RESEARCH

Restricting Diversity to Promote Democracy: Community Literacies and Playing Across Spaces

Samantha Owen
Curtin University, AU
samantha.owen@curtin.edu.au

In 2018 a teacher in a Montessori school captured on camera two children in her special education classroom using a touchscreen tablet to interact. To her it was significant: these pre-verbal children had found a way to independently share aspects of their lives. In 1965 a Nigerian mother commented that volunteering on a care rota in a playgroup in a housing estate in west London gave her the confidence to greet her neighbours when she saw them on the street. To Ilys Booker, the community development worker assigned to the area, this was also a marker of significant change and an indication of success. Using these two instances as starting points, this article explores the links between play/space/city and literacy/civic/citizenship by drawing together two case studies: *Notting Dale, London, 1964–1969* and *River Montessori School, Australia, 2018.* In both case studies, the institutional concern is over how the target groups are educated to become literate as citizens, with a focus on exhibited values and virtues. Working from a historical perspective this paper asks: what are the historical conditions which determine our current understandings of participatory culture? How do these enable and/or limit the possibilities of Open Literacy? How do communities form in a liberal democracy and what roles do institutions play?

Keywords: Literacy; Play; Community Development; Participatory Culture; Digital Technologies; Screen panics

Introduction

Sitting in a classroom in Australia, two pre-verbal children – one seven years old and one almost five years old – are teaching each other about their families and their lives. They are using a touchscreen tablet to do so and the younger child, Child A (Left, **Figure 1.1**) is navigating the stored photograph files to find a particular image. Success. The desired image of the older child, Child B (Right), is found (**Figure 1.2**) and they both celebrate (**Figure 1.3**). Child A then navigates to a baby photo and with huge pride shows it off (**Figure 1.4**). Their actions don't seem that significant, digital devices are regarded as synonymous with everyday life and children appear to use them with ease (NAEYC 2012: 2). However, using technology these children had found a way to communicate and to display what was important to them. Their choices were deliberate but in their actions they were playing – engaging, navigating, communicating and expressing. This was new and their obvious joy at finding something they could do together was exciting. Their problem was that the interaction was limited: at the school children younger than eight years old were not allowed to use screen-based technologies, and so only by exception were these pre-verbal students allowed to use their tablets as communication devices when they were in the separate space of the Special Education learning spaces. They visited each morning and then returned to their mainstream classroom later in the day without their devices.

River[1] is a Montessori school which educates children aged three to 15 years across three Planes or stages of learning. The screen restriction exists as, according to the pedagogy, from three years old to six years old,

---

[1] Ethics was obtained for this project. The school and the children have been de-identified. Permission has been obtained to use the images.

(L-R)
Fig. 1. Child A [Left] navigates.   Fig. 2. Child A identifies Child B.
Fig. 3. Child B expresses pride.   Fig. 4. Child A identifies a baby photo of Child A for Child B.
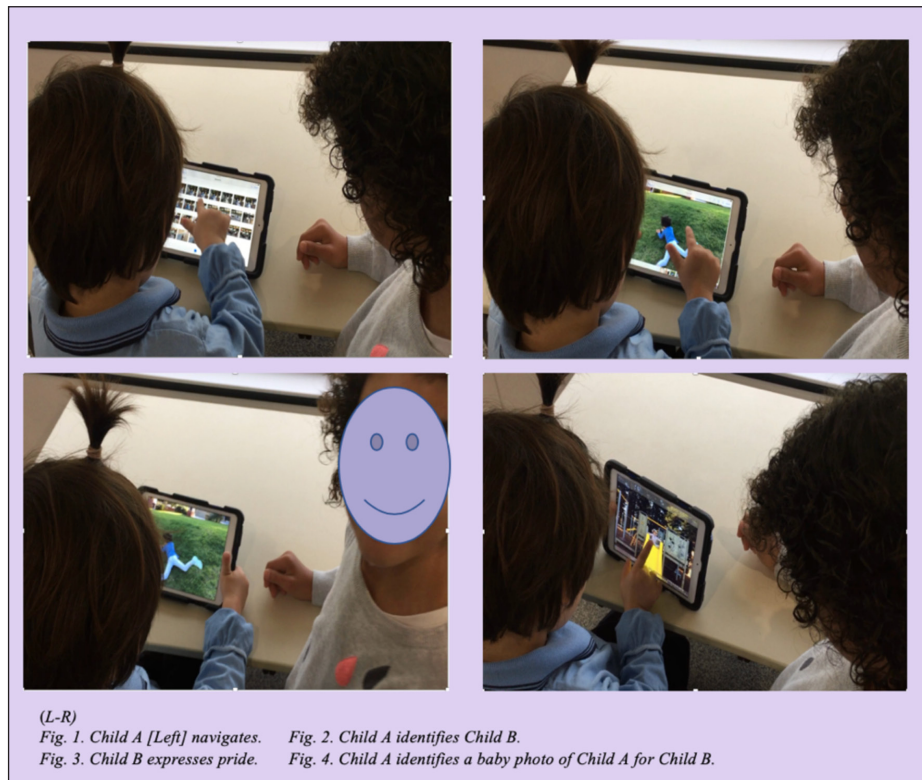
Figure 1.1–1.4: Two children are teaching each other about their families and their lives.

the child's absorbent mind begins to analyse and order their world (Montessori, 1963). Learning must be sensorial. Children should not be exposed to fantasy worlds and immersive devices. Screen usage can redirect or stunt neurological pathways in the brains of children younger than eight (Ungerer, 2015). However, while this was policy at school, and there was the expectation it would be followed at home, it was not. We saw glimpses of children arriving at school watching devices in the car. Outside the school gates children merrily chatted about television shows they watched, games they played, how they used their mum's phone, a whole digital world in which they were immersed. As soon as these children crossed the school gates the conversation changed. Character clothing or backpacks were not permitted. Some children still wore their *Peppa Pig* underwear. Tiny rebellions. Children playing *Paw Patrol* or similar in the playground were gently redirected to a new game. Regular school communications to their homes reminded caregivers of the importance of digital hygiene with no distinction made for media hygiene or literacy.

In 2017 there had been some requests from parents and primary carers to soften the screen technology restrictions and to increase engagements with Digital Technologies and related activities such as coding. The pressure raised an interesting point, as the aim for a Montessori classroom is – philosophically and in terms of materials used – for it to be a continuous space with the children's home. The micro systems of the school and the home need to be mutually supporting to ensure children's developmental potential is extended (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, the school was experiencing a community fracture as some caregivers put in place false barriers to prevent the home seeping into the classroom. Others simply didn't care. A final group were pedagogical devotees, and they were not numerous enough for the school to ignore the demands. The mix and the ban made caregivers unsure of each other. For many it raised questions around understandings of childhood – none of these parents wanted to deny their children something. Most of them hoped that sending their child to the school would give the child some sort of advantage. Furthermore, the caregivers, the children and the school were all aware of a fundamental tension: when digital technologies were used in the second 'plane of development' it was tacitly accepted that these eight- and nine- year-old children would have acquired the skills to do so at home. In other words, their digital literacy was acquired in a space with which the school had set up a conflictual relationship. The school leadership commissioned a research project (which I led with my colleague Sharon Davies) to think through these issues; but phrased it around the new curriculum that the State Government mandated in 2017, which required children in Early Childhood Education (ECE) classrooms to use Digital Technologies.

Moral Panic: Open Literacy and Participatory Culture

This article builds on an understanding of literacy – a term used to explain the processes by which a skill is acquired (reading) and then demonstrated through a communicative action (writing) – as 'situated, social practices' (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Brandt and Clinton argue that by viewing literacy as a social practice the researcher can consider both 'what literacy is doing with people in a setting' and 'what people are doing with literacy in a setting' (2002: 337). Responding to the cultural turn and new social theory these literacy researchers suggested that the processes by which we become literate is through those deemed appropriate by the knowledge keeping institutions and through the practice of everyday life. In *The Uses of Digital Literacy* (2009) John Hartley builds on the study of popular literacy initiated by Richard Hoggart to understand literacy, not as an 'instrumental skill for business or civic or religious purposes' (Hartley 2009: 2), but as it was used in everyday life, and thence to assess its emancipatory potential. The latter represents a tension as it presents literacy 'users' with opportunities for subversion or divergence. Moving to a discussion of digital literacy, Hartley also notes a similar tension to the home-school hostility observed at River Montessori, and he contends that the result is a culture of restriction: 'walled gardens' posing as digital environments (2009: 104). He suggests that within the education system it is teachers who must change (Hartley 2009: 25). In order to be effective educators, they must take advantage of the 'purposeless' (i.e. non-instrumental or institutional) peer networks which students construct. Hartley makes clear the benefits from doing so in his discussion of Open Literacy, which he defines as:

> *the cultural uses of digital and media literacy:*
> – *to create new groups and meanings, extending knowledge by means of informal entertainment and narrative, dramatic or game formats;*
> – *to experiment with new technologies, extending both play (informal, anthropological, purposeless) and games (elaborate, competitive, high-skill) as part of the innovation system for digital culture;*
> > ◦ *to advance knowledge and communication by digital means, and to link future-facing digital culture with traditional archives and forms;*
> > ◦ *to encourage user-led social innovation in times of uncertainty and change, across demographic borders, at global scale.* (Hartley 2019)

Hartley enters the space of subversion, observing that Open Literacy is 'user-centred and system-wide, "bottom-up" rather than "top-down", producing unforeseen network effects that in turn change the rules of the game' (Hartley 2019). The capacity for Open Literacy to work in this way is determined by the limits of the participatory culture. Henry Jenkins defines the latter as:

> *one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices'* (2016: p. 2).

Jenkins returns us to the restrictive environment of official literacy and to the civic. However, while in a Western liberal nation-state 'participatory culture […] embraces the values of diversity and democracy', inclusivity is limited – and this limitation is pervasive at every level of our lives, social, cultural, political, economic. In exploring the case studies, I raise these questions: who defines the terms of participation and justifies the exclusion or partial exclusion of some members – even those who are not violating the moral codes but who do not conform or who cannot learn and communicate in the same way?

   To answer, I look at this from the perspective of 'moral panic', a conceptual paradigm that emerged from the Cold War milieu with work such as Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) and Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972). I draw on the understanding of moral panic as the 'process of arousing social concern over an issue' (Scott 2014: 492) and discuss how it comes to limit inclusion. In doing so I write against two historical moments for moral panic (which are beyond the scope of this article to analyse in detail): the 1958 Notting Hill race riots (Pilkington 1988) and the 'Screentime Panics' in response to the increased and immersive uses of Digital Technologies (see, for example: Jenkins, 2015; Lumby, 2018; Richtel, 2011). My contention is that the potential offered by Open Literacy is limited by the institutions which control our participatory culture, and that moral panic serves to justify these limitations.

River Montessori School, Australia, 2018

To return to River, the school needed to find a way to respond to curriculum changes, and to the parents, while remaining true to Montessori pedagogy. As they were aware, there was no pre-existing internal or official Montessori strategy for how to introduce Digital Technologies in the ECE areas in the school or to develop Digital Literacies. They were informed by ambivalence, fear and conflicting understandings in their community (Davies, Owen & Thomas, 2020). However, they were also mindful of the 2013 American Montessori Society Position Statement on Information Technology: 'Intelligently integrated into the Montessori environment, technology can be a valuable communications tool and may promote traditional Montessori tenets.' The statement also provided the directive that: 'Using Montessori's methods of observing will help us determine the place of technology in the Montessori world' (AMS 2013). To investigate how that intelligent integration worked, in 2014 Tufts University researchers conducted a study in a Montessori learning environment with 'Plane One' children (five- to eight- year-olds), using LEGO® and WeDo™ software. Elkin, Sullivan & Bers (2014) determined that these robots had some of the elements essential for Montessori materials, and with Professional Learning could be integrated thoughtfully. These findings were consistent with the testing for Cubetto, a small wooden robot for three to six year-children designed by UK-based toy company Primo Toys with Montessori principles in mind (Stockdale, 2016).

We framed two questions for the project: How did the prepared environment and the Montessori curriculum provide for the development of Digital Literacies and the use of Digital Technologies? Are Digital Technologies simply an 'obtrusive interference?' (Jones 2017: 28) in the Montessori classroom? We also decided to use an Action Research methodology (Holly, et al. 2005) over a six-month timeframe and in three phases. Phase One comprised two professional development days during which we introduced the project and through a number of activities asked the educators to define these Digital Literacies within the context of the school. The ten aspects they selected were:

- critical thinking;
- navigation skills;
- communication skills;
- collaboration skills;
- problem solving;
- participation in and contribution to civil society;
- self-regulation and independence;
- global citizenship;
- multimodality and innovation; and
- creativity.

Phase Two was the facilitation of three Action Research cycles. The researcher worked with educators a as a Critical Friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993) and they were then asked to identify and teach lessons which contained the preconditions for the development of Digital Literacies. In their journal they critically reflected on what children did, said and produced (Davies, Owen & Thomas, 2020). We used these exercises to develop a specific, targeted and technical vocabulary that caregivers, educators and children would use, and it was aligned to the 'Virtues' which were used in the school to identify valued behaviours. Phase Three comprised further professional development for the ECE educators, followed by a Digital Technologies implementation trial. The project concluded with a whole school critical reflection workshop and delivery of the findings to the school community (Davies, Owen & Thomas, 2020).

At the project conclusion we had collaboratively defined a solution which met the mandated curriculum needs and fitted with the school's notion of autonomy. We proposed that a shared language could be used to resolve the internal contradiction in the school attitude to Digital Technologies use. Educators were confident that the approach was consistent with Montessori pedagogy and the school's philosophy, which opened up a channel for communication among educators, children and caregivers. It was at this point that Digital Technologies could be introduced to the Montessori classroom in meaningful and authentic manner. Thus the project had built capacity in the areas of Digital Literacies and Digital Technologies. The new Digital Literacies language empowered the educators and aligned with the virtues that sat at the core of the school process and which united educators, children and parents.

However, while the school was happy with the delivered outcomes, I was left with a feeling of disquiet: the children in the video produced for the Critical Reflection journal were still sitting in a separate room. Further, their interaction is probably the closest example of Open Literacy that we noted at the school and their self-identified resolution to their isolation was restricted – they could communicate with each other

using devices, but not with their wider peers. What this meant was that the participatory activity recognised their diversity but was not inclusive: pedagogy was privileged over equity. This decision was not malicious and would not have been seen by the school leadership in these terms, but it was one that they felt they could make and which they believed was accepted based on people choosing – and paying – to go there. Furthermore, they justified their pedagogical position by using the language of moral panic, focusing on the 'dangers' of screen time, which was reinforced in the way they conflated media and digital literacies and policed behaviours. It raises the question: why do we justify limited inclusivity even for those who are following the moral codes of civil society?

From Springboards We Leap: Notting Dale, London 1964–1969

These were the questions bothering Ilys Booker, an adult educator and community development worker who came to work in London in the 1950s. Booker was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada in 1929 and died in London on 20 December 1968 (Mitton n.d.). She served in the Canadian Women's Royal Naval Service during the Second World War. After the war she was accidentally interviewed for a job as a broadcaster for the Canadian national radio service. She transitioned from broadcasting into community adult education and worked for the Canadian government in Ontario, setting up informal education programs for those returning and transitioning their roles (Batten, 1968; Haynes 1969). Booker went on holiday to London in 1954 and while there she met the two people who would determine the course of her career, Muriel Smith and T.R. (Reg) Batten. Her first role in London was with Smith at the London Council of Social Service, where they gained a reputation for ground-breaking community development work. They founded the Association of London Housing Estates, an advocacy group working to achieve better outcomes for self-help schemes such as fundraising for a playgroup (Haynes 1969). Booker held the role of first Secretary and from 1955 until the early 1960s she 'worked mainly with autonomous community groups of tenants' on the new housing estates, helping them to recognise their needs and to identify what they could do to meet them (Batten, 1968). Like Booker, Smith followed the methods of Batten, a senior lecturer who ran the one year community development course at the London Institute of Education. Batten theorised that community development started with education not social work and he rejected what he termed the paternalist and colonialist mainstream 'springboard' method, which was to show communities how to behave and then gradually withdraw. His perspective was shaped by his time in Africa, where his critically reflexive practice meant he attempted to write textbooks and to teach from the perspective of colonial subjects (Batten 1933 (1950), 1941, 1953).

Batten linked education and autonomy and he defined community development as 'almost any form of local betterment which is in some way achieved with the willing co-operation of the people' (Batten 1957: 1). He emphasised community participation: where local people 'thoroughly discuss and define their wants, and then plan and act together to satisfy them' (Batten 1957: 1). His non-directive approach required worker immersion in the community and gentle interventions to allow the group to self-identify their needs and take charge of their community affairs. Their new capabilities were due to 'development within the groups themselves as the members' learn about their community and each other and help each other and accordingly are 'more able to conduct their business without outside help and guidance.' What follows is 'development in the community at large as the characteristics developed within the groups influence the conduct of the members in their homes and in their neighbourhood.' The intention is 'that leaders developed in their groups will later become leaders in community affairs' (Batten 1957: 81). Batten was Booker's friend, mentor and teacher and his work heavily influenced the approach she took to her work, especially in Sicily, where she went with the Danilo Dolci Trust (Booker, 1962: 137).

Described by Aldous Huxley as 'a new Gandhi, a modern Saint Francis, equipped with much more than compassion and seraphic love' (Huxley 1959), Danilo Dolci was a human rights activist famous for his strikes in reverse to activate civil society. Dolci had arrived in Sicily in February 1952 aged 28 and worked as a social activist to motivate grass-roots change, combat child poverty and build community. He upset the church, local authorities and the mafia, and attracted international attention and support (Owen 2017: 422–423). In 1957 and 1958 he held two Congresses for Full Employment to generate further support for his projects and education programs (*Congresso* 1957). He used these to present the argument that what prevented development taking place in western Sicily was: lack of education and training; violence and intervention that was 'unorganic' and 'non-collaborative' (Dolci 1961). He also outlined his four-stage approach to undertaking Community Development work:

1. Good-will, a period of community integration;
2. Documentation, gathering of information about the people and their lives and understanding the problems;

3. Active resistance to the conditions and ways of life witnessed;
4. 'Initiating systematic work which will lead towards development' (Dolci 1961).

Dolci worked outside the system in Sicily and so did not see funding or support from the Church, State, local authorities or Mafia. Instead he sought funds from international benefactors and the developing network of Friends of Danilo Dolci groups spread across Western Europe, the UK and North America. Following his 1957 Congress Dolci asked each of these to establish a centre in Western Sicily and to send volunteers who were trained community development workers to initiate projects (Owen 2017: 422–423).

The British Danilo Dolci Corresponding Committee was set up in the mid-1950s by Adult Education specialist, Ross D. Waller, who was a colleague of Batten's. It was run by the United World Trust, the body responsible for the educational and research work of the National Peace Council. In 1958 they organised his a visit for Dolci to London which was a success (1700 people attended one of his lectures) and the group formalised into the Friends of Dolci in the UK ('Meeting with Danilo Dolci' 1958). The Friends were united by their interest in development, aid, (de)colonialism, peace activism and humanitarian work. They managed to attract high level support: as well as the Huxleys, these included Lord Sainsbury, Sir Laurence Olivier, Peter O'Toole, The Marquess of Anglesey, the Italian historian Denis Mack Smith, The Bishop of Manchester, Professor Peter Townsend, and the translators Antonia Cowan and Nicholas Parsons. With funding and support in place, a base in Menfi, western Sicily, was established in 1958 following an official reconnaissance trip (Scotney, 1961: 1).

In 1959 the Friends received a grant from Oxfam and the Elmgrant Trust to fund a development worker to go to Menfi to 'lay down the foundations for social and educational work' (Scotney, 1961: 1; Booker 1962). Booker was appointed by the Friends committee in November 1959 (*Minutes of Danilo Dolci Committee* 1959, 26 Nov.: 1) and, having taken a sabbatical from her job, she set off in late-January 1960 and lived there until July 1961. Booker understood that her role in Menfi was in Community Development, which at that time she defined as a

> *process which, as it evolves, creates an improvement of conditions, including social, economic and educational; it is a process which cannot move forward without the efforts of the people themselves and although much encouragement and stimulation may be necessary to persuade a community to look to its needs and begin to act, in the final analysis the development must come from the people* (Booker 1960: 1).

Booker aimed to 'lay the foundations for the development of local leadership in Menfi' by supporting 'active participation of the people themselves in shaping their own future' rather than a method which would mean they were 'disciplined into progress.' Hence she believed that the self-help programme should grow out of the 'felt needs of the people.' (Booker 1960: 1–5). Her universal principles for development work were that:

1. You must listen to those you serve – what you may think they need is not the same as what they perceive they need;
2. By listening you can then involve people in the process of solving the community problem; and
3. You can then then direct them that cooperative effort is the way to address their problems.'

Booker was clear that the method is 'painfully slow', but that it works, because it is meaningful, empowering and consultative (*Bulletin of the Danilo Dolci Committee*, 1960 May?: 5; Booker, n.d(b)).

Booker initially followed Dolci's approach while in Menfi and so established a daily walk and waited for people to come to her. Although careful planning meant she was able to come in contact with many of the 12 000 inhabitants as Menfi is 'very compact so that geographically it is not large' (*Bulletin of the Danilo Dolci Committee*, 1960 May?: 2), not many approached her directly and she noted in her letters and Reports that she encountered cultural difference and suspicion (Booker n.d. (a): 19–21). A breaking point came when after some months, a group of women came and asked her to set up a doposcuola, an afterschool centre, which she did in the house she had taken as a base. In doing so Booker deviated from the Community Development approaches outlined by both Dolci and Batten and returned to the springboard model as she took on a central role running the service rather than empowering the community to set it up and staff it. The doposcuola didn't run smoothly as Booker and the volunteers did not understand the school system or what the community expected. They also expressed concerns about the children's lack of understanding of the concept of 'free activity' of 'play' and creative thought and application (Waller 1960). At the end of her

time in Menfi, Booker assessed the value of the project and she concluded that although it was introduced prematurely, it was a success in some ways as they attracted a good reputation – beyond kind, helpful and free. As she took her daily walk and passed a woman on her doorstep, the woman engaged Booker in conversation: 'all the mothers say that your school wakes the children up'. Booker interpreted this as recognition that the 'children's minds were being opened' (Booker 1961: 42). However, her experience in Menfi reinforced the she needed to follow the Community Development steps outlined by Dolci and Batten. The reason was that while change had started she did not yet see a participatory culture emerging as it was reliant on her input. Her observation reinforced Dolci's assertion that 'Much can be done *for* people but effective change can only come from within.' Thus the efforts of the development worker are directed into 'ways of stimulating awareness and to encourage the community to find its own solutions' (Booker 1962: 98).

Booker returned to London in 1962 and she was commended for her work in Menfi. She began to grow a public profile in community development circles, lecturing on local leadership and community formation. In 1963 Booker returned to Menfi for a conference. A combined evening dance for young people and a celebration was held to welcome her. It was here that Booker noticed a new openness in the community. In her later *Report* Booker noted that of the 70 who came 'I would hardly have believed so many girls would be allowed out for a social evening unaccompanied by their mothers.' Over the next few days she noted a further change: the door-bell rang almost constantly. While in Menfi she had used the doorbell as a monitor of progress 'and used to count how often it had rung in one week'. That the '[… the Jamieson's] have hardly an hour's peace' she took as a sign of an emerging participatory culture, with members who 'work patiently to an objective, however limited' (Booker 1963).

Booker's short visit to Menfi was a break before she started a new position as the Community Development worker leading a five-year project in Notting Dale, North Kensington, London. Notting Dale is a tiny slice between wealthy Holland Park, Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill. It is an area known for problems related to social cohesion and housing, which were brought sharply to our attention in 2017 when the panels on the outside of the large apartment block, Grenfell Tower (**Figure 2**), caught fire and caused 72 deaths (Doherty, 2018). Attention had turned to the same area almost 60 years before following the 'race riots' of the summer of 1958, when white working class or Teddy boys clashed with Afro-Caribbean or West Indian migrants, those who arrived in the 'motherland' on the *HMT Empire Windrush* following the call for labour to aid in reconstruction (Pilkington 1988; Beider 2015: 61–97). The tensions erupted over post-war uncertainty about social order, the blame for which far-Right leaders such as Oswald Mosley and (later) Enoch Powell directed at the new Windrush and Commonwealth arrivals (Nairn, 1982). These conditions laid the

Figure 2: Grenfell Tower – identified by the Grenfell Green Heart – under reconstruction in the heart of high density housing area, Notting Dale, November 2018. (Photo credit: Samantha Owen).

groundwork for the emergence of naturalised and openly racist new Right discourse, articulated most clearly by Margaret Thatcher in January 1978 while campaigning to be prime minister:

> *The British character has done so much for democracy, for law […] the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react […] in many ways [minorities] add to the richness and variety of this country. The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened* (Aitken, 1978).

In direct response to the 1958 race riots, and as a measure to avoid the moral panic Thatcher's discourse would later invoke, social researcher Pearl Jephcott was asked by the City Parochial Fund to run the the North Kensington Project. This was a Family Study that she and her team carried out to assess what could be done in the area to create cohesion and community, with a focus on self-help schemes (Jephcott 1964). Booker was employed onto the project for implementation once Jephcott's research had concluded, and Booker's visit to Menfi confirmed that she would follow a 'pure' community development approach in Notting Dale. She would not mix Community Development work and Social Work; her approach to self-help would be to: 'listen to the community and hear what they need not what you believe they need. Then … help them to achieve it' (Booker 1965: 2). Booker saw that her role was to stimulate thought and offer skills and knowledge but not to decide activity or to organise people.

To begin her work in Notting Dale, Booker took a basement flat in Clarendon Road and spent her days taking daily walks to learn the area and the people. Booker noted the local shops had signs in the windows: 'Sorry, no coloureds. Asians welcome' (Booker, 1966: 3). Coloured, in this context, referred to the 'Windrush' arrivals and Indian and Pakistani immigrants (Braithwaite 1967; Little 1967; Phizackla & Miles 1980), who were moving into the new prefabs in the area (*Notes on North Kensington; 'A New Social Life'* 1957). After nine months of walking Notting Dale, Booker reported that while she had made good connections and had many discussions about what might be done, projects which might transpire, those she had spoken to had still not autonomously founded a project for her to support. Her report raised concern with the project administrators, who were looking for results and were not entirely sure about her methods. Furthermore, they had expected Booker to continue running the two playgroups Helen Shiels had been employed to set up as a self-help scheme. Shiels was trained in community development and nursery work and so she was both the Community Development worker and the playgroup leader for the groups from October 1963 until her return to Australia in October 1964 (Booker, 1965). This frustrated Booker because although she recognised the necessity of the playgroups for Community Development, they were not connected to her project, and she had already resolved not to combine roles as she had done in Menfi. She understood the separation was essential for building trust and creating community. Furthermore, the playgroups followed the 'springboard approach', whereby the worker and the Trust provided the initial impetus and then withdrew once the community was ready to take over. Booker disagreed with – and resisted – this method, which, following Batten, she classified as paternalist and colonialist. Booker and the project leaders compromised. A social worker was employed as the playgroup leader and Booker continued to oversee the playgroups as the Community Development worker. She also selected a project: working with the Nottingwood playgroup mothers (Booker, 1965). Booker concentrated on developing a leadership structure for the group and building their decision-making skills by asking questions and suggesting ways to take action. Booker's view was that the measure of success was if agency was expressed and if a sense of community emerged.

Result of the Nottingwood Group

An executive emerged among the Nottingwood Mothers. They had to hold meetings, employ a worker, run the helper rota, raise money for toys and rent and for excursions. They also set out to establish permanent premises and build an Adventure Playground. While they found a site on Treadgold Street, they bought a prefab and set out a plan for the playgroup ((Mitton and Morrison 1972: 24–92). While local hooliganism eventually caused them to abandon the site and return to the rugby club, Booker saw the experience as one in which they developed agency: the group had decided to say no to the Greater London Council One O'Clock Club taking over the playgroup, one mother declaring of their decision to remain autonomous: 'we won't be a stepped on community any longer, we're on the way up' (Booker 1966, October). Booker agreed and commented: 'You can't just have a middle-class lot imposing on the working-class lot a service that they don't want. That's silly and can't succeed' (Mitton and Morrison 1972: 55).

Second, with respect to community, Booker noted that a feature of the Nottingwood Group was a fear of outsiders – of newcomers taking over, whether they be young mothers or people new to the area. In her view it promoted 'we' and 'they'/us and them attitudes (Mitton and Morrison 1972: 158). These concerned her as

they were the sentiments which created the conditions for the 1958 race riots. However, here the day-to-day running of the playgroup provided the course of action, as all who used the playgroup were asked to sign up to the helper rota. One of the purposes of the playgroups was socialisation, which the rota provided for the mothers as they learned about each other when caring for each other's children. Booker remained firm that participation had to be voluntary – one had to choose to join the community. Second, she consistently asserted that her role was not to teach newcomers how to conform to community expectations, but to invite them to participate on equal terms and to watch them and the community change as they learned about each other. From this 'passive' method she saw some measure of success: a Nigerian mother who worked on the rota commented that it meant she knew people and could address them when she saw them outside of the playgroup context. (Mitton and Morrison 1972: 152–3).

When Booker started work in Notting Dale, and followed Batten and Dolci, she made her case for how Development Work should be done – both in underdeveloped nations and underdeveloped areas of developed countries. Her method of community development was not to teach people how to join a community or to provide resources but to help people discover their voice and to allow them to create and transform their community; and some progress was made. However, Booker died in December 1968, aged 39, nine months before the conclusion of the project. Elizabeth Glover was appointed in her place and she returned to the colonialist springboard method that Shiels had introduced but Booker had resisted. In doing so, Glover and the people running the project failed to recognise the progress Booker had made. This blindness was commented on by Batten at the Memorial Service held for Booker in March 1969:

> *The progress is slow and difficult. Progress is not always observable, but after three years a few people have begun to see that they can create some local improvement, and quite a number now speak more positively of 'our community', because they feel some identification with the place and their neighbours.*
> (Haynes 1969: 4)

It was an identification the women Booker worked with recognised and were willing to fight to keep. In her notes Glover recorded what she viewed as a bewildering incident: one day Ann Travers, a core member of the Nottingwood group, rushed into the project flat and asked to call Admiral Bowland, who worked for the governing trust. Glover was surprised and said she would have stopped Travers if she could, 'as [Bowland] wouldn't have the foggiest who she was.' However, to her surprise he remembered Travers and provided assurance of grant support to keep the playgroup going (Mitton and Morrison 1972: 130). While Glover could only wonder at Travers having the audacity to call someone far above her station, Travers was only doing what Booker had taught her: expressing agency and showing leadership to create community by working with those above and below. Determined not to lose the community they had started, the Nottingwood mothers decided independently that there should be a legacy for Booker and so they changed the name of the playgroup to the Ilys Booker playgroup and raised the question of a memorial hall in the area for Booker. However, when the project concluded in September 1969, and the playgroup, with no clear direction, closed down. The hasty withdrawal of a Playgroup worker and Glover going on holiday meant they had lost the guidance they needed. Notting Dale residents were left a dislocated and poor community, as the Grenfell tragedy in 2017 reinforced (Doherty, 2018).

Conclusion

It is here, in that methodological conflict between the colonial springboard and open navigation approaches, that Booker takes us back to the two children in the room, and to the relationship between participatory culture and Open Literacy neither of which, I have argued, are compatible with the demands of Western liberal democracy. Booker's methodology was to invite agency through small interventions. She opened navigation, represented in her daily strolls, for the community to find the terms on which they met and engaged – and she gave them connections once they had decided on direction. Unlike Glover, and River Montessori, her response to moral panic and to fears about invasion and cultural loss was not to shut down communication but to open it up. In doing so she sought to build a participatory culture through expressions of agency, understanding that to be the only pathway to democracy. Hence she asked the Nottingwood mothers to find an inclusive community design by engaging with what Hartley defined as the principles of Open Literacy. At River Montessori, a moral panic approach shut down the possibility of a cohesive school community: not excluding those who rebelled but reinforcing the power structure of the school and forcing standardisation. The end result – as the Notting Dale residents have continued to experience – was to exclude those who bring diversity rather than those who violate the moral codes. This is dnone not for their own good but for what – in a curious western liberal tautology – had been determined to be the common good.

Competing Interests

References

(1957, 17 September). A New Social Life for Londoners. *South London Press.*

(1958, 3 March). Meeting with Danilo Dolci. *The Observer.*

(1959, 26 November). *Minutes of Danilo Dolci Committee.* In The Papers of Eric Baker Archive Collection GB 532 CWL EB0, University of Bradford Archives.

(n.d.). *Notes on North Kensington.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006, London Metropolitan Archives.

Aitken, I. 1978, 31 January. Thatcher – Rees Clash Fuels Election Row. *The Guardian.*

American Montessori Society. 2013. *AMS position statement on information technology.* Retrieved from: http://www.tjleone.com/ams_technology_position_statement.pdf.

Barton, D and **Hamilton, M.** 1998. *Local Literacies. Reading and writing in one community.* London & New York: Routledge.

Batten, TR. 1933, 6th edition 1950. *Handbook on the Teaching of History and Geography in Nigeria.* Lagos: CMS.

Batten, TR. 1941. *The British Empire and the Modern World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Batten, TR. 1953. The textbook and the Teacher. *Overseas Education*, XXV(2): 62–63.

Batten, TR. 1957, fifth edition 1965. *Communities and Their Development: An Introductory Study with Special Reference to the Tropics.* Oxford University Press.

Batten, TR. 1968, 23 December. Miss I. Booker. *Times.*

Beider, H. 2015. *White Working-class Voices: Multiculturalism, Community-building and Change.* London: Polity Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t89j8k

Booker, I. 1960, March to September. *Report on Menfi.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 09 002. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. 1962, June. A Sicilian Experiment. *Community Development Bulletin*, XIII(3).

Booker, I. 1962, September. 'Thoughts on Training'. *Community Development Bulletin*, XIII(4).

Booker, I. 1963. *Report.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 09 002. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. 1965. *Report to the North Kensington Family Study Committee for the Period 1st October 1964 to 30th April 1965.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. 1966, October. *Some Indications that Progress is being Made.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. 1966, 7 March. *Community Development Method Applied in North Kensington.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. (n.d. (a)) *Basic Concepts in Community Development.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006. London Metropolitan Archives.

Booker, I. (n.d. (b)). *Community Development Work in Sicily.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 06 003. London Metropolitan Archives.

Braithwaite, E. 1967. The 'Colored Immigrant' in Britain. *Daedalus*, 96(2): 496–511.

Brandt, D and **Clinton, C.** 2002. 'Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice'. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(3): 337–356. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlr3403_4

Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979. *The ecology of human development.* MA: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, S. 1972. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers.* MacGibbon and Kee Ltd.

Costa, AL and **Kallick, B.** 1993. Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership*, 51(2): 49–51.

Danilo Dolci Committee. 1958, August. *Report on a visit to Sicily by a member of the committee, to study the work of Danilo Dolci.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 09 003. London Metropolitan Archives.

Davies, S, Owen, S and **Thomas, S.** Developing Digital Literacies in the Early Childhood Montessori classroom. *The digital in children's early years: Research, design and practice*, Holloway, D, et al. (eds.) (forthcoming 2020).

Doherty, G. 2018. *Grenfell Hope: Stories from the Community.* London: SPCK Publishing.

Dolci, D. 1961. 'Difficulties in the Development and Stimulation of New Initiatives in Western Sicily'. In the Danilo Dolci Papers (DG 105), Box 3, File: Series I: Danilo Dolci: Speaking Engagements – Itineraries, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC).

Elkin, M, Sullivan, A and **Bers, MU.** 2014. Implementing a robotics curriculum in an early childhood Montessori classroom. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice*, 13: 153–169. Retrieved from. DOI: https://doi.org/10.28945/2094

Hartley, J. 2009. *The Uses of Digital Literacy. Creative Economy + Innovation Culture.* Australia: University of Queensland Press.

Hartley, J. 2019. Open Literacy. *Cultural Science.* This volume.

Haynes, G. 1969, 25 March. *Ilys Booker Memorial Address.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 05 002. London Metropolitan Archives.

Holly, ML, Arhar, J and **Kasten, W.** 2005. *Action research for teachers. Travelling the yellow brick road.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Columbus, Ohio: Pearson. http://www.jite.org/documents/Vol13/JITE-v13IIPvp153-169Elkin882.pdf.

Huxley, A. Introduction, *Report from Palermo*, New York: Orion Press, 1959 in the Danilo Dolci Papers (DG 105), Box 7, File: Series III: Biographer Jerre Mangione – Publicity/media coverage/letters to the editor (published), SCPC.

Jenkins, H, Ito, M and **Boyd, D.** 2016. *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jenkins, M. 2015, 2 December. Tablets out, imagination in: the schools that shun technology. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/educator-network/2015/dec/02/schools-that-ban-tablets-traditional-education-silicon-valley-london.

Jephcott, P. 1964. *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill.* London: Faber and Faber.

Jones, SJ. 2017. Technology in the Montessori classroom: educators' beliefs and technology use. *Journal of Montessori Research*, 3(1): 16–28. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17161/jomr.v3i1.6458

Little, K. 1967. Some Aspects of Color, Class, and Culture in Britain. *Daedalus*, 96(2): 512–526.

Lumby, C. 2018. Screentime panics. In: Nelson, C and Robertson, R (eds.), *Dangerous Ideas About Mothers*, 49–58. Perth: UWA Press.

McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media.* McGraw-Hill Education.

Mitton, R and **Morrison, E.** 1972. *A Community Project in Notting Dale.* London: Allen Lane.

Mitton, R. n.d. *Notes.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 01 006. London Metropolitan Archives.

Montessori, M. 1963. *The secret of childhood.* Costelloe, Joseph M. (trans). New York: Random House.

Nairn, T. 1982. *The Break-Up of* Britain. London: NLB.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). 2012. *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* [Position Statement]. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College. Retrieved from: https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/PS_technology_WEB.pdf.

Owen, S. 2017. Italian-American conversations on the mafia: Danilo Dolci visits Philadelphia's 1961 Festival of Italy. *Modern Italy*, 22(4): 419–433. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2017.50

Phizackla, A and **Miles, R.** 1980. *Labour and Racism.* Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Pilkington, E. 1988. *Beyond the Mother Country.* I.B. Tauris.

Richtel, MA. 2011, 22 October. Silicon Valley school that doesn't compute. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/technology/at-waldorf-school-in-silicon-valley-technology-can-wait.html.

Scotney, ND. 1961. *'Menfi' A Paper for Discussion by the Danilo Dolci Committee.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 09 003. London Metropolitan Archives.

Scott, J. (ed.) 2014. M: Moral panic. *A dictionary of Sociology.* Oxford University Press.

Stockdale, M. 2016. Introducing 'Cubetto'. *Montessori International*, 119: 32–33.

Ungerer, RA. 2015. Montessori education, technology, and meaning in our lives. *Montessori Life*, 27(1).

Waller, R. 1960, 8 April. *Letter to Ilys Booker.* In the Muriel Smith Papers LMA4196 09 002. London Metropolitan Archives.