Complicité: Resisting the Tyranny of Talk in Early Childhood

Christina MacRae
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Charlotte Arculus
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Abstract

This paper is based video data from a project called SALTMusic, for young children diagnosed as having **"language delay." The interdisciplinary action**-research project was co-delivered by speech and language therapists and early childhood arts practitioners, with children and their parents. Addressing a concern **that children's lack of words places anxiety, guilt**, and stress upon families, SALTMusic explored ways of engaging with children using minimum words, by focusing on playful encounters of bodies responding to a range of materials, objects, and sounds. In this paper, we consider two filmed events from this project. **We explore these events through the theme of this special issue, with its emphasis on the "complex intermingling of knowledges"** between children, their families, early years' arts practitioners, and speech therapists. We wish to think more deeply about what happens when adults talk less, and instead use space, sound, materials, and bodies to converse with toddlers. In particular, we turn to the dramaturgical notion of *complicité* in order to enlarge our understanding of communication and conversation towards a mutually transformative sense of unfolding collective action. In particular, we ask what the potential of the concept of *complicité* mi**ght offer early years' practice in an era of accountability, where the** professionalization discourses of early childhood education are creeping into and infecting parenting discourses. We ask if the concept of *complicité* might help adults working with young children to resist the domination of word-oriented discourses that eclipse implicit, bodily, and materially attuned ways of relating to the young child.

Keywords

Complicité; More-than-words; E**arly years' pedagogies**; Speech and language therapy; E**arly years' arts** practitioners

Introduction

In this piece of writing, we (re)turn to two data clips that took place in a series of SALTMusic family support sessions in order to **think more deeply about early years' pedagogies.** These sessions took place in the Priory **Children's Centre in the east of the United** Kingdom. We will use the concept of bodily encounters as a way to think more deeply about creating spaces where complex and intermingled knowledges can emerge, and we put this to use as a way to break our habitual recourse to what **Blum has called "wordism" (2015, p,74; 2017,** p.6). Using performance practice as a discipline that might foreground the idea of emergent forms of knowledge that do not rely on words, we explore if this might offer us ways of resisting an ever-narrowing focus on vocabulary and talk. In particular, we explore what happens when we use the dramaturgical concept of *complicité* and apply it to the analysis of the video clips. This concept helps us to think about creating spaces where early years professionals, children, and parents can encounter each other in more-than-words ways, so that we can take account of affective and collectively produced understandings. In this paper, we explore conversation as a relational act of *complicité* that may or may not involve words, but where bodies respond in relation to each other. We propose

that this can be offered as an antidote to the act of "talking to" or "talking at" children. Alongside the notion of *complicité*, we also develop an idea of understanding as something that is produced by being in the middle of things; in and among.

We open by briefly introducing the national (and wider) context of a growing professionalization of parenting (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014) that is associated with "talking to your child." Alongside this is a linked, but specific discourse around the professionalization of the Early Years Workforce (Georgeson, 2009; Osgood, 2006; Taggart, 2011). We recognize that behind this current situation are the effects of a long and complicated history of research that has singled out the key significance of the infant/mother dyad as a site of socialization in the facilitation of the child's capacity to communicate (Riley, 1983, p.25). Furthermore, we acknowledge that this history is in turn is entangled in colonial recapitulation theorizing where both the development of the child, as well as the evolution of language is conceptualized as progressive from lower to higher, from simple to complex, and animal to human (Burman 2017; MacRae, 2020; Viruru, 2005). Because human language is the behavior most deeply associated with truth, reason, and knowing (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p.38), this results in not-yet-speaking children being seen as lacking any real knowledge or understanding of the world (Maclure, 2013). Thus, words have a problematic association with thinking: What is not language cannot easily be considered as thought. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this genealogy, and instead our intention will be to engage with this fraught relationship by reflecting on video data from a collaborative project that brought speech therapists and early years performance arts practitioners together in a project that sought to engage with these tensions during a program of family support

sessions. One of the authors, Charlotte, a community musician, arts animateur, and doctoral student was involved in the sessions, and was behind the camera for the two pieces of video. The other, Christina, not part of the project at the time, also has a research interest in young children's communicative practices and became involved when she worked alongside Charlotte to (re)view the video clips in order to think more deeply about how these two events unfolded.

Having sketched out the national context, we discuss the SALTMusic project and its multi-disciplinary methodology. We then (re)turn to two short pieces of video taken during the project. We analyze the videos through the concept of *complicité*: both exploring how *complicité* is something that is aligned to the material, as well as to how it is expressed through collective action. We conclude by proposing that, not only is multidisciplinary working productive, but we speculate on the potential of *complicité*-as-practice as a key concept that could lie at the heart of future multidisciplinary work that includes speech therapists and multi-arts practitioners.

Talk to Your Child: The National Context and Beyond

Gillies (2014) traces how in the late 1990s parenting began to enter the arena of social policy as an overt focus and has steadily intensified since then (see also Edwards & Gillies 2004, Macvarish et al, 2015). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) focus specifically on a growing attention to parenting skills from 1997-2010 under the United Kingdom's Labour government. They point to a series of key policy influences from the identification of parents as vital in relation to children's outcomes in Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003), to Every Parent Matters (DfES, 2007). From this period,

under coalition and Conservative governments, **there has followed an austerity driven "roll back of the state," where state funded provision of** early years services to families has reduced, while the sector has been subject to increasing privatization (Lewis & West, 2017). Accompanying this there has been a creeping discourse that professionalizes parenting, with implicit understandings of parenting as techniques to be learnt (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014) Accompanying this is a more specific focus on the linguistic repertoires of parents. Riley (1983) observes that as child development theory moved from a biological construction of the child to a more sociocultural construction, communication became increasingly significant, sometimes operating as a kind of proxy for the concept of attachment.

Blum (2017) draws attention to an even narrower focus on numbers of words and vocabulary, chronicling how since 2010, a particular small study measuring the number of words that parents directed at their children (conducted by Hart and Risley in 1995) has since become a rallying cry in UK and US policy. She **charts how this "word-gap" study has been cited** as evidence underpinning a rising number of programs that train poorer, less educated parents to direct more talk at their young children (Blum, 2017; Kuchirko, 2019). Blum **(2017) calls this "wordism" and critiques the** idea that language is words and more words are **better. Here the individual "word" dominates as** the primary unit of analysis in education, and **words are "celebrated, counted, accumulated—or found missing" (p. 26).**

Providing a language-rich environment has long been regarded as an essential ingredient of good early years education. However, the new intensity of focus on the word-gap in relation to parents has accelerated a consciousness about the need for words to mediate adult/child relations. This approach is

nevertheless debateable. As Blum (2017) points out, the adult-directed and child-centered talk so esteemed in the west is far from universal, as worldwide multicultural perspectives show (for example, see Brice Heath, 1983; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). While this particular focus on adult speech has been intensified through recent global north policy and the media, this compulsion to bring language to children is not new, and can be linked to ways that language is deeply political, and always shot through with power and ingrained colonial attitudes that equate language with knowledge (Aveneri et al. 2015; MacRae, 2020; Viruru, 2001). Significant **for us is that "many key insights into infant** language learning rest on implicit assumptions of how language interactions unfold, assumptions that are based on WEIRD populations (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic), and almost exclusively on white middle-income mothers and their **children" (Kuchirko, 2019, p.550). Holding this** in mind when unpicking policy discourses that extort parents **to "talk to their children," is a** reminder to be aware of how some kinds of communicative and literacy practices may be valued at the expense of others (Hackett, 2018).

SALTMusic

The SALTMusic project that this paper reports on was funded between 2016 and 2018 by the charity Youth Music to offer weekly sessions for families with young children (24-36 months) diagnosed by speech and language **services as having communication "difficulty" or "delay." The project was delivered as part of the Priory Children's Centre's work with families.** The Priory was one of the initial 50 trailblazer Sure Start Programmes set up in the United Kingdom at the millennium and was run by the Great Yarmouth Community Trust. This particular project was an interdisciplinary action-research initiative, co-delivered by speech

and language therapists and early years' multi-arts specialists (Pitt & Arculus, 2018). It was the latest of a number of projects initiated over a 20-year partnership between the Great Yarmouth Community Trust Sure Start programme and SALTMusic, a multidisciplinary group of early childhood musicians, performance artists, and speech therapists. Sure Start, a UK policy initiative that started in 1998, had a similar mission to the Head Start programs in the United States and Australia. Through this **program local Children's Centres were funded so** that universal childcare, family support, and health services would be offered to families of young children. In the first phase of the Sure Start Local Programme, multidisciplinary work was promoted. Over the lifetime of the SALTMusic partnership, budgets were cut and nationally the core work of many Sure Start **Children's Centres have faced an existential** threat. Sadly, while this paper was being written, the Great Yarmouth Community Trust went into liquidation (at the end of 2019) as the result of withdrawal of central government funding for local councils. Notwithstanding these gradual erosions to services and resulting reductions in Sure Start funding, up until this action-research project, SALTmusic had managed to continue to work within the core provision to families with **young children at the Priory Children's Centre. It** was the close relationships that were facilitated through this long-term collaboration that enabled the creation of playful pedagogies in open-ended family spaces for meeting, being, and learning together.

Engaging with C**hildren's** Non-Verbal Funds of Knowledge

From the outset the SALTMusic, **practitioners (an equal mix of early years' multi-**arts specialists and Speech and Language Therapists) recognized the potential problematic effects of focusing on the acquisition of words as a child's principal achievement. They were concerned about how this focus might tacitly be perpetuated by the word-gap and school-readiness discourses that constructed the parental role as key in increasing the number of **words in their child's repertoire. The group** worried that these narratives might work in counterproductive ways by placing anxiety, guilt, and stress upon parents (especially those of low socioeconomic status, since this group was being singled out as in need of intervention). Linked with this, there was a concern that opportunities to engage with children playfully might become hijacked by the imperative for adults to talk to children all the time. Furthermore, the group members were concerned that this tyranny of **talking (Pitt & Arculus, 2018, p.12) or "wordism"** (Blum, 2015, p.74; 2017, p.6) risked ignoring **other forms of children's communicative** interaction, rendering their nonverbal funds of knowledge invisible. As an antidote, the SALTMusic team deliberately worked using minimal talk and instead focussed on interaction through music, movement, and object play. Words, when they were used, were deployed playfully and within a palette of other types of expressive voice play.

SALTMusic Methodology

The team used a cycle of reflection and planning as the means by which to share their disciplinary ways of knowing. Through this **process, which became known as "interthinking"** (Pitt & Arculus, 2018, p.27), they shared specific techniques; for example, drawing on speech **therapists "Observe, Wait, Listen" approach** (Girolametto et al., 1986) and intensive interaction (Hewett & Nind, 2013). Over the years of the partnership a *pedagogy of improvisation* developed and was central to the SALTMusic practice. This involved, to quote **Lines (2017), "a responsibility within the** unfolding ensemble to stay sensitive and also

keep exploring. It requires openness, alertness, and attentiveness to sustain creatively" (p. 56). SALTMusic strove to be an ethical and emergent practice attending to in-the-moment responses and to the ongoing creative processes produced when bodies encounter other bodies (both human and nonhuman). The starting premise of the sessions was to recognize young children as rhizomic and transdisciplinary thinkers (Dahlberg, 2016), constantly making and remaking heterogenous semiotic connections unhampered by language. The practitioners understood that they, themselves, learnt from children and gained greatly in their respective practices through improvising with children. The collaboration sought to explore the question that Viruru poses, when she asks, "what is lost when language is gained?" (2001, p.31). The SALTMusic project was interested in expressions of thought beyond words and proposed that by attending to what Manning calls the minor gesture, this could render tangible how children create "languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues" (2016, p.2).

(Re)viewing Data Vignettes

This paper is focussed on two pieces of video from the SALTMusic sessions which were part of the data from the action-research project led by Charlotte and Jess Pitt. Both clips show a two-year-old child who attended the weekly sessions with his Dad. He had been referred for speech therapy and he never spoke in the sessions. In the first clip he is near to his father who is sitting on a chair. In this clip we witness an interaction between the child, some plastic cones, a spinning basket, and four adults. A co-produced movement/song is produced as the child spins the basket and the movement is accompanied by singing adults. The song emerges as a striking refrain that seems to have

emerged from all the assembled elements, both human and nonhuman.

In the second clip, the scene is very different; the video was taken at the end of the same session and the whole group (adults and children) are gathered around a large piece of Lycra that is being held, stretched, and gently bounced by outstretched arms and hands. Here, the same two-year-old, unexpectedly becomes a key player in the assemblage when he breaks into an improvised, made-up song "the boats are in the sea." This song emerges as the child watches some small paper boats placed onto the Lycra as they bounce up and down with its rise and fall.

Both these clips have made a great impression on the SALTMusic group, and Charlotte in particular, over the last few years. Not only did the events have a significant impact on the team at the time, but subsequently Charlotte has returned to the video clips as a means to explore the potential of music as an affective and rhythmic force (Arculus, 2019). Here the singularity of the emergence of the child's song became a significant event. This analysis of the video surfaced the pedagogy and community of improvisation that surrounded the event. In particular, it drew attention to the material affordances of the blue Lycra fabric that joined people together through a shared pulse, the song, and the co-produced action responding to the motion of the spinning basket. When the call came out for this special issue, *More than Words for Working with Families and Children*, we saw this as an opportunity to collaborate by returning to the video data once more, and to explore in greater detail the singular unfolding of the two filmed events. We anticipated that we would explore how refrains were produced, sustained, and transformed through a pedagogy of improvisation. However, when (re)viewing the video with the specified theme of "embodied forms of knowing, gut feelings, intuition" and

the concept of "withness" as proposed by Shotter (2012), we found our attention was redirected. When we focused closely on what happened to the adult bodies in this space of minimal talking, we found ourselves pushed into new directions. Giving our attention to the repetitions of both movement and sound when bodies encounter each other, we started to notice how both human and nonhuman bodies became complicit in each **other's motion.**

Complicité as a Concept of Data Analysis

Our newfound awareness of a complicity that seemed to be produced through encounter, raised new questions about the potential of performing arts techniques in relation the theatrical concept of *complicité*, and what this concept might unlock if we took it up seriously to think about child/adult communication. *Complicité* is a French term commonly used in street theatre, physical theatre, and ensemble improvisation. It has been popularized as a performance concept by actors who worked with the dramaturge Jaques LeCoq (whose writings on drama are influential in mime, physical, and visual theatre) and with the British theatre company *Théâtre de Complicité*. For actors it means a dynamic, sensed, attuned, force between players; a moving-with. When engaging in performed *complicité***, the actor's sense of self** becomes blurred and distributed through the group. Through playful encounters, processes that LeCoq-schooled actor, John Wright frames as "*finding the game*" **(2006), players develop** *complicité* and then can improvise together. As Kuppers et al. (2016) note in their co-created, community performance research projects:

> We do not know yet how to speak to each other, how to make art together. The very act **of coming together is an experiment. […] we** develop our antennae for one another, and then we end in an open-space improvisation […] (p. 221).

It is essential for any ensemble in the performing arts (orchestra, dance ensemble, street act) to develop *complicité* because *complicité* is absolutely palpable to an audience, as it affects and folds them in, even though they may not know why. We are interested in **thinking about how both "finding the game" and** *complicité* are not confined as relationships solely between human actors, but, that they also include materials such as, instruments, puppets, cloth and other props. We will try to work with **this concept in tandem with Shotter's (2015) notion of an "ethics of attunement" and "thinking**-with."

We will now (re)turn to these two video clips in greater depth in order to explore them through the lens of *complicité*.

Event 1: Encountering a Spinning Basket
Setting the Scene:

Charlotte, a two-year old child, his father, and a SALTMusic practitioner are gathered around a large multicolored basket that has been taped onto a Lazy Susan turntable. Also present in the scene are colorful plastic cones scattered on the floor, some of which are in the basket. Other people are in the room (including the project researcher, who is sat on the floor observing the session from across the room). The room is also full of other diverse objects and materials—cloth, tubes, balls, and instruments. There is an ambient Brian Eno soundtrack playing in the background. Charlotte has been tasked with recording the event using an iPad, and her usual practice is to keep this short, at around 2 minutes per clip. However, when her attention is drawn by a child standing close to their seated father, she films for longer. The child offers and exchanges cones with the SALTMusic practitioner sitting on the floor. This leads to them starting to spin the basket together; Charlotte starts to film (this video clip lasts for 6 minutes). What follows is a re-

narration of the video. This description was produced through a dialogue and reanalysis between Charlotte and **Christina.** This "telling" attempts to story the event so that *complicité* plays a vital role in the encounter between the child/4 adults /cones and a spinning basket.

Storying the Video Clip:

The basket taped to the Lazy Susan is set in motion when it **encounters the child's hand.** *This encounter, which produces spinning, engenders a found game and an emerging* complicité *between the child and the basket. The spinning motion of the basket attracts both* **Charlotte's attention and the SALTMusic** *practitioner sitting next to the child. Although Charlotte is filming, the spinning provokes a* **"weeee!" vocalization from her, as she too becomes complicit with the basket's motion. The** *drawn-***out intonation of her "weee" utterance is** *an expression of her joining in with the game, entering it while the child continues to push the basket. The child/basket* complicité *has now* **been enlarged to include Charlotte's "weee" sounds. The father is watching the child's** *encounter. His attention to child and basket is strong and consistent. It is also worth noting that the SALTMusic practitioner, the action-researcher and Charlotte have also developed a* complicité *with each other through playing and working together over time. These assembled bodies are held together in suspension through the different but interconnected threads of* complicité *that emerge through the seeking and finding of games—games that allow players to* **enter each other's encounters in playful ways.** *The movement of the basket sets the rhythms and patterns in which the assembled bodies become complicit. The enlarging of these rhythms through* complicité **drive the child's** *increasingly forceful gestures, and this in turn increases the momentum of the basket. While this is going on, the SALTMusic practitioner has*

simultaneously started to find a new game with the child/basket/father involving cones (collecting, looking through, and dropping cones in the basket). A minute or so later the researcher, who is seated at a distance from the spinning basket, is drawn to this game-finding and finds complicité *by joining in with a refrain* **of repeated words: "round and round and round and round"—***the rise and fall of which follows the movement of the circling basket. Her voice is, at the same time, tuned to the Eno soundtrack that is playing in the background. All the actors lurch between losing, finding, and playing their multiplicitous, yet connected games. They mostly manage to sustain being-in-relations and within songlines: The various refrains are curious riffs for each other to play off. Polyrhythms emerge and the assembled constituent parts fall into momentary grooves through the developing sense of* complicité *with a spinning basket.*

Materializing Complicité *Through Movement*

"There is no Complicité *method — what is essential is* **collaboration, and a turbulent forward momentum"** (*Théâtre de Complicité*, 2020).

We agree that when thinking about how *complicité* was generated by the spinning basket, movement is indeed a key element. The child becomes complicit with the basket through setting it in motion, and, in turn, adults enter into various complicities produced through and with each other, as well as with the assembled sounds and objects. *Complicité* emerges through and with the encounter rather than through a sense of clear direction or intention. To introduce words that would *direct* **action ("look, you are spinning the basket") into this ensemble** runs the danger of destabilizing the suspended state of play. What becomes important in the seeking of games to enter into with others (both

human and nonhuman), is the need to always be ready to recognize when a game is over and to find a new game (Wright, 2006). At the same time, it is important to always keep open the possibility of new connections and complicities to break through, or as Cross (2005, p.10) might **say, to keep intentionality "floating**." On (re)viewing the clips, we are interested in what this sense of *complicité* might offer in terms of making us think more expansively in relation to the term conversation, opening it up beyond a narrow exchange of words. As Christina has noted elsewhere (2020, p.16), the history of the word conversation has an older sense which is linked to residing and dwelling, while the Latin combination of *con* (together) with *verser* (to turn) takes us to a concept of moving in unison. **Thus conceived, "our (con)versations are always** more-than-human: mattering is a form of (con)versation as bodies move both in relation to matter and in relation to the affective responses **of other bodies" (MacRae, 2020**, p.16). This can be seen as the difference between language in a scientific mode, a formal system which can be **measured and taught ["talk to your child"]; and** conversation as a relational, affective mode between people, through which they turn and move. This resonates with Hackett and **Somerville's (2017) proposition that literacies** are practices of the body, and with Sheets-**Johnstone's (2011) proposal that we "make sense" as we move our bodies (2011, p. 117). To say that "the child drops the tubes into the basket" or "the artist makes a 'weee' sound" is as** meaningless as extracting a single note from an improvised tune. Rather, it is the relation of thinking-with (Shotter, 2015) another—the *complicité* of child and basket, child and father, tube and basket, Brian Eno and voice, tubes and basket and father, and so much more that holds the event together in a loose and open fashion. The etymological roots of the English word complicity have multiple, overlapping meanings:

accomplice, collusion, participation, collaboration, involvement, association, recognition, complicate. It also has links to the middle English word *complice*, meaning associate; and the Latin word *complicare*, which **means to "fold together." Working with these** meanings, it might be possible to sense *complicité* **in the movement of the child's body** as it pulses in relation to the speed of the basket, in the tuning of one voice to the Brian Eno sound track, or the other voice in tone and tempo with the momentum of the rotating basket.

In the field of early childhood where the use of words to express oneself is an overarching goal, it is all too easy for certain kinds of complicities to become a threat to the order of things. Children who mimic the actions of other **children, children's intimacies w**ith material **objects, or adults who respond to children's** moving bodies with mimicry are all instances where often *complicité* can appear to threaten **"normal" behavior. It is of interest that** complicity is a concept that is usually seen in negative terms where it is cast pejoratively as **ceding of one's personal responsibility, or as an** upending of the normal modes of behavior (Reynolds, 2017). We also note that in the English language, complicity is often used rhetorically in political and judicial terms to denote behaviour that breaks rules through transversal actions that undermine behavioral norms (Reynolds, 2017). Here it is the unspoken—but yet understood—that exists between those involved that is particularly threatening. There is an invisible quality to complicity—it can only be sensed by those playing the game or those paying careful attention.

From the outside, SALTMusic sessions might look chaotic in the absence of adult direction. Visitors observing one of these sessions might initially feel troubled by the lack of a single point of focus: the multiple and often

brief encounters, the botched attempts at **"finding a game,"** **and the sense of being not** included in games that others were part of. This leaves practitioners in a risky place where they might appear, as Shotter says, "unprofessional" or "incompetent" and unable to "account" for themselves to those around "by giving reasons for our conduct" (2015, p.137). Davies (2014) describes encounters as an always-evolving story that requires not knowing what is happening or where things are headed. Schulte (2013, p.2) **conceives of the process of gaining children's** trust as unstable, provisional, multiple, and incomplete, and not something a script or score can be written for; it requires openness, alertness, and attentiveness to sustain. Attending to the potential in moments of encounter as a significant aspect of this improvisational pedagogy takes us beyond habit and the already known. There are different levels of *complicité* between different players but during these *thinking-with* encounters, talking runs the risk of killing this confederacy in its tracks.

Event two - The Boats are on the Sea
Setting the Scene:

This clip was filmed later during the same SALTMusic session as the first. At the center of the event is a large piece of pulsing blue stretchy (Lycra) fabric. The room has been cleared, offering a large space for movement. The fabric is held by all the people in the room who are sitting around the Lycra, apart from Charlotte. Lycra has been a veteran in these sessions because of its capacity to do special things through its elasticity and shared pulse as it is held in-common. It also divides the space into an above and a below.

Storying the Video Clip:
Little folded paper boats have been placed onto the stretched material. The boats

bounce as the Lycra is lifted up and down collectively by the humans grasping it in their hands. The leading artist says in a sing song **voice "the boats are on the sea." There is a "shussshing" vocalization that so**unds a little *wave-like, and also like a call for quiet. Charlotte holds the camera at the far end of the room. As the Lycra pulses, it becomes noticeable that the child filmed in the first clip is singing softly. He suddenly raises his voice to sing loudly into the room. His song is extraordinary and beautiful, the tune is* **complex and it has six words "the boats are in the sea." In this singing, at once, the "game" is** *taken to a new level as words are made into song. All are present and complicit in a moment of forward momentum. The blue material continues pulsing and vibrating with a* complicité *from which the song emerged.*

The adults join in, taking up the refrain. **Charlotte's voice is clearly audible on the video** *clip. It becomes clear on (re)view that the* **adults don't reproduce the child's original** *tune—but rather that it is transformed into something else that moves forward wildly with the motion of the blue Lycra. As the singing settles into a gentle refrain, the child/blue material/bouncing boats have transformed the song-game* complicité *into something new. The child does not sing again but collects the little boats from the rolling, swelling Lycra-sea. This takes a little time, and all the while the song rolls and swells forward. The human/Lycra assemblage is complicit in quietening and stilling a little, which allows the child to gain the last remaining boats. When all are collected, the child places them once more on the sea and this time he gets hold of the edge of the Lycra. He then conducts the song forwards through a more vigorous and turbulent up and down movement of the Lycra. The song follows accordingly, rising and swelling.*

Bodies in Concert and the Birth of a Tune

The child's song that emerges from the *complicité* of the group has a soaring power. The song is an "event"; it is an act of creation, a new collective utterance in the world. It is the thing most alive in the room and draws everything towards it. Here, as we reflect on our reviewings of the video, we wonder if *complicité* might be thought of as

> a knowing to do with one's participation within a situation, with one's "place" within it, and with how one might "go on" playing one's part within it—a knowing in which one is affected by one's surroundings perhaps even more than one affects them (Shotter, 2012, p.3)

Thus, *complicité* is a kind of knowing-ness that is akin to having an understanding. An etymological search of the word *understanding* reveals a complexity of roots that includes "standing among," and being in-between or in the midst of. Pondering these roots brings forth an idea of understanding as an immersive, close, relational quality rather than a passive standing beneath a transcendent knowledge. We consider how the term understanding could relate to the idea of *complicité*; could we think of the song-event as an understanding that was produced in the midst, through a *complicité* that was more-than-human? We would like to suggest that when we tactically reduce our words, this can have the effect of making us more aware of emergent ways of knowing that are produced in concert with children, as well as more-than-human actants. With regards to the manner in which the song erupted from the child in concert with the pulsing Lycra, the bouncing boats, and rhythms of the collective bodies, we notice both "an 'upward' emergent pressure from individual knowers as well as a 'downward' collective pressure from the collective knowing of the group" (Kieren, 2005, p.75). In the case of this

particular event, the collective group of people holding the Lycra included parents, SALTMusic practitioners, and children. Following MacLure, we also note that while language is "inescapably social," it also can have an impersonal quality where voices not are not expressions of individual and bounded selves, but instead can be issued forth through a collective enunciation. Here Maclure, draws from Deleuze who suggests that this is a murmuration that emerges through collective voices (2016, p.175). The way the song changes its shape, tune, and tempo is complex and entangled with all the constitutive players in this event, including the Lycra and the bouncing boats.

We would like to also suggest that children are uniquely positioned to teach us about complicity as a force, since it is a quality that is often supressed as reason and language take hold of us. As Duhn notes, very young children, are, perhaps, "less caught up in the illusion of a self that controls and governs than older humans who have learned to see, feel, and think the self and the world in particular ways" (2015, p. 928). They also can be distinguished as having a particular "style" that emanates from a corporality that is attuned to the spaces and objects that they encounter (Løkken, 2009). We share Maclure's caution that we should be wary of romanticizing this "wild" element of early childhood (2016, p.179), however with Duhn (2015), we do think that the affective alliances infant bodies create with other bodies, both human and more-than-human, might be recognized as capacities rather than as threatening the development of reason and language. It is interesting, as we noted earlier, that the term complicity is generally used rhetorically in negative terms, and certainly the contagious complicities of young children running or shouting in unison are ones that adults are fearful of triggering. However, the point we would like to make is that complicity is

neither good nor bad, but rather should be thought of as a force that makes us capable of acting in a multitude of ways.

Conclusion

Taylor and Blaise (2014) talk about a process that involves attending to ways in which **our bodies are set in motion "by the** collective body or the body-**world" (p. 385). They go on to** speculate that to be open to this kind of learning, **we need to acknowledge that "we are never** operating independently in the world, never **acting on intentional agency alone," and that, instead, "we** are moving as a constituent part of a collective worldly body—stirred and affected by our relations with all manner of more-than-human others, living and inert, in our common **worlds" (Taylor & Blaise, 2014, p.386). Acknowledging these as "situated knowledges"** (Traffi-Pratts, 2019), produced in the spaces that bodies find themselves in as they are set in motion, requires that we take the physical and material qualities of the spaces in which we encounter families very seriously. Working with the concept of *complicité*, borrowed from drama theory, could be deployed as a provocation that brings a different disciplinary knowledge from the performing arts in order to unsettle the dominance of linguistic and cognitive narratives that have come to colonize the field of early childhood education. Sumara and Davis point out that while the etymological roots of the word complicity share a history with the word complexity, complicity is also about being implicated in something and being an accomplice (1997, p.303). They go on to claim that as an overarching concept, complicity **"announces a need to be attentive to one's participation in events" (1997, p.303). Taking** up the invitation to become an accomplice to unfolding events as children encounter other bodies could be seen as a way of attempting to reside inside the act of culture-making in order

to deliberately resist imposing cultures on **families. Furthermore, this requires "a willingness and an effort to formulate one's place in the community [...] and reciprocally**, to allow that community to become part of the **research" (Sumara & Davis, 1997, p.309).** Equal to the situational necessity of complicity is its critical relationship to time. Complicity is a force that is necessarily produced in the moment; it always is created fluidly in response to the unfolding dynamics of the present moment. This can sit awkwardly in the context **of the shadow that is cast by the "school-**ready **child," one produced through the policy** discourses of data and assessment. This school-re**ady child normalizes "particular development trajectories" over others through a reduction of complexity in order to create a "hierarchy of unreadiness/readiness" (Evans, 2015, p.35).** And as Pierlejewski points out, this phantasy of the school ready child is a spectre that stops open-ended gaming in it tracks (2019:6). *Complicité* insists on being inside and residing within the time of now. Bates reminds us that **we should also be "concerned with 'here and now' as 'time–space'" (2019, p.422). So** *complicité*-as-practice reminds us to not only take space seriously, but also that sometimes we should give in to time, obeying the imperative to succumb to time in a world that is so worried about wasting it.

With Sumara and Davis, we concur that relationships of complicity carry forces that are **capable of enlarging "the space of the possible"** (1997:309). (Re)viewing the video from the SALTMusic project, we have been struck by how *complicité*-as-practice was a quality that emerged through the careful, slow, multidisciplinary partnership between speech therapists and early years multi-arts specialists, where respective practices and techniques were shared and transformed. But further, we feel that *complicité*-as-practice has a potential itself

to engender new multidisciplinary alliances, and ones that recognize the capacities and knowledges of children themselves. As a performative tactic that attends to the movement of bodies, it is one that is ripe with possibilities. *Complicité*-as-practice has the capacity to become a force of shared concern and responsiveness that can bring together performance artists, speech therapists, as well as other early years professionals as they work mutually with local communities of families. While parents bring their own implicit and intuitive ways of knowing and responding to children with them, the current climate of assessment, progression, and school readiness shape and limit the expression of these more situated and felt funds of knowledge in favor of explicit expectations. Although the notion of *complicité* emerged unexpectedly as we (re)viewed the video clips from the SALTMusic sessions, the surfacing of *complicité* as a force that opens up, rather than closes down, possibilities for action has been exciting and offered us hope in a time of increasing parental and professional accountability. We suggest that movement-oriented arts practices like dance, music, and drama might align themselves well alongside and in collaboration with early childhood education. In particular, we advocate exploring the potential of *complicité*-as-practice through forging collaborations between early childhood educators and performance artists. This requires a financial commitment to long-term, situated partnerships that will test potential beyond the short-term, one-off, funded arts project model that has become the norm in UK arts funding. Cross-fertilization of health, education, artistic, and parental practices around early childhood takes time and commitment, and collaborative partnerships between health, arts, and educational research funding sources could be deployed to productively bring these practices together.

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About the Authors

Charlotte Arculus is an artist-animateur and has worked with very young children for over 30 years. She is currently a doctoral student at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her doctoral project **"More Than Words"** uses innovative film technologies and the temporal arts to understand the complex worlds of two-year-old children. She has presented, research, arts installations, and workshops nationally and internationally. She is the is the artistic director of Magic Adventure, an immersive, multi-arts installation project.

Christina MacRae is a research fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University whose interests lie in early childhood care and education. She has a particular interest in the way that sensation, affect, and movement express a bodily relationship engagement with the world. She has recently carried out an **ethnography called "The Sensory Nursery,"** where she has experimented with methodologies that give more weight to materiality, relation, and bodily ways of knowing. She also has experience of working with young children in diverse settings a nursery teacher.