration of iPads in a participatory theatre education programme**

#### **Abstract**

While it is commonplace to argue that technology integration in educational contexts should be pedagogically appropriate, in some contexts, the notion of ‘appropriate’ integration can be slippery. This is the case in the context of educational theatre, which builds on the experience of ‘liveness’ and of being together in a shared space. In this article we report on a collaborative qualitative study of one iteration of a participatory theatre programme delivered to 7-9 year olds at a primary school in England, through which artist/practitioners worked with researchers to investigate the integration of iPads in ways that were appropriate to the programme’s underpinning pedagogy. Drawing on a sociomaterial analysis of what happened moment to moment in practice, we describe three aspects of the experience that appeared to amplify, shift and/or dissipate as iPads came into play, particularly with respect to the iPad’s video function: narrative complexity; multiplicity; and togetherness. Considering these in relation to the programme’s established principles and practices, we argue that part of ‘appropriateness’ in this context involves responding to the unexpected pedagogical possibilities that open out as digital technologies combine with other people and things. These insights, we propose, have implications for theatre practitioners seeking to integrate digital technologies within their programmes, as well as those working to articulate the value of such work to participants, funders and other stakeholders.

**Key words:** theatre, participation, education, technology, drama, iPads

## Introduction

In debates about the integration of digital technologies in educational contexts, it is commonplace to argue that technological innovation needs to be pedagogically “appropriate”, that is, to acknowledge that technologies do not in themselves bring educational benefits but that they should be integrated in ways that suit specific teaching and learning purposes (e.g. Luckin et al., 2012; Schleicher, 2015). In this article we consider how we might approach the idea of “appropriateness” in the context of participatory theatre, recognising that digital technologies are, for some, at odds with the ensemble approach that is at the heart of such work (D.Davis, 2014). Building on writing that has documented the innovative use of digital technologies across process drama and participatory theatre (e.g. Anderson, Carroll & Cameron, 2009; Carroll & Cameron, 2003; Sutton, 2012), we report on a collaborative qualitative study of one iteration of a participatory theatre programme delivered to 7-9 year olds at a primary school in England, through which artist/practitioners worked with researchers to investigate the integration of iPads - the video function in particular - in ways that were consistent with the programme’s underpinning pedagogy. We draw on a sociomaterial analysis of what happened in this instance to argue that part of ‘appropriateness’ in the context of participatory theatre involves responding to the unexpected pedagogical possibilities that open out as digital technologies combine with other people and things in ways that do not disturb existing pedagogic practices and possibilities. In the Yeats’ poem *The Cloths of Heaven*, which our title alludes to, the poet declares to the reader that he has spread his dreams “under your feet”, exhorting us to “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” This seems an especially appropriate analogy for our research. We suggest that our approach to both research and to the possible integration of digital technologies had to be “soft”; to gently tread around and mingle with the “embroidered”, “golden and silver light”, and the “blue and the dim and the dark cloths” which were both

metaphorically, and at times literally, part of the the substance and process of the enchanted forest as it was collectively and individually imagined and represented. In contextualising this work, we begin by outlining the range of practice which we refer to as participatory theatre and identify some key instances of technology integration.

### **Participatory theatre and digital technologies**

We use the overarching term ‘participatory theatre’ to refer to the work of a wide range of applied theatre practices that operate through “participation where young people are engaged at a personal emotional level, and yet protected into that participation by a theatrical construct” (Wooster, 2016, p13). While arguably most theatre aims to involve its audience at an emotional level, the participation we consider here blurs the distinction between audience and performers more completely through inviting active participation in an unfolding drama. This work occurs in diverse settings, including schools, museums and outdoor sites, and takes many forms, ranging from extended theatre-in-education programmes that involve participants in scenarios in which they grapple with complex issues or concerns, through approaches that invite immersion in an environment through sensory engagement (Jackson, 2007). Such work blends elements of process drama, in which children are "involved as participants in making the drama and as characters within it" (O’Toole, 2009), in different ways and to different extents, with theatrical experience and theatre making.

The types of participatory theatre practice that we consider in our research share a commitment to generating collaborative and imaginative experiences that build on the embodied, affective dimensions of an ensemble approach. An ensemble approach involves a shared endeavour that capitalises on being together in a shared space, and has been seen to offer participants immediate and direct experience of “building community and common

culture” (Neelands, 2009). It provides supportive opportunities for participants to explore diverse experiences and/or engage with contradictions, tensions and possibilities in a safe environment (Jackson, 2007).

In recent years, whether prompted by creative possibilities or by funding criteria (e.g. ACE, 2017), there has been increasing interest in integrating digital technologies in participatory theatre. For some, however, digital technologies sit uneasily with an ensemble approach. D.Davis (2014), for example, has argued that digital technologies distance participants in ways that undermine the educational possibilities generated through the live encounter. Others, however, have suggested that the principles and practices of drama and theatre in education align well with those that play out in on-screen spaces, such as online gaming (O’Mara, 2012), and that digital media offer alternative approaches to being together across physical spaces (Anderson & Cameron, 2015). Indeed work by some companies and drama practitioners has suggested that online environments, such as those associated with online “affinity spaces” (Gee & Hayes, 2012) and participatory cultures (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006), can offer new modes of participation and possibilities for ensemble working (Sutton, 2012). Carroll and Cameron (2003), for example, outline a project in which interactive web-based resources (videos, websites, email, etc.) were used within process drama to propel the developing narrative. Such work has been seen to enrich the ‘liveness’ of educational drama and theatre in different ways, not least for audiences used to a mediatised culture (S.Davis, 2012).

Importantly, as S.Davis (2012) highlights, the significance of technologies (digital or otherwise) is not what they do in isolation but in how they work alongside everything else in the moment. It is this idea that we want to explore further in this paper, with a view to adding

to debates about what ‘appropriate’ technology use might look like in participatory theatre. As we have explored elsewhere (Burnett et al., 2018a), much existing writing about digital technologies in participatory theatre relates to what might be described as the *designed* use of digital technologies, or the use of technology to suit certain purposes in the drama. While we emphatically support considered and purposeful integration, in this article we want to explore the possibilities associated with approaching technology integration slightly differently. We argue that, in the context of participatory theatre, an important aspect of technology integration involves responding to the *unexpected* pedagogical possibilities that open out as digital technologies combine with participatory theatre programmes. The work reported below therefore builds on the premise that we need to know more about what happens *in practice* when digital technologies enter participatory theatre programmes (Burnett et al., 2018a).

In contributing to this agenda, in what follows we explore what happened when iPads and particularly their video functions were used within one participatory theatre programme in a primary school in England. In doing so, we acknowledge that our example is very particular, focused on a single iteration of one participatory theatre programme. However, we propose that this example works to illustrate what can be gained by working in an open-ended way, and exemplifies how the pedagogies embedded in participatory theatre may both inflect and be inflected by the introduction of digital technologies.

### **The programme**

Our focus is a collaborative research project conducted by three researchers (Cathy, Becky and Guy) and one theatre practitioner (Vicky) which examined the integration of iPads within Chol Theatre’s *Imaginary Communities (IC)*. *IC* is a programme developed and directed by

Vicky which launched in 2013 and has been funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Arts Council England.

*IC* is a live story-making process through which children and their teacher work with one or more practitioners as a theatrical ensemble. Using elements of process drama and live story-making participants create an imagined world through drama, storytelling and play which they populate with characters and locations in which events subsequently unfold. The story is essentially unplanned but links to a theme decided in collaboration with the commissioning organisation, which may connect with a curriculum topic. The programme usually takes place in schools but also sometimes in libraries and other community spaces. It is scheduled over several sessions to promote depth of engagement, typically weekly over the course of a school term, and is complemented by activities such as drawing or writing. It is often located in a classroom, where resources (some already there and some introduced by practitioners) are used by participants to build the imagined world.

Four characteristics of the programme are particularly distinctive and relevant to the discussion that follows:

1. While practitioners draw on strategies to facilitate the process developed through their experience over time, the programme is essentially responsive in nature: the drama is **open-ended**, working from and with the children's and teacher's ideas.
2. Unlike approaches such as mantle of the expert (Heathcote, Bolton & O'Neill, 1995), that recruit children to a generic shared role or stance of expertise from which they encounter the drama (e.g. Winters & Code, 2017), *IC* encourages children and their teachers to create individual characters. This provides opportunities to **draw on and value "funds of**

**knowledge**” (González et al., 2005) developed out of school; elements from the “everyday” and popular media often feature.

3. As participants work from the perspective of individual characters, they often develop their own narrative strands. The **maintenance of individual narratives** is actively encouraged by artist-practitioners who work to integrate these within the main narrative where possible.

4. Facilitating this open-ended programme is sensitive work which relies on a strong sense of **shared endeavour** which the artist-practitioners work hard to cultivate by positioning the children and teacher as "equal playmakers" (see Storey, forthcoming).

At the time of the project, one of Chol’s funders, Arts Council England, were requiring companies in receipt of funding to embrace the possibilities offered by digital technologies:

*In Achieving great art for everyone we identify “the dizzying potential of digital technology in transforming the way we make, distribute, receive and exchange art.”*

*We want to unlock this vast and largely untapped potential – to create, share and link artistic and cultural works in ways made uniquely possible through digital media.*

(ACE, 2017)

As a group of researchers and practitioners, we were cautious of this rhetoric about the power of the digital, cognisant of how repeated claims for the transformational possibilities of technology in education have failed to materialise in education (Selwyn, 2016). We were also mindful that some discussions about tablet use (including iPads) in education have implied that tablets themselves confer agency, engagement and well-being on users (Potter & Bryer, 2017). Studies of tablet use can - perhaps unwittingly - reinforce this notion by neglecting the other resources that come into play when they are used. We were concerned that this view of



digital technology as having ‘dizzying potential’ could potentially trample under foot the already precarious position of drama in education which aims to support children’s right to self expression. Chol however were keen to explore ways of using iPads that aligned with their existing approaches and to build on some previous experience of filming short video-messages from characters to respond to incidents within the drama. They had observed the potential of the video functions of iPads within the diegetic world of the imaginary community and believed that this aligned with their commitment to valuing children’s funds of knowledge, and to using technologies with which children were already familiar. They were interested in exploring how children might draw on their experience of using iPads- and specifically the video function – during *IC*.

In order to investigate such possibilities, *IC* was condensed into a week-long programme and became the focus of our collaborative study (see Burnett et al., 2018a; 2018b). This programme, involving daily morning drama sessions, was offered at no charge to a state-funded primary school in England that had previously participated in *IC* and felt that their children had benefited considerably. It took place at the end of the summer school term 2017, at a time when curriculum requirements for the year had been met and there was greater freedom to devote time to this free-flowing, open-ended activity. One class of 7-9 year-olds and their teacher took part, facilitated by at least one, and on three days, two, artist-practitioner(s) (Vicky and Carly).

The theme chosen for the week was “The Enchanted Forest”. As the week progressed, the artist-practitioners drew on considerable experience of *IC* in encouraging the group to work together and supporting children and their teacher to create characters, setting and narrative. Moving in and out of role as characters in the forest, they guided the development of the

story, building on the children's ideas. Most sessions occurred in the classroom, with tables and chairs pushed to the edge, reanimated with the company's collection of "heavenly cloths" to represent characters, settings, buildings and magical artefacts. On two occasions the group moved outside to the school's woodland area. The week began as children, their teacher and the artist-practitioners worked together to imagine and create their enchanted forest, building different locations (e.g. a magic tree, a poetry garden) from classroom furniture supplemented by the fabrics provided by Chol, artefacts bought from home by the children, and everyday classroom objects repurposed. All participants then created characters that lived in the forest, with children often drawing on popular narratives from film, television and gaming.

Characters from different worlds lived alongside one another - a fairy, a vicar, a warrior, for example. Over the week some built alliances, and some plotted against one another. Tensions built between different factions, coming to a head as a red devil (supported by several confederates) set out to take control of the forest. A storm raged and a terrible battle ensued.

Although Chol had identified the video function of the iPads as having potential, in line with our 'gentle' approach, specific uses of the iPads were not planned. Instead the school's set of six iPads was made available alongside a range of other resources and materials, including the suitcase of cloth and other props which were taken up as and when children or artist-practitioners identified possible uses. During the week, the iPads participated in *IC* in various ways, some of which are described in other writing from this project (see Burnett et al., 2018a; 2018b). Predominantly, they were used as video cameras - as children documented what was happening during whole class events and meetings, or recorded smaller performances by or interactions between individuals. This use of the video function of iPads was not accompanied by any of the processes usually associated with film production, such as teaching film language through analysis of film (Burn and Durran, 2006). Instead some

distinct uses emerged which, we suggest, have value for both film and theatre educators.

What happened around and with these cameras varied considerably, and was often different from what commonly occurs in pedagogic approaches where narrative film-making is the main activity.

### **The study**

Our research approach was influenced by qualitative case study methodology (Stenhouse, 1978; Yin, 2018), focusing on detailed study of this single programme whilst recognising the multiplicity of factors that helped to shape it. Methods included observation, research conversations with participating children, collection of artefacts, and two reflective meetings involving researchers, practitioners and the class teacher (one prior to and one on completion of the programme). Observations took place during all *IC* sessions over the course of the week when the practitioners were present. This included all mornings of drama as well as some activities occurring in afternoons, such as drawing and writing activities in which children were encouraged to explore further and consolidate their ideas about characters and settings. Observations totalled at least three hours per day (approximately fifteen hours overall). One researcher (Cathy) was present for all sessions and a second (Becky) was also present on three days. Observations sometimes focused on the practitioners and their facilitation of children's participation, and sometimes on a small number of individual children (maximum three) and their interactions with others or the iPads. In any moment, adults, children, iPads and many other materials were involved, and so, while these foci provided different starting points, all observations ranged over diverse activity. Observations were recorded using brief field-notes, with the Cathy using these as the basis for writing detailed accounts at the end of each day. These were then discussed with Becky who shared alternate perspectives and insights on what had happened and on the Cathy's representation

of these. It is important to acknowledge that observations were inevitably selective and that field-notes could only represent a partial version of what happened.

In order to avoid interrupting the drama, both researchers attempted to stay outside the world of the story, and refrained from engaging in dialogue unless children initiated interactions, in which case they followed the child's invitation. This usually happened at the beginnings and ends of days and in transitions between activities, when children talked about what was happening, what their character was doing, or about something else that had happened outside the class. During these discussions, Becky followed up references to popular culture that were made during the drama, finding out more about the origins of these. Often it was these conversations with children during break-times or when drawing or writing that helped us to make sense of their character's appearance in the drama and in filmed sequences.

Spending time with them as they wrote and drew, we saw how such opportunities gave the children a chance to develop their own characters and storylines. Both researchers witnessed informal discussion between children and with practitioners, or were available for children who wanted to talk. In this way they gained some insights into the children's perceptions of and response to the programme. We had planned for more structured reflection by children on their experiences but this was not possible to schedule as the programme itself absorbed all available time. Audio-recorded group reflective discussions between two researchers (Cathy and Guy), the two artist-practitioners and the class teacher were held prior to and following the week. On three occasions one practitioner and the teacher also recorded shared video reflections. Finally, videos, drawings and writing created by the children were copied and archived.

The study's ethical framework was given approval by the institutional ethical review committees of the two universities represented by the researchers. Written consent was requested prior to the start of the programme from the head teacher, teacher, practitioner, and the children's parents/carers. Not all parents returned consent forms, and of those that did, two stated that they were unwilling for their children to be part of the research. All children were asked to give their consent verbally and we were also sensitive to any children who indicated (e.g. through body language) that they were reluctant to be observed, interpreting this as implicit withdrawal of consent. While all children participated in the *IC* week, only data relating to those for whom we gained explicit permission (from parents/carers and children) were retained for research purposes. It is important to acknowledge therefore that our analysis does not reflect the full range of children's responses.

In conducting observations and analysing data, we adopted a sociomaterial sensibility that was sensitive to what happens in the moment, and which we have applied to the analysis of digital technology use (including iPads) in other educational contexts (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, Burnett & Merchant, 2017). As we have argued elsewhere (Burnett et al., 2018a), from this perspective digital technologies are not resources to be taken up or tools to be used, but will participate in different ways as they come into relation with other people and things (e.g. see Law, 2011; Law and Mol, 2008; Mol, 2002). Importantly this perspective acknowledges that technology use cannot be fully explained in terms of human intentionality. Instead both humans and non-humans (including digital devices) are seen to act on one another as they come into relation. Sociomaterial analyses of technology integration have been useful previously in generating new insights into learning processes. Dezuanni's research into children's use of iPads in making films, for example, explored how material practices associated with digital devices were significant to the development of students' knowledge

about media concepts, and to the quality of what they were able to produce (Dezuanni, 2015; Dezuanni et al., 2017). In addition to attending to what was offered by the materiality of the digital device, however, we were interested in what happened as those devices came into relation with other human and non-human materialities. Our interest in the “liveliness of things”, foregrounded the ways in which digital devices can become different kinds of things when taken up in practice, and that consequently what happens is always more than what is designed; nothing is entirely predictable, and any moment is rich with potentiality. Our focus then was not on the learning process of individual children or indeed on video production (although we did trace children’s participation over the week), but on how uses of iPads/video emerged as children, practitioners, iPads and other materials came into relation moment to moment, and in how the programme unfolded as this happened. In observing what happened, we focused on:

- how different participants - on and off-screen, human (artist-practitioner, teacher, children, researcher) and non-human (devices, objects, texts, etc.) - contributed to the generation of the imaginary community;
- how the imaginary world unfolded through interactions between participants, whether physically co-present or onscreen, human or not;
- the scope and diversity of activity generated through creating and playing within an imaginary community that includes the digital;
- ways that integration of digital tools and associated practices seemed to propel, enhance, and/or detract from the development of the drama.

The process of analysis involved the team in the collaborative and iterative review of data with a focus on the possibilities that seemed to open out (or close down) as iPads were used and the insights children’s video material suggested about their individual storying. Vicky’s

knowledge of *IC* was essential here as she was able to reflect on what happened in the light of considerable prior experience, evaluation and research related to the programme (e.g. see Storey, forthcoming), and to identify new possibilities that seemed to be generated as iPads entered the enchanted forest. This process involved individual readings of the data (fieldnotes, video and artefacts), interspersed with reflective meetings during which we shared our perspectives on the processes and purposes associated with children's use of the iPads. The data were then revisited in the light of these discussions. Through this process, we identified a number of themes related to aspects of *IC* that were in some way inflected by iPad integration.

Below we consider three themes generated through our analysis: narrative complexity, multiplicity, and togetherness. In doing so, we acknowledge that our discussion does not do justice to the depth and diversity of the *IC* experience, and does not reference all the ways in which iPads participated (see Burnett et al., 2018a, 2018b for other dimensions). We focus on these three themes because they seemed to be associated with new possibilities within *IC*, and as such, illustrate how digital technologies can work to open out *unexpected* directions in participatory theatre. In practice these dimensions were permeable and interwoven as is evident we hope in our examples. However by distinguishing between them, we explore aspects of technology integration that we suggest had implications for the pedagogical work of *IC* and which inform wider notions of 'appropriateness' in technology integration in participatory theatre.

## **Aspects of iPad integration in *IC***

### ***Narrative complexity***

Our first theme, narrative complexity, focuses on the interweaving of stories over time, and the role of the iPads/video in facilitating and/or making visible this process. As stated earlier, narrative complexity was a common feature of *IC*, but our interest here was in how iPad use seemed to enrich this complexity, or at least to make it more public. As the week progressed, there were many opportunities for children to film using the iPads, either alone or with others. For example they were invited to film what would happen when their characters heard the Red Devil pass by. On such occasions, children often developed the narrative in ways that were never shown to others. We knew from what they told us that they were continuing in the playground, and that this fictional world play often took the story in new directions, but we had no direct access to this. Their videos provided a glimpse into how their characters related to the broader shared narrative but also into the multiple parallel universes of story with which they were playing. Videoing was not the only opportunity to develop these individual, divergent and/or parallel narratives. At various points the children were invited to draw and write about settings and characters, and this provided other opportunities to develop their own stories. Videoing, however, seemed to offer a qualitatively different opportunity to thread individual stories through the group story: filmed narratives were embodied and dynamic but also focused, starting and ending with the press of record and stop.

Watching their videos we saw narrative strands that were not evident in their drawings and conversations, and which did not feature in the over-arching class story. In their gestures, facial expressions and voices, we sensed, sometimes fleetingly, what seemed to be the depth of their immersion. For example, early in the week, Carly invited the children to go outside the classroom to make video diaries with her support, to tell how their character was feeling about unfolding events. As Carly held the device, all but one child spoke in character, some talking to imagined others in the forest, some voicing their feelings, some watching



themselves on screen as they filmed. All seemed immersed in the story, whether or not they had been a strong presence in the shared narrative. As prompted, they spoke of their feelings about the arrival of the Red Devil and the characters they were linked to. However, they often also gave themselves more agency, significance or intrigue than was visible from watching the unfolding drama. For example, a “beautiful fairy” revealed herself to be also “half wolf” in a momentary aside, which indicated how characters could mutate within the drama even when the whole group was not made aware of this.

Later in the week they had a second opportunity to film video diaries, this time going out to the cloakroom alone. We noticed a greater degree of confidence this time, perhaps because there was no adult present, because they were more immersed in the narrative, or because their prior knowledge of the video diary form was invoked. Perhaps filming the video diaries, alone with the iPad in the corner by the coats and seeing themselves on screen, generated a more private space through which they could speak to an imagined other, or maybe in which they could see themselves projected back (mirror- or selfie-like) in ways familiar from reality television shows where a secret space is often a key site of disclosure away from other participants.

These individual, private video diaries opened out opportunities for children to share personal narratives that did not have to be made public or fully conform to the shared storyline. They provided an opportunity for children to perform their characters in alternative contexts, asserting a significant role for themselves even if this was not shared with or acknowledged by the rest of the class. As discussed above, the opportunity to develop divergent narratives is one of the qualities of *IC* that distinguishes it from other participatory theatre programmes. However, as Vicky noted, it is impossible for practitioners to incorporate all of these stories

into the main narrative. At the very least, the video gave an outlet for these stories and made them more visible to practitioners and researchers, but it perhaps also provided the space and time for narratives to crystallise and further develop. In a sense perhaps, the iPads provided an imagined audience to children in a way that just was not possible for practitioners managing a whole class within a finite amount of time. As Vicky reflected:

*... because every precious story had time to play then, because it was valued in the use of the tablet, it took the pressure off us. We didn't need to know every single thing that was happening. So it felt magic. [Post project reflection meeting]*

### ***Multiple modes of participation***

Our second theme addresses the ways in which the iPads opened out, or made visible, multiple engagements that seemed to exist simultaneously or move fluidly from one to another. We refer to these as multiple modes of participation, through which children sometimes aligned with what was intended and sometimes did not. For example, iPads were sometimes associated with practices that reflected existing classroom routines.

On one occasion iPads were introduced as cameras to record feedback reports from the children on the small structures they had built from fabric, chairs and other materials to represent places in the forest. The teacher was asked to choose some children to film and selected individuals who had not necessarily come to the fore in other activities. In doing so she conferred status on them and actively signalled their skills in filming (as they had taken this role before in class). The children took seriously their role in recording the action using well framed and stable images. The orchestration of filming - and the children's responses - could be seen as reflecting established schooled practices as well as the pedagogical

intentions of their teacher. As children presented their feedback to be filmed, however, this played out in various ways (as also noted in Burnett et al., 2018a), reflecting what seemed to us to be different modes of participation. Some followed usual procedures for “presenting back” at school: outlining some key ideas and talking as “objective” outsider direct to camera. Other presentations started in conventional feedback mode but soon morphed into other genres, for example as they spoke in the first person as their character like a presenter of a television documentary, highlighting objects within their structure, or reconstructing what happened there. Others moved from rehearsed presentation to improvisation, free playing within the space they had made.

These different responses seemed to represent the kind of stepping in and out of the diegetic or fictional world that often typifies children’s play (Fleer, 2014). It appeared that *IC*, combined with the use of the iPad/cameras and the materiality of the newly created forest locations, drew the children into a complex arrangement of overlapping narratives. Of course we cannot know what the children intended, how they experienced what they did, or what prompted them to approach the task as they did. However, this example illustrates how a single episode can simultaneously play out in different ways. The feedback perhaps became something different to the teacher and to those children videoing to what it was for the children presenting; while on one side of the camera, children adhered to familiar school routines and roles, on the other side children playfully incorporated diverse materials and cultural resources into the activity, often extemporising on the spot.

As the week progressed iPad use became less teacher-directed, with children free to take up the iPads and film when they wanted. As this happened, the process of filming seemed to open out further possibilities for participation. At times the process of documenting

sequences of narrative seemed to enable children to step entirely out of the diegetic world, perhaps providing an emotional break from the intensity of the drama. When this happened, however, those filming sometimes exhibited a different sort of intensity in their attention to the task:

*The children filming by and large stay focused, watching all the while to check the frame works. Occasionally starting filming at the wrong moment but then going back, deleting and starting again. [Fieldnotes: Day 4]*

At other times, filming had a more bodily, frenetic and kinaesthetic quality that appeared to fit with the increasing drama and peril in the story, *Blair Witch* style. For example, at one point, children with cameras moved rapidly round the room circling the group, all attention to good framing and pace of movement gone, zooming in in ways that seemed uncomfortably close. Occasionally commenting on actions as they happened, they became foreground rather than background to the action. Rather like the avant-garde film director, they appeared to adopt the role of “Enfant terrible” defiantly pressing their will on others and making the filmmaker (themselves) and filmmaking (their decisions) as visible as possible. This was in rather marked contrast to the fly-on-the-wall techniques which we saw exhibited prior to this. This practice mirrored more obtrusive forms of reality television but also perhaps signals a desire to step out of or disrupt the fictional world and also to challenge the commitment of others to the imaginary community. Other children responded by physically preventing themselves being filmed - putting up a hand to stop the filming and to prevent their images being taken off guard - whilst still remaining in role and paying attention to the emerging narrative. The processes of filming and of being in the story therefore sometimes seemed to work to intensify one another, but sometimes interfaced in ways that had to be negotiated

outside the fiction. Interestingly, we also noted that children learnt which shots to use, how to frame and how to manage sound on location, despite no explicit instruction on film-making, an aspect of participation which we began to think of as filmmaking as an emergent literacy practice, in which children's use of iPads more closely resembled processes that pioneer filmmakers had to undergo to fully understand the affordances of their medium. For example, we saw children learning, through trial and error, that they could move the camera position rather than maintain a static shot of a scene. We also observed them working out when to cut to a new shot to create a perception of time passing (the kinds of techniques that might usually be explicitly taught prior to production commencing) (Parry, 2014).

Other aspects of participation linked neither to story-making or filming. For example, ownership of the six iPads was occasionally contested. This rarely appeared to obstruct the ongoing development of the drama, with a small number of children usually managing to appropriate the devices, largely tolerated by the rest of the class. However, it appeared that for some the iPads were regarded as conferring agency or power and this was something not to be quietly experienced but to be made explicit, a struggle which paralleled the struggle for power amongst the inhabitants of the forest. At other times, the apps and archives hosted by iPads played a part. For example, when invited to review what they had filmed, one group found another film saved on the iPad (a video of a dance performed by a child from another class), which they watched, laughing, before viewing their own film. Drifting even further, it seemed, out of the enchanted forest, two children took the opportunity to use the iPads as games devices, retreating under tables to do so. Initially this might have been prompted by a moment of resistance or lack of interest. However, as they played, they soon became absorbed in the game. Others in the class seemed indignant that game playing was going on, but this appeared to arise from their commitment to the project as a whole class activity; it

was the opting out they seemed concerned about, not the fact that some had been 'allowed' to play games. Notably this was an isolated event, and the game-playing children re-joined the group when decisions were being taken that they wanted to be part of. These examples illustrate the simultaneity of different kinds of participation, with some children engrossed in the story, others in other relations with children and the materials around them, and some moving apparently unproblematically between these from moment to moment.

### ***Togetherness***

Our third theme, togetherness, explores ways in which uses of the iPads seemed to intensify or disrupt the sense of togetherness that, as explored earlier, is at the heart of ensemble approaches. It was not just the camera function that was relevant here, but the size and shape of the iPads as objects. As in other studies of screen use in educational contexts (e.g. Burnett, 2014, 2015), at times it seemed that the iPad's screen sometimes helped to frame an intimate shared space, intensifying a feeling of togetherness. Often children's improvised scenes roamed widely, particularly when in the woodland area. However the iPad sometimes helped to hold them together - as action needed to be kept within the frame in order to be filmed, or as children gathered round a iPad to view some footage. For example:

*Vicky has the tablet, which acts like a magnet and some children gather behind or near her so they can view the scene on screen. She gives instructions to Carly – to tell what she is feeling at this crux of the story. Carly listens and nods, yes...yes.. Vicky asks her to choose her place on the map and stand somewhere in the room to represent that place and then begin to voice her thoughts. She counts her in 3,2,1. Carly's performance is received in silence followed by spontaneous applause. There*

*seems to be a shift in focus, an intensification. R says “that was beautiful”. The group around the tablet watch it on-screen.*

*Vicky suggests they review- so she turns the screen around and all re-watch the scene together. As it replays some are open-mouthed, all eyes on the screen. It is followed by more applause. (Field-notes: Day 3)*

In participatory theatre, practitioners commonly manage the safe movement of large numbers of bodies in a limited space from within the narrative, drawing on resources in the environment to help them do so. They might gather children together in a corner for example, or use an urgent whisper to draw children in. In this example, the iPad is used in much the same way. Gathering around the screen brings children physically together and in doing so focuses them on what Carly is doing. Although of course we cannot know what this felt like to the children, it may be that this moment intensified their feeling of involvement, or of being together. Importantly the iPad does not achieve this alone, nor does the practitioner or the children. It is what they all bring to this moment, perhaps combined with established routines for listening and sharing associated with being in the classroom, that seems to generate this moment of togetherness.

As well as reinforcing or intensifying moments of togetherness, iPads also played part in disrupting them. The development of the narrative, for example, hinged on a series of meetings where everyone assembled together, meetings that were managed carefully by practitioners to maximise participation while sustaining the momentum of the story. Often these meetings were characterised, to the researchers at least, by a rhythm which generated a sense of compelling urgency, of moving from idea to idea, from activity to activity, from event to event. iPad battery life or storage however did not pay any heed to this, and

interrupted at the most inappropriate times, the rhythms of the iPad interfering with the rhythms of storying. Presented with an on-screen message, or worse an inert screen, the children sometimes called out, “the battery’s gone” or “the storage’s full”. These moments, for the adults at least, seemed to interrupt the togetherness needed to sustain the narrative.

Using the iPads in close proximity presented additional challenges. For example, we noticed an emerging etiquette as children worked in groups to film alongside one another. It was easy for children to wander in and out of the frame of others’ videos, but they found ways of solving this, for example by keeping the camera still and cutting at key points, or filming again if someone mistakenly walked into shot. Again, filmmaking practices seemed to emerge as children and iPads came into relation with adults, children and other materials through the unfolding drama. The challenges of managing proximity were occasionally too difficult and children often appeared in each other's videos, but this was sometimes the cause of amusement as children seemed to enjoy spotting others in their films when they watched them back. While perhaps interrupting their togetherness in the shared story world, the iPads caught moments of proximity in the shared physical space.

## **Discussion**

As others have explored, iPads offer certain affordances for film-making, linked for example to the size of screen, opportunities for immediate reviewing and the multifunctionality that enables planning, filming, editing and screening with just one device (Potter and Bryer, 2017). For Dezuanni, the process of approaching filming using iPads as a material practice highlighted several areas in which students might need support, in expanding a metalanguage for discussing media making, for example, or engaging in analysis of the process of



production as well as in analysis of texts made. These insights have implications for pedagogies for developing children's filmmaking as an emergent literacy practice and the potential role of digital mobile devices in this process, which our observations do speak to and which we have explored elsewhere (Burnett et al., 2018b). This article however has a different emphasis, considering the ways in which use of the iPads enriched (or detracted from) the story-making in *IC*, with a focus on the possibilities generated as iPads as devices came into relation with other people and things as they week progressed.

The three aspects of tablet integration in *IC* explored above illustrate some ways in which this happened during a single iteration of participatory theatre. We re-emphasise that we do not see these three aspects as discrete but over-layered. Indeed traces of all three can be seen in most of the examples cited. They serve to illustrate, however, how the introduction of tablets presented different possibilities. These included possibilities for different kinds of engagement, ways of exploring or archiving alternative narrative threads, drawing on students' familiarity with popular media tools, techniques and tropes, and developing filmmaking sensibilities. At the same time practitioners consciously incorporated the video function/iPads into their repertoire, for instance as ways of giving depth to character and settings. There were occasions in which the video function/iPads seemed to disrupt things as they came into relation with everything else that was happening - or at least to unsettle adult expectations or intentions. Whether or not these instances constitute "appropriate" uses of technology is difficult to determine, but one way of considering this is to map our findings on to the four key features of *IC* outlined earlier in this article.

In relation to *open-endedness*, it was apparent that, as iPads came into relation with children, adults, the paraphernalia of *IC*, the classroom and woodland area, possibilities opened out

that had not been anticipated. Practitioners worked with these new possibilities, building in new opportunities for video diaries for example as they noticed that these seemed to offer new spaces for creativity, but also let some possibilities unfold quietly which seemed to generate alternative modes of engagement for some children. It is not our intention here to assess the pedagogical value of different kinds of developments. The children's under-the-table game-play, for example, could be read as activity that undermined the ensemble, or as an outlet that allowed some children to withdraw briefly and re-join the group when ready. They do illustrate however how diverse possibilities were generated as iPads came into relation with everything else that was happening, prompted by their camera function, but also by their size, shape, multi-functionality, intuitive interface and limited storage and battery life. It was not just the technical capability of the devices that was significant here but their materiality. Our examples highlight the significance of tablet integration to, among other things, children's proximity to others, their imaginative forays, classroom politics, the technicalities and artistry of filmmaking, the evocation of familiar form, and the challenges and potentialities generated through navigating multiple worlds. Different aspects of participation co-existed and often translated rapidly from one to another. Each of these, we could argue, reflect different kinds of engagement, which as they interfaced with one another opened out new possibilities.

In relation to *funds of knowledge* and to the *maintenance of individual narrative strands*, our findings illustrate how the tablets provided an opportunity for children to showcase, share, recontextualise or rework cultural resources. They provided one means by which children left traces of individual trajectories through the narrative. Of course, in many ways this may not differ greatly from what usually happens in *IC*. A common feature of participatory theatre is that it allows the exploration of complexity and contradiction; multiple stories always likely

exist and participants draw on diverse experiences as they make sense of and with what is happening. This was certainly- as explored earlier- an established feature of *IC*. The iPads, with their video function, however made this more explicit. Moreover, what happened was inflected by ways of using such devices wrought through prior familiarity in other times and places (whether this was through playing games at home, or being used to being called upon as official recorder in class). Children's funds of knowledge were apparent in their interactions with devices as well as their recorded storying.

In relation to *shared endeavour*, possibilities generated held the potential for both intensifying and unsettling the ensemble. Cultivating the kind of togetherness that *IC* attempts is challenging and involves mutual care, commitment and respect (see also Boyd et al., 2018). Integrating tablets into *IC* sometimes seemed to make this careful work more difficult. It highlighted the contingency and fragility of the ensemble, the fluctuating relationships that sometimes reinforce but also challenge existing hierarchies (between children as well as between adults and children), and the consequent desire by some to carve out individual and/or private spaces that variously deepen or divert from shared experience. The togetherness we witnessed was messy and uneven and we suspect that being together felt different to different participants at different moments, sometimes empowering and sometimes not. With limited opportunities to gain insights into children's experience of *IC* on this occasion, our findings are necessarily tentative in this regard. However, there certainly seemed to be moments when iPad integration intensified the feeling of being together, and there were also moments when it apparently provided ways for children to manage being alongside one another in different ways simultaneously. Perhaps rather than working to either intensify or disrupt the ensemble, the integration of tablets made its workings (and its vulnerabilities) more visible. Such developments may be valuable of themselves, but they

also raise questions about the role that ensemble approaches can play in holding together difference, as well as maintaining shared focus on shared concerns.

### **Conclusion: “appropriateness” in participatory theatre**

This study adopted the sociomaterial view that digital technologies are not resources to be taken up or tools to be used, but will participate in different ways as they come into relation with other people and materials. Just like the suitcase full of fabric, the iPads combined with other elements to generate possibilities in the unfolding drama. With this in mind, it is not possible to draw straightforward conclusions from our analysis about the value of technology integration in *IC*, or indeed the ways that technology use may inflect participatory theatre more widely. Our research was small-scale and focused on just one iteration of the project. Further studies might usefully explore in more detail: how parallel/interlocking stories were maintained or followed; which (and whose) ideas are taken up; how filming intersects with free-flowing play and emergent literacies; and the diverse ways in which tablets play into all of this. There is also more to experiment with in the *IC* format: use of devices could become part of the story as well as a means of recording it, and there may well be room for more explicit reflection on the best ways of using such devices or communicative practices, or to integrate opportunities to converse at a distance in real time. As S.Davis (2011, 2012) highlights, it cannot be assumed that learners will have (or intuitively "pick up") the skills required to use digital technologies, but neither should it be assumed that the teaching of skills necessarily provides powerful opportunities for effective learning. Further research focused on creative pedagogies and the role of digital tools is critical if we are to respond to the needs of children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the enchanted forest, the careful integration of tablets played an important part in opening out possibilities for participation. We therefore suggest that it is important to highlight such fluid, responsive approaches to technology integration in national contexts such as our own where technology can sometimes appear to be a clumsy mechanical giant, thundering through the forest to establish a particular pathway. UK arts funders are not alone in encouraging arts organisations to embrace digital technologies and this is one of a number of criteria used to measure their success. Against this background there is a pressing need to ensure that technology integration is considered in relation to arts organisations' "signature ways of working" (Thomson et al., 2012), in this case as a way of supporting participants to be equal playmakers.

Of course this was the first time Chol had used tablets in quite this way, and the project was by its nature exploratory. As might be expected, Chol plan to draw on the learning from this project to inform future design of technology integration. However, our point here is that even considered integration will play out in different ways with different groups in different times and places, and that sensitivity to what emerges as this happens, and the possibilities generated is key. Specifically, this study suggests a particular orientation to what is apt or fitting for other participatory theatre programmes, or indeed for educational provision more broadly. Appropriateness in technology use in education is often defined in terms of efficiency or efficacy (e.g. Higgins et al., 2012). This assumes that the aims of educational practice remain static, with effectiveness or efficiency judged in relation to existing objectives. In our case, there certainly seemed to be moments when tablet use did enhance practice in relation to the programme's established aims and practices, in opening out spaces for multiple narratives, for example. However, as tablets participated in *IC*, other possibilities also opened out – or at least were made visible- and this prompted practitioners to revisit

aspects of the programme or re-examine existing assumptions, regarding for example the need to keep everyone focused on the shared story. With this in mind we might approach the integration of digital tools not in relation to planned purposes, but as potentially more fluid. Technology integration, we suggest, cannot simply be designed into programmes but needs to be approached in ways that reflect the ephemerality and contingency of what happens in participatory theatre and the silvery and light and dark and dim dreams which shimmer under our feet. By implication then, notions of appropriateness may *themselves* need revisiting in light of a shifting set of relationships with unpredictable effects. Notions of appropriateness, in effect, themselves need to be kept open.

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