

**Generative divergent analysis as a model for reflection
illustrated with reference to an early-years reception class
and wicker settee**

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Generative divergent analysis as a model for reflection illustrated with reference to an early-years reception class and wicker settee

Abstract:

Generative divergent analysis (GDA) is a creative additive approach to raising insignificant details of experience to significance. A schematic view of the model highlights use of evocative objects as starting point for 'turning towards', 'turning away' and 'being-in-relation-to' as part of an ongoing burgeoning of experience. The model is exemplified by focusing on a wicker settee as an evocative object that was noticed in an early-years reception class. Revisiting the object generated several speculative ideas relating to the hidden curriculum and energies of childhood. Poetry and song were used during the revisiting in order to develop a more direct experience in addition to the more contemplative awareness that was evoked during the first encounters. As an additive process the outcome of GDA takes the form of unfinished resources for thinking.

Keywords: reflection, paradigm, early-years, generative, evocative, arts-based

My extended experience during the last twelve years of supervising trainee teachers during teaching practices has led to a preoccupation with the insignificant details of experience, the contextual details associated with teaching activity. This is more accurately described as a speculative encounter with surfaces rather than with the 'thick descriptive detail' referred to by Geertz (1973). My personal subjective experience of supervising students over this period has included awareness of purposeful planned teaching events but with a more marginalised awareness of encompassing contexts. What could be done to bring this more into focus? The more restricted awareness, for example the more limited awareness of the physical learning environment, together with a belief in the value of creativity and ideas rooted within a process orientation to developing experience, led me to develop an approach to practitioner research that I refer to as the creative analytic paradigm (CAP) based on evocative objects (Turkle, 2007) and the idea of field as an emergent concept (Ely et al, 2001). There is insufficient space here to provide a detailed account of the CAP but the full explication of this approach to educational research was the focus of my PhD thesis (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process, 2013).

Whereas Bruster and Peterson (2013) focused on the analysis of critical incidents as a foundation for their approach to reflective practice, the binary analysis of Derrida (1978) drew attention to the overlooked or marginalised minor binary as worthy of consideration. Similarly, the situational analysis approach of Clarke (2005) drew on actor network theory when incorporating non-human actants into the analysis of social situations. Shon's (1991) concept of knowledge-in-action, and also the Aristotelian concept of 'phronesis' (practical wisdom) help translate these views into the professional teaching context. More recent models of reflection (Bradbury, 2010) also lend support to the more engaged state of being which involves the moment by moment developing state of awareness rather than a more detached and remote scientific objectivity. When focusing on the role of research within education, Eisner (2005) reinforced this more creative response to experience by emphasising

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3 the value “of the attractiveness of a set of ideas, rather than of the rigor of a body of data-
4 based conclusions” (p89).
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7 The approach to analysis in relation to the evocative objects model is both generative and
8 divergent. This is a process model which uses the evocative object as a source of ideas
9 generation through repeated revisiting of the object over a period of time. This is more of a
10 passive serendipitous background activity rather than an exhaustive systematic active
11 interrogation and extraction of meaning. As with human relationships space for the
12 relationship to develop and valuing of the other are signs of a flourishing and worthwhile
13 relationship whereas interrogation is a sign of the impending breakdown of the relationship.
14 Uncertainty can be the spark that adds value.
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17 Generative divergent analysis (GDA) is an imaginative additive process of generating
18 alternative speculative reflections and the analytical process is essentially a creative
19 burgeoning of experience. The fluency, flexibility and originality of thinking referred to by
20 Guilford (1973), the elaborative interpretation referred to by Novitz (2000) and the use of
21 orienting concepts to kick start the thinking process as referred to by Layder (1998) are some
22 of the possible starting points for engaging with experience in this creative way. This more
23 creative approach to analysis recalls the creation of nomadic pathways and transcendental
24 empiricism of Deleuze & Guattari (2004).
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28 The specific character of generative divergent analysis is marked by a ‘turning towards’ and
29 ‘turning away’ from the evocative object as part of a developing being-in-relation-to
30 relationship with the object. The collections of speculative reflections and elaborating
31 interpretations of evocative objects constitute satellite topics conceived of as unfinished
32 resources for thinking (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process, 2013). What
33 follows is one such satellite topic, originating in the early-years physical learning
34 environment, where the primary evocative object is a reception class containing a wicker
35 settee. The image, as a remarkable moment (Brown & Jones, 2001), was revisited on
36 numerous occasions and several ideas were generated during an extended period of time. The
37 GDA model involves generating different ways of responding to the evocative object and in
38 this satellite topic there are two distinct approaches. The first is a contemplative awareness
39 and elaborating interpretation; the second is a more direct encounter with the object through
40 use of poetry and song. Whereas the first approach remains tightly connected to the wicker
41 settee setting, the second approach begins with the wicker settee setting but then merges
42 various reception class settings in order to develop the initial ideas. The overall effect is
43 different levels of ‘turning towards’ and ‘turning away’ and a sense of drifting away from the
44 original primary evocative object (Figure 1). Although the themes may appear markedly
45 different the final ‘turning away’ begins to unite ideas related to hidden curriculum and the
46 concept of childhood through a focus on normalisation.
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54 (Figure 1) – goes here
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56 Imagine a Reception class: On the left there are red, green and blue tables surrounded by the
57 usual chairs made with tubular steel frames and hard plastic backs and seats. On the right, the
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3 Interactive Whiteboard is located at child's height on a wall with a mural painted directly
4 along the entire length of the wall. There is a draped translucent curtain sectioning off a quiet
5 area with some cushions. Although there are several types of display e.g. hanging from the
6 ceiling and breaking away from the rectangular wall display, they don't intrude on the space.
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9 Probably one of the most notable features in the whole classroom is the very ornate, even
10 Baroque, chaise longue, located as if on a stage in front of the Interactive Whiteboard, adding
11 a sense of style and contributing to an impression of elegance. In stark contrast to the primary
12 colours of the tables in what seems to be the more formal working area, the translucent
13 curtain, the hanging display and the mural itself are soft pastel colours such as mauve, pink
14 and turquoise. The teacher's chair is covered with a lavender blanket and there are also
15 touches of lavender in the expansive pale blue sky of the mural, which includes a few flying
16 insects, and jade green grass with a few mushrooms just beneath the Interactive Whiteboard.
17 Although the room is very small, the mural adds to the sense of space by giving the
18 impression of direct access to sky and grass, and reduces the potential for the experience of
19 crowding. The skylight windows also help to open up the room while the chaise longue acts
20 to break up the space and reduce the potential for boisterous activity associated with the
21 perception of open space.
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26 Looking more closely there are several different types of chair and seating in this classroom,
27 apart from the tubular steel work chairs. There's a wicker chair, a rocking chair, a wooden
28 chair for a pupil with a physical disability, there's the comfortable teacher's chair with its
29 lavender blanket, adjustable height computer chairs and also several cushions piled in a heap.
30 Actually, what at first sight appeared to be a chaise longue is really a stylish wicker settee
31 covered with red cushions and leopard skin covers but the effect of the contrasting colours
32 and chairs is to divide the class into 'formal' and 'informal' and brings the idea of the 'hidden
33 curriculum' into focus.
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37 The various forms of seating stand out as items of mass culture. The standard hard plastic
38 backed work chairs appear as functional items, comfortable and durable but not particularly
39 alluring from the point of view of style. They're well matched to the working environment
40 and as such they can be seen as components of the normalisation process, the way in which
41 the school introduces children to the dominant culture where behaviour is regulated by the
42 needs of conformity. Interestingly, other instances of the hidden curriculum might be visible
43 through e.g. name labels on children's trays which reinforce individualism, and good
44 behaviour displays which reinforce working for extrinsic rewards which is also part of the
45 dominant culture though neither are visible in this setting.
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49 I'm still wondering about the children sitting on leopard skins; after all leopards are an
50 endangered species. Consistent with the speculative nature of generative divergent analysis
51 (GDA), other ideas also come into view. For example, returning to the formal/informal
52 character of the classroom divided by colours and chairs raises questions about the nature of
53 the classroom as a place within the encompassing context of the neighbourhood locale. And
54 although the spread of mass culture and growth of mass communication has undermined class
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3 consciousness and introduced multiplicity such as race and gender, does the separation in this
4 classroom still reflect a working class division of work from leisure?
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6 Figure 2 is a visual representation of the 'turning towards' and 'turning away' components of
7 the GDA model in relation to the preceding reflections.
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12 (Figure 2) – goes here
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16 The insignificant details of experience are already beginning take on more significance: the
17 settee is no longer just a settee but part of a tasteful environment that seems to support tidy
18 sitting rather than indulgent but messy play. Children are potentially also learning through the
19 hidden curriculum that work is separate from leisure. Maybe the judgment about the leopard
20 skins is too harsh, maybe.
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25 The burgeoning of this experience of the 'reception class with wicker settee' is also supported
26 by a poetic encounter which helps to add an arts based layer that accesses other dimensions of
27 experience (Leavy, 2009; Barone, 2001; McNiff, 1998). In the following section the wicker
28 settee setting is revisited in a way that relates more closely to perceived feelings originating
29 in the setting.
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34 The songs and poems originate in the wicker settee setting but have been transformed into
35 factional accounts (Eisner, 2005) through merging with images from other settings in order to
36 engage with and communicate the experience more directly. The particular focus when
37 turning towards the evocative object was specific forms of energy of childhood. This was
38 evoked by the ideas of tidy sitting in a tasteful environment contrasted with the more
39 indulgent expressions of childhood. The turning away involved more general reflections on
40 the nature and value of childhood (Figure 3). The end result is a more elaborated but still
41 unfinished resource, a more developed evocative object; a more conscious, direct and
42 personal experience of the energy of childhood; and the nature of the classroom as a learning
43 environment, as an object for thinking (Turkle, 2007).
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50 (Figure 3) - goes here
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54 The first poem is a response to the tasteful classroom design that suggested sitting on the
55 settee was a privilege. The decision to rewrite the poem as a song was influenced by the
56 evocative potential of this form of expression. The song version of the poem is loud with a
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3 driving blues rhythm, drums, bass, funky lead guitar and rock style voice. This is essentially
4 the **raw energy of childhood**, the authentic expression of the child, of who I am. The image
5 is that of Flemming's (1996) orgiastic play within the early-years learning environment. This
6 is the child's space, my space, immersion in the moment, the 'flow' that Csikszentmihalyi
7 (2004) refers to.
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10 (Listen to the performance of the song at:
11 <http://www.eyle.org/SoftPastelBlueSunglow.mp3>)
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13 The full version of the poem (Figure 4) is the only one in the series that has rudimentary
14 rather than developed form, which suggests the unbounded potential of childhood but which
15 also reflects an emerging yet uncultivated self. The poem, as a string of words, is read rapidly
16 with urgency and purpose but never really escapes the orgiastic/ascetic dimension of play
17 (Flemming, 1996). Although a continuation of the energy of childhood, the images are
18 always weighed down by a sense of the imposed order of the environment, the sophisticating
19 influence of education, and the formation of 'docile bodies' (Naughton, 2005).
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(Figure 4) – goes here

31 The history of the concept of childhood has moved away from the early anthropological
32 perspective linking the child and the savage where the natural activities and games of
33 childhood were seen as "echoes of the ways in which our human ancestors lived"
34 (Montgomery, 2009, p.18). This may suggest there is nothing raw about the energy of
35 childhood but self-expression may still be more the self-expression of the child than the
36 expression of the values of the encompassing social context until the cultural world of
37 advertising, family and education begin to exert their influence. Various authors have
38 highlighted Philippe Aries's study which suggested that childhood is a social construction
39 that didn't exist until after the 15th century so that the meaning of childhood relates to a social
40 rather than actual reality. Sociocultural studies have also drawn attention to different cultural
41 perspectives on childhood (Tobin, Wu et al 1989; Kehily, 2004). Philosophical views of
42 human nature also raise questions about what it means to be a child and whether there is a
43 raw energy that is distinctively part of the essence and spirit of childhood. However, within a
44 Western cultural context it's at least not alien to notice the abundance of energy associated
45 with childhood and the image of children running wild contrasted with the more constrained
46 activity typical of educational settings such as the wicker settee.
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51 The second poem (Figure 5) conveys a more ascetic view of children playing in different
52 areas without making too much mess, organised, tidy and cultivated activities, planned use of
53 space and teacher's perspective. In contrast to the preceding view the setting is experienced
54 as ordered and quiet but where children are involved and preoccupied with 'measuring and
55 pouring', 'digging and delving' and 'translucent views' – the **channelled energy** rather than
56 raw energy of childhood.
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(Figure 5) – goes here

An alternative perspective would be to contrast the cultivated energy of teacher directed activities within the educational setting with children’s cultural worlds (Swann & Kehily, 2003) and the ‘third space’ (Grant, 2011) characterised by Pokemon, gooey aliens, card swapping but also by the impromptu creative utilisation of resources. The point is well illustrated by the child who wants to keep one foot in the role play area when called upon to do a planned reading activity with the teacher. A similar image of valued self-initiated activity is provided by children playing outdoors where one of the children spontaneously decides to relocate a large tyre to a more central but unused part of the play space. Very soon other children join in to help move what is quite a heavy tyre and before long they create a car tyre area for climbing on and standing in.

The third poem in the sequence (Figure 6) depicts **lost energy** through moments of inactivity where the environment is implicated in the action in the form of tangled wires and broken headphones in the listening area; indistinct and unappealing classroom areas; outdated displays and overcrowded space; where the classroom is too noisy, too bright, too dark, too cold; where the physical setting is over stimulating and distracting, and where resources are inaccessible.

(Figure 6) – goes here - NB Could be located on left of page with tight wrapped text adjacent to text beginning “The third poem...”

An alternative image is provided by Glasser’s (no date) concept of under-energised children who

“... are often overlooked in a busy classroom or family and do not actively seek to have their needs met in positive ways. They may also turn to misbehaviour for attention, but usually in obtuse or inconspicuous and less pronounced ways. In some instances, this type of child is the “daydreamer,” “doodler” or “worrier” who fails to finish or undertake required work and responsibilities. In other instances the child is quietly defiant.”

Claxton & Carr (2004) referred to learning environments as prohibiting, affording, inviting and potentiating. One instance of a prohibiting environment would be the perception of busyness in the classroom setting as a form of overcrowding which may lead to children

¹ Figure 5 Wordle image created using <http://wordle.com>

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3 switching off and withdrawal, conveying a sense of aloofness (Evans et al, 1991). The
4 outdoor mural and strategic location of the settee helped to manage the small size of the
5 wicker settee setting. Although the setting was instantly appealing and inviting upon entry to
6 the classroom the artistic styling gave the sense of being in the 'best' room of the house
7 rather than in the living room which takes some getting used to and may undermine the
8 potential for children to be children. The inappropriate use of space may also prohibit
9 learning e.g. where books for reading are located next to a noisy role play area rather than in
10 an alcove affording semi-private space. Lost energy!

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13 The concept of 'lost childhood' extends the image of lost energy further. Kehily (2004)
14 referred to the 19th century account by Henry Mayhew of the 8 year old Watercress Girl
15 which recalls other images of street children who lacked experience of play and the fun of
16 childhood. Economic necessity forms part of a composite image together with the spare the
17 rod to spoil the child perspective.
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22 The fourth poem (Figure 7) represents a combination of raw energy in the form of the child's
23 rapid and spontaneous movement possibly suggesting Glasser's (no date) concept of the over-
24 energised child in relation to a focus on ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).
25 The poem also suggests cultivated energy in the form of perseverance with planned activities
26 and lost energy in the form of 'hanging round the areas' and 'hands in pockets'.
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32 (Figure 7) – goes here - NB Can be located on left of page with tight wrapped text -
33 adjacent to text beginning "The fourth poem..."
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37 The raw, cultivated and lost energy schema focuses attention on values and the source of
38 different values, learnt behaviour contrasted with natural curiosity, the separation of self from
39 other. Where does the child as a source of value start to express external values? How does
40 the educational setting acknowledge and also disregard the values of the child? Cannella
41 (1999) approached the social construction of childhood from a Foucaultian perspective when
42 considering the insidious power of teaching and management methods to "imprint the souls
43 of the children rather than just their behaviours" (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005).
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47 The final poem, rendered as a song (Figure 8), is a reminiscence that portrays childhood
48 without the intensity of the various forms of energy. It's a potentially stereotypical 'tempus
49 fugit' happy days view reflected both in the title 'Water Play and Wellies' and in the brevity
50 of the song.
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54 (Figure 8) – goes here
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3 How much of the image originates in my own childhood experience of childhood as
4 a happy time or in repressed images of experiences sooner forgotten, and how much is
5 suggested by the affordances of recently visited early-years settings?
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8 “Love childhood, indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts. Who has not
9 sometimes regretted that age when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart
10 was ever at peace? Why rob these innocents of the joys which pass so quickly, of that
11 precious gift which they cannot abuse? Why fill with bitterness the fleeting days of
12 early childhood, days which will no more return for them than for you?” (Rousseau,
13 2011)
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16 Moss & Petrie (2002) expressed a similar view when characterising ‘children’s spaces’ as
17 opportunities for the development of children’s culture where children can pursue their own
18 agendas through an emphasis on processes and relationships rather than predetermined
19 outcomes. Contributing to this more positive image of children with values, interests and
20 purposes of their own Batycky (2008) valorised listening to the voice of the child and urged
21 that children need to be recognised as co-creators of knowledge as part of a “lived and
22 negotiated curriculum that is not predictable” (p. 177).
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26 Drawing the threads together, the generative divergent analysis approach to reflection as an
27 additive process of generating alternative speculative reflections through engagement with
28 evocative objects led to an encounter with an extended range of themes. The first ideas
29 evoked from the wicker settee related to
30

- 31 • sense of artistic style
- 32 • space and the strategic breaking up of space
- 33 • leopard skins seat covers
- 34 • work/leisure patterns and social class
- 35 • the character of the setting as a desirable place to be within the encompassing context
36 of the neighbourhood locale
- 37
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40 These images ‘turned away’ to begin to engage with a more general focus on the hidden
41 curriculum, including separation of work from less formal activities, the role of extrinsic
42 rewards in the early-years and environmental support for developing independence.
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45 Revisiting the wicker settee as an evocative object led, at a more experiential level, to a
46 focus on raw, cultivated and lost energy which ‘turned away’ to an initial encounter with
47 the potentially burgeoning topics of
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- 49 • Energies of childhood - either as an empty shell or regarded as a more substantive
50 schema – a more philosophical approach to considering the essential nature the child
51 and the categorisation of childhood energy
- 52 • Immersion in the moment – the valuing of being in the ‘flow’ - the unbounded
53 potential of childhood that knows no limits and wants to keep one foot in the role play
54 area while doing the teacher directed number activity– the pedagogical implications
55 of regarding the child as a source of value
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- Childhood as a social construction - the uncultivated self – a developmental perspective that recognises the child as a source of value and ‘child’s voice’ – rights of the child within the encompassing cultural context
- Learning environments – influences and types - elements of ascetic play orgiastic play

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3 **Title: Generative divergent analysis: reception class and wicker settee**
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5 Author: Anthony Barnett
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9 **Captions:**

10 Figure 1: Schematic overview of the satellite topic
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15 Figure 2: Initial generated ideas
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19 Figure 3: Initial generated ideas upon revisiting
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23 Figure 4: Full version of the poem – SoftPastelBlueSunglow. Listen to the recorded version at:
24 <http://www.eyle.org/SoftPastelBlueSunglowFullPoem.mp3>
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29 Figure 5: Channelled energy poem. Listen to the recorded version at:
30 <http://www.eyle.org/SearchPage/poems/WellyPoem2a.swf>
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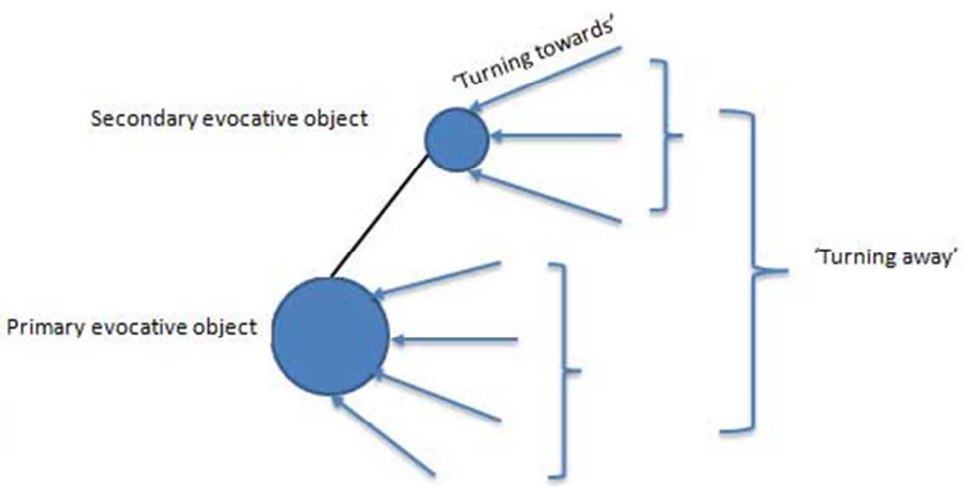
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34 Figure 6: Lost energy poem (Noah's Ark)
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38 Figure 7: Combined energies poem (Visit to a reception class)
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42 Figure 8: Water Play and Wellies. Listen to recorded version at:
43 <http://www.eyle.org/WellyPoem1a.swf>
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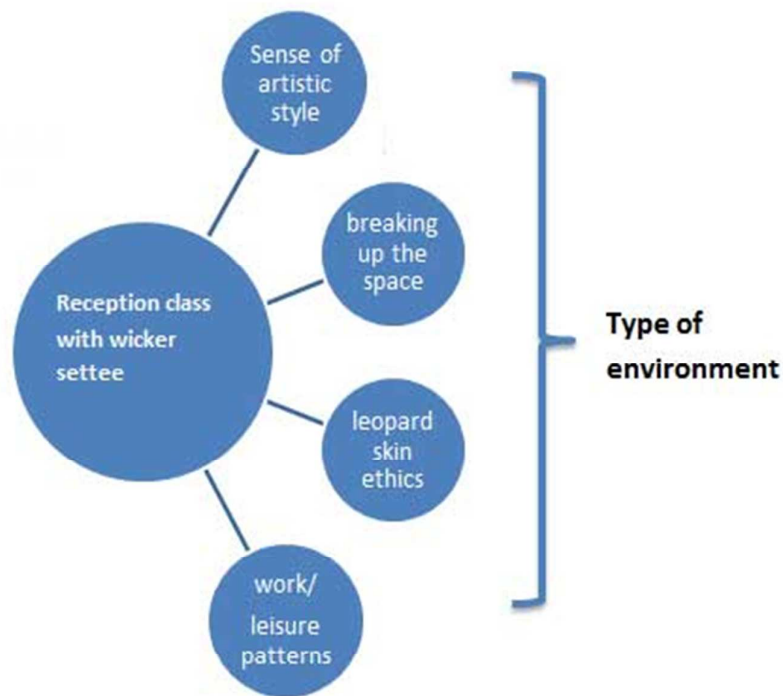
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Figure 1



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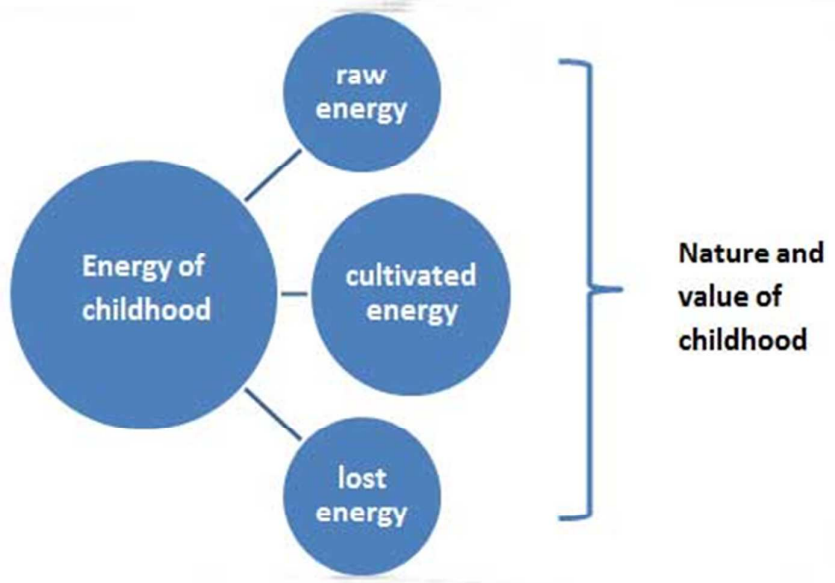
Figure 2



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Figure 3



Review Only

Figure 4

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Strategic **wicker settee** centre stage **informal space** soft pastel colours
mauve jade green lilac blue sunglow tidy carpet **ascetic play** artistic style
marginalised **orgiastic art involvement** running boys leopard skin ethics
mural – sky, grass open space - translucent curtain **skylights streaming**
sunlight wicker chair rocking chair wooden chair cushions inclusion
stool formal rectangular tables **hard plastic** backed chairs **tubular steel**
faint **alphabet number line** hint of words and sounds
Normalisation separation - Hidden curriculum - Identity – Attachment

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Figure 5



er Review Only

Figure 6

Noah's Ark Poem

As I wander through the space
Hands neatly placed in pockets
Expressionless face
Then pause

Rocking to and fro', to and fro'
No thought of play or place to go

Do I know that I am standing
In the centre of the room
Life going on around me?

Am I listening to the music?
Am I dreaming of the day?
Do I hear the teacher calling
To tidy classroom things away?

Do I notice children passing
While rocking to and fro'
to and fro' to and fro'...?

What's this beside me, what's inside?
Press down, jump up, look around,
It's time to go.

Figure 8

Water play and Wellies

The classroom setting

Fine mesh netting

Sand, soft furnishings and sunlight

Comfortable children

Free from fretting

Outdoors, puddles and muddy site

Self registration

Work on the walls

Toys and the carpet, books to share

The Christmas card shop

Dressing up shawls

Post cards, dancing – glad I was there