JoLLE@UGA®
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Considering Collective Motivation to Read: A Narrative, Inquiry

Mark D. McCarthy

Abstract: Research into literacy education often explores cognitive or sociocultural understandings, with the former shaping how curricula and assessments understand readers. This focus on cognitive processes is one of many ways that reading is imagined as an individual pursuit. Through a lens of posthuman subjectivity, I consider a narrative of a key moment of collective motivation in the classroom as situated in a larger context. While I draw upon empirical evidence in the form of interviews, narrative inquiry takes me toward questions that evoke. Notably, I find that the ubiquity of collective endeavors appears as solo achievements. As a result of my narrative-inspired thinking-through-theory, I argue that collective motivation is a feature of posthuman subjectivity, and that we might generate new possibilities for learning as assemblage in our teaching. To elaborate, I weave together narrative and diagrammatical modes of thinking, storytelling and description of my analytical process, to evoke questioning.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, posthumanism, reader motivation

Dr. McCarthy is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Springfield College. His research draws from poststructuralist approaches and qualitative methodologies to investigate teacher preparation for literacy instruction, including the teaching of children's literature. He has recently explored narrative inquiry, fiction in research, and conversation analysis. Interests bridging his research and teaching include language and discourse, complexity, and critical multicultural education.

Betty's[1] student John announced that he was taking a family trip to Pigeon Forge, TN, the home of Dollywood and the NASCAR Speedpark. However, John's family was headed there to experience a curiously-located replica of the *Titanic*, moored alongside a brick building emblazoned with the White Star Line logo serving as the threshold to this life-sized monument and museum. The destination was just enough out of the ordinary for Georgians to pique Betty's interest, and given John's buzz about the trip, she offered him funds to buy a book for the class. It was unlikely that Betty would have known the series of events that would unfold. But, as is often the case, one's fortunes are realized due in no small part to the accumulation of tiny actions—very much a theme of the cinematic representation of the ill-fated passengers aboard the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*.

When John returned to his second-grade classroom with the text—an informational, *Titanic*-themed alphabet book—Betty happily read aloud an entry during the literacy period each day. The introduction of this text marks the beginning of my "noticing what is set in motion" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2016, p. 104), understanding the events and bodies involved as assemblage, which I will elaborate more fully in the sections that follow. John's enthusiasm for the topic was infectious, yet he was never a social leader or trend-setter up until this point. Betty thought of him as more of an "outlier," an unfortunate yet unsurprising status given that he carried the label of ELL and spoke Spanish at home.

Betty's characterization of John may be indicative of the widespread deficit framing of ELL students, but when I asked her more about it, she said, "He's able. He wasn't a low student to begin with, but his language definitely impacted his academics."

Labeling students as low or high is too common a practice in elementary schools, and her stance suggests the insidious neutrality of language dominance: *John struggles because he isn't good at English*, with no critique of language policies that systemically position him to struggle. A greater elaboration of these problems with schooling is outside the scope of this paper. In any case, John was not the most popular student. That is, until he engaged everyone.

Each student found an entry point via the text, topic, and themes based on their own learning preferences: measurements and figures for the mathematical; dress up and storytelling about the lives of real passengers for the theatrical. These second graders and their teacher were likely unaware that some evidence suggests motivation to read influences reading fluency skills (Quirk, 2005, p. 90). Regardless, the students' engagement never quite ended, and Betty excitedly rode the wave of enthusiasm into the content units that followed. She described the whole class's experience with joy:

> Because one student fell in love with Titanic, the rest of the class fell in love with it. And I just poured everything into that because, first of all, it was nonfiction. I was super hyped that they chose a nonfiction...I just poured all my energy into...I mean, we redid the doors, Titanic-style. We studied nonfiction text features with Titanic books. I mean, anything I could pull Titanic into...we even had our Titanic party for celebrating our Titanic unit. I gave them a real passenger on the ship, they had to go research it and write a paper about their person and if they lived or died and what their family was like. And it was just, it was very in depth for a second grade. But they

---

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all characters.

were right with it. Because even my lower students were able to hang with it because I just did it to what they needed. And they loved every minute. They were so engaged.

Her account tells of standards met and exceeded expectations (with the familiar hierarchy of high and low students), and perhaps more importantly, students interested, engaged, and motivated.

Literacy educators are often concerned about reader motivation because, as simple as it sounds, motivation correlates with more reading, and the more one reads, the better they get at it (for an early example, see Stanovich, 1986; Rayner, et al., 2001, elaborate on developmental theories of reading in support of this notion, such as *emergent literacy*, Clay, 1991; see De Naeghel, et al., 2012, for more specifically on motivation). Motivation itself is often assumed to be located within the individual, perhaps due to the cultural lens and logic many US educators bring to their teaching: the individual is the primary, if not exclusive, subject position. As such, Betty elaborated John's individual academic gains:

> What was great about the whole situation is the student who got everybody roped into it was the very student who said how much he hated reading, how much he hated writing. And yesterday, he was the first one to finish his opinion writing. Everybody else in the class wrote about what their favorite holiday was. And he said, "Can I write about the Titanic?" I said, "If you can come up with an opinion for the Titanic, then yes." So, he wrote about, and these are his words, "Titanic is the neatest ship to cross the ocean." He used "luxurious," and he's an ELL. So, I mean, I was really excited.

Again, noting a deficit framing, individual motivation is an effective way to understand John's move from disengaged and disconnected to writing opinion essays with Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary. But how can we account for the group-level motivation? Was it simply that each student had the opportunity to become individually motivated? This enactment of collective motivation matters, and whether or not it's beyond the aggregate of individual motivation, I've enjoyed thinking about it.

Here, I consider this key moment (Reitz, 2017) of collective motivation in the classroom as situated in a larger context through a lens of posthuman knowledge (Braidotti, 2019). As a result of my narrative-inspired thinking-through-theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Mazzei, 2014), I argue that collective motivation is a feature of posthuman subjectivity, and that we might generate new possibilities in our teaching by learning as assemblage (i.e., reimagining subjectivity). To elaborate, I weave together narrative and diagrammatical modes of thinking (Freeman, 2017), storytelling and description of my analytical process, to evoke questioning, namely using research to promote curiosity and inquiry, not simply to provide answers. Freeman (2017) outlines five different modes of thinking, of which categorical thinking—with its grounding in identification and grouping—might commonly be found structuring how knowledge is produced and disseminated; diagrammatical thinking, the realm of critical materialism and posthumanism, moves toward experimentation, materializing, and actualizing. I'm learning as I write and question, creating space for that learning to be shared, "where the riddles and problems posed as theoretical questions demand not answers but the modulation of new problems and new questions" (Mikulan, 2018, p. 98). I invite you to question with me.

Theoretical Perspectives

Literacy is generally framed within the research literature as being influenced by cognitive processes

and sociocultural factors. The highly influential National Reading Panel (NRP) Report (2000) has led to "science-based reading instruction" following what has come to be known as the big five: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The big five have been adopted as the target development areas across many schools' reading curricula, despite the report's Minority View offering valuable insight as to why the big five should be part of but not all of the curriculum. Those in the skills camp bring a positivist sensibility to tracing teacher efficacy, grading schools, and focusing on individual achievement at scale. Proponents of social approaches tend to associate with critical sociocultural research paradigms that call into question the "objective" research that determines funding and futures.

The omission of qualitative research set the stage for research/science/evidence-based literacy education to ignore sociocultural instructional strategies—including, perhaps, social constructs of motivation, as I elaborate in the next section. Unfortunately, this dominance is just one example of cognitive capitalism (Braidotti, 2019), wherein an approach or discipline draws more funding and is therefore positioned as being more important, or truer even. Further, the data-driven decision-making, used by governments and corporations alike, is part of contemporary human society. Denzin (2016) says of the current state of the world: "We live in the audit cultures of global neoliberalism" (p. 8). This audit culture shapes research (St. Pierre, 2011) and how it is enacted within the field of literacy education (Pressley, 2002). As a result, reading education and assessment are largely focused on the individual pursuit of skill development. However, the individual

> **"Reading education and assessment are largely focused on the individual pursuit of skill development. However, the individual human as the only knowing subject has been called into question, notably by posthumanism."**

human as the only knowing subject has been called into question, notably by posthumanism.

Posthumanism provides an opportunity to think about motivation outside the social/cognitive binary in literacy to suggest a new perspective on what occurred. Central to Braidotti's (2019) framing of posthuman knowledge is the *posthuman subject*. The posthuman subject is a dynamic assemblage of human and non-human actors, technologies, texts, etc. with "the power to affect and be affected" (p. 54). *Thinking* is not solely undertaken by an individual human, but instead by the assemblage. In other words, what thinks and learns is a subject consisting of a temporary collectivity that includes more than humans. Assemblage has similarly been defined specifically in literacy research: "the grouping of bodies (non-human and human) affecting and being affected in fluid composition" (Franklin-Phipps & Rath, 2018, p. 146). The concept of assemblage is central to how I am thinking and questioning.

Many researchers (Braidotti included) trace assemblage back to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who reframed, among other things, how we might envision literacy with this concept:

> We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed. (p. 4)

Here we begin to see the reader-text-assemblage (for example, Hargraves, 2018) not as close reading to search for essential meaning, but as experience.

Nail (2017) elaborates Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. All assemblages include the abstract machine—"the network of specific external relations that holds the elements together" (p. 24), "a kind of local condition of possibility" (p. 25); the concrete assemblage—"the existing embodiment of the assemblage" (p. 26), or human and non-human actors "becoming capable of different things" (p. 27); and their personae—"the mobile operators that connect the concrete elements together according to their abstract relations" that "are third-person (he, she, they) collective subjects of an indefinite event (one, everyone, anyone)" (p. 27). This fluid concept is taken up in literacy research as inviting expressions-to-come and a focus on futurity (Mazzei & Jackson, 2018) and for exploring racializing assemblages (Franklin-Phipps & Rath, 2018), among others. Nail (2017) makes the point that assemblage is about events, not essences: "if we want to know what something is, we cannot presume that what we see is the final product nor that this product is somehow independent of the network of social and historical processes to which it is connected" (p. 24). We therefore might think of research into these practices as being based on intuition, "understood as a mode of inquiry whereby problems are created and not repeated or 'ready-made'" (Mikulan, 2018, p. 97):

> It is not until a certain interaction or exchange among forces "interrupts," "gathers," or "invites" literacy to emerge that certain questions can be posed. The question of posthuman literacy should then not be the answer to an already posed problem. (Mikulan, 2018, p. 96)

Betty's account remained on my mind—an interruption that invited further thought. Recasting the story around an assemblage of students, texts, teacher, and places posed a new problem: motivation. Perhaps this was an instance of collective motivation toward expression beyond the limits of the curriculum. In any case, motivation tends to be part of the organized collective, or at least in how we retrospectively narrate its story.

While distinct from posthuman thinking, I am inclined toward narrative and storytelling as a vital way to understand the world because people story their world. Freeman (2017) writes, "It is this human capacity as narrators, and consumers, of stories that results in narrative thinking being so compelling an object of inquiry" (pp. 31-32). This key moment of storytelling lingered with me. Now I have retold it to you, and added (myself) to it: this story, this assemblage. Your entry now reconfigures the assemblage, now engaging in thinking about motivating readers.

A Little About Motivation

"Motivation" is "the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way"; or "the general desire or willingness of someone to do something" (Oxford Languages, 2022). Central to these definitions are the subjects "one" and "someone," suggesting that motivation is individually manifested and acted upon. Delving further into the literature on reader motivation, I found terms like "self-efficacy," and dichotomies like intrinsic/extrinsic or goal/process or emotion/cognition. Each of these has its roots in individuals. Some strands of research build on Bandura's (1977) work on self-efficacy and later Eccles' (1983) expectancy-value theory of motivation, which center perceptions of the self. Quirk (2005) provides a thorough overview of different models that emerged more recently, which suggest different lines of causality between skill development and motivation, but still center on the individual.

In an elaboration of an assessment of motivation to read, Malloy and colleagues (2013) describe motivation thusly:

> Students who are engaged have their eyes on what they are doing, are ardently attending to the teacher's read-aloud, or are in reflective repose as they read independently. Going deeper beneath these behavioral manifestations of their literacy engagement, students who are motivated to participate in literacy instruction are on task, cognitively and strategically engaged with the material, and perhaps affectively responding to the activity as well, enthusiastically sharing what they've read with their peers. (p. 273)

This social element is positioned following the uncertainty of a "perhaps," but we see layers of what might be impacting or emerging as signs of motivation. Looking to psychology, Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) noted: "motivated behavior in school results from a combination of student and situational characteristics" (p. 345). Likewise, from the journal *Child Development Perspectives*: "although motivation often is considered an individual variable or characteristic, social context and social relations affect students' motivation as well" (Wigfield et al., 2016, p. 191). Guthrie and Alao (1997) studied the principles of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction: (a) conceptual themes, (b) real-world interactions, (c) self-direction, (d) interesting texts, (e) social collaboration, (f) self-expression, (g) cognitive strategy instruction, and (h) curricular coherence. Social collaboration is present, yet the social construct also includes independent work as one of the structures and multiple other principles center the self. Across the research literature, the social connection to motivation is known, yet it seems understated. Interestingly, "In a path analysis, this social construct predicted reading motivation

more highly than did home literacy, cognitive strategies, and instructional variables" (Guthrie & Alao, 1997, p. 100). A safe conclusion is that motivation is complex and contains multiple constructs (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), though that may not be very helpful to the teacher seeking a means to improve motivation among her students.

Not all teachers read academic articles pertaining to motivation, so I wanted to see what information might be easily obtained. A popular site on teaching reading, Reading Rockets (WETA, 2022), has accessible information for teachers about reading motivation. Examples of what might drive motivation include curiosity, enjoyment, and challenge, among others (and a quote along the bottom of the page from Emily Dickinson that compares a book to a frigate no less!). Elsewhere, the site also mentions self-efficacy and self-concept as part of reading motivation (Gambrell & Marinak, 2009). Regarding discussion of social factors in motivation, Guthrie, Bennett, and McGough (1994) contribute:

> With the exception of Wentzel's (1989) work in the general motivation literature and in-depth case studies of adults' purposes and interests in reading (Gray & Rogers, 1956), the social goals for reading have been infrequently discussed. But social motivations seem essential for reading since students read in groups during instruction and share texts in many social situations. (Reading Rockets, n.p.)

I cautiously considered the date of publication here in light of decades of more literacy education research, but these references remain relevant enough for a popular literacy website. In any case, what I gathered from the research was also clear here: social factors, while essential, tend to be overlooked in favor of individual sources of motivation.

I speculate that this gap results from the complexity of measuring social factors involved in reading motivation: you can't easily research what you can't measure (a dark matter, of sorts). I can easily imagine asking a child if they think they are good readers and comparing it to one of the many reading assessments they take in school; however, identifying the extent to which group coherence drives their interest is a bit more challenging. I might comfortably conclude that motivation is complex, and it doesn't completely reside in the individual, as it would be a challenge to trace causality. Research suggests that high achievement on assessments can support motivation, but declining motivation is also tied to assessment results (Wigfield et al., 2016), so teachers will need to consider risk-reward when relying on assessments to drive motivation. Text choice and relevance; student goals and values; instructional activities; and many other factors can build motivation, but ultimately there isn't a universal answer for teachers.

From another perspective, I suggest that motivation is a feature of the collective. In other words, a collective will not form without a shared motivation or purpose. Thus, practically speaking, as a teacher, I may not be able to know how to increase motivation for each student, but what if I might inspire the formation of a collective, which will inherently be motivated? I will elaborate this more, but would first like to provide a bit more context for the story.

Local Context

Betty was a White, early career elementary teacher in A County, Georgia, working on her MA in Education and pursuing the Reading Endorsement. With a population of just over 100,000, A County had a 5.2% unemployment rate and 12.7% of the population lived in poverty, according to Betty's research into her teaching context. The 22-school district served 13,000 students and had risen from 70% to 80% graduation rate in the five years preceding. Significantly to Betty, the student population was 51% White and 43% Hispanic, and this suggests the regularity with which Betty would encounter ELL students. Students expected to learn real-world content from teachers who love to teach and wanted their school experience to be fun and filled with sports, clubs, and activities (perhaps a glimpse into their desires). Their parents expected that their children would be safe, and they wanted teachers who would communicate openly. Parents also expressed to Betty a desire for children to learn more than just academics—life and social skills as well—and they shared the kids' desire to have learning include real-world content, including for life-paths that didn't include college. I had asked Betty to seek out the opinions of families and the community as part of a course assignment because I believe schooling should be contextualized within these larger social webs.

Betty expressed a feeling that teaching was fundamentally driven by one's heart. Like many teachers, she described her work as a calling: "Teaching is part of my purpose. When I am in the classroom with my students, everything feels right in the world." This position aligns with Hartwick's (2015) finding that "for many, teaching is a way they fulfill a sense of Divinely-inspired mission for their life" (p. 130), which as we'll see, fits with Betty's theological stance. This calling parallels the White savior narrative present in many stories about teaching, yet as with its application historically around the world, saviorism can be truly problematic despite folks' best intentions. In line with the community expectations of a teacher, Betty noted

> **"This calling parallels the White savior narrative present in many stories about teaching, yet as with its application historically around the world, saviorism can be truly problematic despite folks' best intentions."**

that, "Being able to be a positive role model to my students is one of my greatest honors. I am an elementary school teacher, so I get to help my students learn how to love and care about each other." To underscore these points, she described teaching as "one of my greatest joys in life." In the time that I knew Betty, her stance never changed, and the stories she told of her vocation confirmed these claims.

Outside of teaching, Betty was a woman of faith. She described a "relationship and connection to Jesus [that] helps me daily to find joy and peace when everything around me is trying to pull me down." She also relied on music as her "therapy," and found connection to family through a shared passion for baseball—specifically, the Atlanta Braves. She found these outlets as a means to counter the negativity that surrounded her: "like almost everyone else in the world I have low self-confidence." Those lingering feelings of self-doubt and negativity were declining, no doubt due in part to her growth in her career. She was entering her second year of teaching and had shifted from third grade to second grade, and she wrote of her identity exploration:

> I have learned how well I know myself. I know that sounds ridiculous, but even up to last year...I did not know myself...How I view my identity now is as someone who can provide self-help and not need someone to figure out what I need. I am proud of the person I have become in the past year.

Her confidence coincided with her entry into the profession, and from all evidence there was a correlation between beginning a job she loved and knowing herself better. The centering of self throughout her rhetoric fits with a cultural construction of subjectivity—how we story our worlds—but throughout there are indicators of social

connection, community, and activities that incorporate tangible physical elements.

At the end of her first year of teaching third grade, Betty "truly believe[d] most of the students left my classroom loving books...Literacy is my favorite part of the day in my classroom!" She had many tools available to her to help her students. She mentioned learning about "their literacy strengths and weaknesses through daily small groups, reading instruction, MAP scores, DIBELS reports, and by talking to the paraprofessionals that came in my room." This repertoire of pedagogical resources tends to be vital to developing a positive literacy environment: explicit instruction, varied group sizes, multiple assessment data points, and the support of multiple adults. Drawing upon the expertise of the paraprofessionals in the classroom was a great collaborative approach to her first year of teaching, and also an indicator of how little is undertaken on one's own.

At first, this context was intended to help elaborate Betty's instructional situation and better position me and any readers to understand what had occurred. Reading through theory, however, positioned me to see the multiple ways in which one might construct a story of individuality despite the social features.

Methodological Notes

At the center of this project was a distinction Freeman (2017) made regarding poetical and diagrammatical modes of thinking: the resulting research is motivated by a desire to evoke, or even to provoke, not to describe and explain. Ultimately, I engaged in description here to trace the unfolding of my analysis, but at its heart, my project intended to inspire questioning more than to provide answers or understanding of a phenomenon. As Grumet (1981) noted of the problem of curriculum, I find parallels with a problem of research: "It is we who have learned

to offer answers rather than questions" (p. 122). I therefore hope to balance description of my thought process with room for a reader to engage in their own interpretation and application to their own context. I presented it somewhat narratively because I was storying the process: the becoming of my thinking, the lines of flight, the rhizomatic experiencing of learning as assemblage.

The process might be said to have begun when I conducted interviews in the Fall 2020 semester and collected coursework from across the 2020 academic semesters. Two important sources were Betty's introduction to her teaching context and her literacy autobiography. Per my IRB-approved design, participants were recruited by a third party. I then scheduled virtual interviews using Google Meet. The content of these reflective interviews (Roulston, 2010) formed the foundation of the research project. Betty continued in other courses with me the following semesters, so I made clear to her that her participation was voluntary and did not influence her standing in any courses. At this stage, we had developed good rapport and I am confident that I upheld my commitment to ethically navigate our situation—she continued to remain in contact with me over the next couple of years and never communicated otherwise.

Through interviews, I aimed to understand how educators perceive cognitive and sociocultural approaches to literacy education, and how that perception might impact their pedagogies—problems posed in advance that are not answered here, but led to the creation of new problems (Mikulan, 2018). Betty was participating in graduate

> **"Our engagements cut across domains and identities, and in many ways the binary of interviewer/interviewee is insufficient for understanding how we came together to co-produce knowledge, engage in learning, and otherwise interact with a variety of other human and non-human agents both geographically and temporally present and distant."**

coursework with me as an instructor, which at the time of the study took place in a virtual setting—as did the interviews. However, in my (re)thinking and analysis here, these interviews were not the exclusive domain of our interactions. More accurately, I might describe these as intra-actions (Barad, 2007). Our engagements cut across domains and identities, and in many ways the binary of interviewer/interviewee is insufficient for understanding how we came together to co-produce knowledge, engage in learning, and otherwise interact with a variety of other human and non-human agents both geographically and temporally present and distant. Throughout her participation across three semesters and through our conversations specifically related to this research, I gained a fairly good understanding of Betty through multiple perspectives.

I explored the data using inductive and deductive coding using Reitz's (2017) five-column coding of a key moment, narrative analysis (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995) to compose a story, and finally a diffractive analysis (Barad, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Taguchi, 2012). Mazzei (2014) described the process of diffractive analysis as one in which we "read...texts through, with, and in relation to each other to construct a process of thinking with the data and with the theory" (p. 744). This practice of thinking with theory blurred and reconfigured the binaries of a Western humanism, resulting in "multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). Namely, individual subjectivity emerged as a questionable assumption.

Subjectivity became complicated in my narrative, too. I wrote about Betty, who, in fact, took on the role of narrator and storyteller, creating a heteroglossic

story (Rosiek & Snyder, 2020) inclusive of a "constellation of voices" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 84): Betty's, her students, a disembodied administrative authority, mine. Of narrative research, Rosiek and Snyder (2020) suggest, "Agency instead emerges within the research process" (p. 1152). For example, the students were not part of my study, yet they became central to it, and my thinking revolved around what might be the best experience for young learners. The voice of the students shaped their learning, the teacher was fully engaged, and I heard and retold some of that story. Betty directly told me about the events that occurred, and then as our second interview continued, we kept returning to the Titanic references that dominated her classroom for the entire fall. From the various parts she told, I processed the story and thought about it, finally writing and revising it in this form here. I shared each of the narrative pieces—John's story and my description of Betty—with Betty for her feedback as I crafted them.

The assemblage shifts as I am taken in, at first a listener, then a re-composer and enunciator. As Nail (2017) describes, "an assemblage is a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole. If the elements of an assemblage are defined only by their external relations, then it is possible that they can be added, subtracted, and recombined with one another ad infinitum without ever creating or destroying an organic unity" (p. 23). My enunciation then subtracts some elements while inviting new ones in. Like Burke (2011), quite literally, this project is "a practice in elaborated/elaborate fiction" (p. 47). I don't understand fiction as untrue, as it quite often brings readers in contact with questions about the human condition despite being fabricated. Fiction grants me access to new ways of thinking about the world. As Freeman (2017) writes:

Without exposure to diverse conceptions of knowledge and truth, researchers run the risk of becoming deluded by their own worldview; believing it to be the one, and only, way to truth. To deepen our understanding of our own beliefs requires an awareness of those others. (p. 4)

Therefore, part of my process is the plugging in of an array of concepts. Each of these creates a new possible entry into the assemblage as I/you read, think, and question. I cannot trace all the influences: if this is a cartographic representation, I may omit the blades of grass to better represent the contours of the landscape. Or perhaps I cannot map the locations of dynamic components of the landscape, such as icebergs and glaciers.

Thinking and Questioning

Throughout this telling, I have drawn your attention to moments where individual motivation may not fully account for what occurred. I would like to elaborate a bit upon that here, and also consider what that might mean for teachers hoping to motivate students to read or engage in other ways. As Betty said:

Last year, I looked solely at each individual student, I'd never looked collectively last year, I looked at each student individually... so collectively, looking at them this year also has been huge, and I know has changed my teaching, and has definitely changed their learning... [Last year] it was all individual, which is powerful. I mean, you need to differentiate, definitely. But you can get too much into individualization if you aren't careful. I don't think my kids suffered last year, I think I was an okay teacher, but I think looking collectively is very important. And this year, just knowing that I'm doing that more, it makes me feel better as a teacher.

And I think it promotes more classroom community too... it's like a true family in here.

While she is not here to elaborate the ways in which her teaching has changed, I can pose some possibilities for further consideration.

Where do we get this idea that the individual is so powerful? I might start with narrative since I have made the point that I believe people story their world and thus are likely to borrow from familiar narrative structures. For example, the hero's journey primes us for understanding the world through the individual. We saw this in the way that I presented Betty's story about her calling to teach. In the hero's tale, the chosen one overcomes their trials and defeats the darkness. These heroes are preselected by birthright. We know now that preselection and destiny are not attributes of the assemblage.

But Betty isn't necessarily the hero of this story. Neither is John. This isn't to say both haven't been heroic (though I am still skeptical about the teacher-as-hero/savior narratives that are gifted to student teachers as they transition into a classroom of their own). The hero's journey offers a simplistic understanding of how events unfold and who played a role in them. It's easier casting for the screen, and perhaps a hero is easier for an audience to follow. One might argue that Han, Leia, and the Rebel Alliance had as much to do with it as Luke; Hermoine, Ron, a wand, and an owl as much as Harry; Morpheus, Trinity, Zion, and the matrix-of-things as much as Neo. Perhaps to better understand these collectivities, we need to reconstruct their motivations; for instance, Luke's motive was to defeat the darkness and free himself from his potential to fall, but the motive of the group was to defeat an oppressive fascist galactic state.

> **"One might argue that Han, Leia, and the Rebel Alliance had as much to do with it as Luke; Hermoine, Ron, a wand, and an owl as much as Harry; Morpheus, Trinity, Zion, and the matrix-of-things as much as Neo."**

What becomes possible when we reframe motivations toward those of collectivities?

Posthuman knowledge (Braidotti, 2019) offers an additional layer of understanding because collective motivation just might be a feature of posthuman subjectivity. In other words, the assemblage acts together for a reason, thus inherently has a purpose. I cannot think of a collectivity without a purpose, but that's not to say a purpose is static and universal among participants. While not an ideal example, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, one contemporary example of a collective, requires a purpose and they shall only pursue actions in furtherance of that purpose (IRS, 2022). A perhaps lesser known example of an organization—but one that strikes me as more posthuman—is the decentralized autonomous organization (DAO), which is also organized around a purpose outlined in the rules of an Ethereum-based smart contract (Ethereum, 2022). A purpose is a starting point, bringing the collective together and driving its actions, but it is fluid; the rhizome is not reliant on the initial point of entry to continue. For me, the concept of the assemblage reconfigures the idea of collective motivation around a new, inclusive subjectivity, resulting in my rethinking of motivation as an integral part of posthuman subjectivity. Motivation is not necessarily something to be taught or fostered or provided. Rather, it is inherent. Maybe then, the question is not *how do I motivate my students?* but *how can my classroom inspire self-organization into a collective?*

Looking at Betty's account of the events that followed, perhaps the teacher isn't always meant to be the catalyst: "[John] pulled everybody in. And then once they were pulled in, all their personalities came

out... I've never seen a group of students so engaged in something, and they're still hung up on it." Betty described the students bringing their strengths to learning about different features of the Titanic, then being quizzed by the principal and putting their knowledge on display. Was John the catalyst then? Or the content? Does it matter? For teachers who might want to replicate these outcomes, it does. The collective engaged in the event of learning in multiple ways.

For me, this insight that the assemblage could be the learning subject was an epiphany. It leads to questions like, *how do we shape our curriculum around organic emergence?* or *what does assessment look like when learning is the assemblage?* Striving to cultivate learning-as-collectives in our instructional spaces might generate new possibilities.

Another part of this story is the context of schooling in the US. As I mentioned, the NRP Report had shaped policy even though it problematically "limited its focus to true experiments...and quasi-experiments" (Pressley, 2002, p. 166). The current state of schools is shaped by policy, and policy is entangled with data produced from large-scale, standardized assessments of individuals and software designed by for-profit education companies. The positivist inclinations of both policymakers and the cognitivist camp of literacy education align with the individual as the assessable subject position. On the other hand, the social approaches to pedagogy that value students and their communities also ask educators to adapt to the context of the students' lives, providing an appealing axiological position by comparison, but not one that can be easily measured and thus it remains the minor paradigm. Therefore, reading development and the many factors that produce motivated, engaged, enthusiastic readers (and learners for that matter) are manifested in the curriculum (both in K-12 education and teacher

preparation) as residing within the cognitive processes of the individual learner—a reified subject position so dominant as to obscure others, much like the surface of the ocean conceals most of an iceberg.

Contrarily, the questions I am asking seem to point away from skills-based literacy instruction and large-scale assessment based solely on cognitive skills. Working on specific skills, like phonics development, can certainly help some learners, but is predicated by an assumed pathway through reading development. It is certain and deterministic—antithetical to posthuman thinking—which means it excludes and pushes some students to the margins. These very students are the ones who flourished in the context of the learning assemblage in my story about Betty and John's experience.

Braidotti (2019) leads me to reconsider the standard framework of education in which all students are measured individually for their competence. The students in Betty's class engaged in different ways. The student who "roped them into it"—Betty's words—isn't getting a better grade for motivating everyone. None of what happened is measurable in any traditional way; this whole situation doesn't meet a standard, and the students didn't necessarily do better on state tests because of it. But they all loved getting roped into it. One of Betty's reflections provides some insight here:

> Last year, they were too dependent on me, they would look to me, but now, like, if they're having trouble logging on to a website, they ask someone next to them first, which I love, because they have to learn to be problem solvers. And that's the collective right there.

Individual-based learning may continue to situate the teacher-as-authority, whereas a collective approach may better promote peers as knowledgeable. They

became a rope, perhaps stronger in their entangled state than on their own.

Shifting course a bit, I'd like to share another thought about text selection as a means to motivate readers. A wider move toward inclusion and representation has led many educators to select texts that are culturally relevant, an act that I support. But I also critique the practice as potentially one that reaffirms dominant narratives from the perspective of someone "inside" an Othered culture (McCarthy, 2020). Jarvie (2021), similarly cautious, offers an alternative to relevance, which I find intriguing and promising: resonance. He argues that "identifying a text as relevant often works from a place of assumption, made by both teachers and students" (Jarvie, 2021, p. 13) and hopes to challenge this practice, not to end it. I wonder if resonance is something that can be predicted: he describes his experience as one in which resonance recurred after the reading. Resonance certainly is another way to understand how the group of students became so engaged. That a single text could resonate with the whole class—which is how Betty described it—seems fortunate, maybe even unlikely. I am not discounting the concept of resonance. In fact, I really love it, but it does not sufficiently explain how so many students were engaged. *Is resonance an outcome of engagement rather than a predictor? Therefore, can collective engagement create resonance?* Looking again to Deleuze (1994), "that which can only be sensed... moves the soul, 'perplexes it'—in other words, forces it to pose a problem" (p. 140). This posing of problems can drive inquiry, and perhaps engagement, resonance. Schooling often seems like it prefers students demonstrate mastery rather than being perplexed.

> **"Schooling often seems like it prefers students demonstrate mastery rather than being perplexed... Reimagining our work outside the normative evaluation of all humans as individuals meant to meet that same standards allows us to open possibilities."**

In terms of educational significance, I hope for this analysis to provide other teachers with insight into their own practice, using story to "theorize an interdependent relation between the particularities of human existence and the general condition of being human" (Freeman, 2017, p. 37)—or the general condition of being a teacher. Until we encounter different ideas, we are unlikely to understand them as possible. In this case, I hope to introduce the idea of collective motivation as an example of learning undertaken by a complex assemblage, a collectivity. The question that lingers with me still: *is an authentic emergence of a collectivity replicable?* I want to believe it is, and I'll keep trying. Also, I suggest here that this learning cannot and should not be assessed individually. Perhaps Gottlieb's (2016) distinction between assessments *as*, *for*, and *of* learning can help: I might strive to learn about my students and their learning, not evaluate their performance of a standard.

How and what we teach and assess creates and excludes possibility. In *Teaching Against the Grain*, in which Simon (1992) explains, "forms of power and legitimation in schools structure a field of possibilities and regulate actual behaviors" (p. 10). Reimagining our work outside the normative evaluation of all humans as individuals meant to meet that same standards allows us to open possibilities. Simon (1992) later asks, "what are the desired versions of a future human community implied in the pedagogy in which one is implicated?" (p. 15). I am thinking through this question and I intend this project as an entry point for other educators to do the same. Perhaps the ideas I've considered here—that individual motivation is insufficient to explain what occurred in the story; inherent motivation belongs to collective

subjectivities like assemblages; deterministic curriculum and individual assessment do not support learning as collective; students viewing one another as knowledgeable is vital; and that striving for resonance may mean looking for questions, not answers—can help new puzzles emerge that perplex us and motivate us to collectively reconfigure the experience of learning.

References

Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. T. (2011). *Change(d) agents: New teachers of color in urban schools*. Teachers College Press.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

Barad, K. (2014). Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, *20*(3), 168–187. doi: 10.1080/13534645.2014.927623

Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman knowledge*. Polity Books.

Burke, K. J. (2011). *Masculinities and other hopeless causes at an all-boys Catholic school*. Peter Lang.

Corson, D. (2001). *Language, diversity, and education*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition*. Columbia University Press.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*.

Denzin, N. K. (2016). Critical qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *23*(1), 8-16.

Eccles, J. (1983). Expectancies, values and academic behaviors. In J. T. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives: Psychological and sociological approaches* (pp. 75-146). W. H. Freeman.

Ethereum. (2022). Decentralized autonomous organizations (DAOs). Retrieved on 17 Feb, 2022 from https://ethereum.org/en/dao/

Franklin-Phipps, A., & Rath, C. L. (2018). Collage pedagogy: Toward a posthuman racial literacy. In C. R. Kuby, K. Spector, & J. J. Thiel (Eds.), *Posthumanism and literacy education* (pp. 142-155). Routledge.

Freeman, M. (2017). *Modes of thinking for qualitative data analysis*. Routledge.

Gottlieb, M. H. (2016). *Assessing English language learners: Bridges to academic achievement* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.

Grumet, M. R. (1981). Restitution and reconstruction of educational experience: an autobiographical method for curriculum theory. In M. Lawn & L. Barton (Eds.), *Rethinking curriculum studies: A radical approach* (pp. 115–130). Croom Helm.

Guthrie, J. T., & Alao, S. (1997). Designing contexts to increase motivations for reading. *Educational Psychologist*, *32*, 95-105.

Guthrie, J. T., Bennett, L., & McGough, K. (Winter, 1994). Concept-oriented reading instruction: An integrated curriculum to develop motivations and strategies for reading. Reading Research Report No. 10. *National Reading Research Center: University of Georgia and University of Maryland*. Retrieved on 17 Feb, 2022 from https://www.readingrockets.org/article/motivations-reading

Hargraves, V. (2018). The posthuman condition of ethics in early childhood literacy: Order-in(g) be(e)ing literacy. In C. R. Kuby, K. Spector, & J. J. Thiel (Eds.), *Posthumanism and Literacy Education* (pp. 187-200). Routledge.

Hartwick, J. M. (2015). Public school teachers' beliefs in and conceptions of God: What teachers believe, and why it matters. *Religion & Education, 42*(2), 122-146.

Internal Revenue Service. (2022). Organizational Test - Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). Retrieved on 17 Feb, 2022 from https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/organizational-test-internal-revenue-code-section-501c3

Kim, J.-H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry*. SAGE.

Malloy, J. A., Marinak, B. A., Gambrell, L. B., & Mazzoni, S. A. (2013). Assessing motivation to read: The motivation to read profile–revised. *The Reading Teacher, 67*(4), 273-282.

Mazzei, L. A. (2014). Beyond an easy sense: A diffractive analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(6), 742-746.

Mazzei, L. A., & Jackson, A. Y. (2018). Posthuman literacies in a minor language: Expressions-to-come. In C. R. Kuby, K. Spector, & J. J. Thiel (Eds.), *Posthumanism and literacy education: Knowing/becoming/doing literacies* (pp. 170-174). Routledge.

McCarthy, M. D. (2020). Othering authors in the name of authenticity: Critiquing colonialism with *The Arab of the Future. Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature, 58*(4), 22-30. DOI: 10.1353/bkb.2020.0066

Mikulan, P. (2018). Étienne Souriau and educational literacy research as an instaurative event. In C. R. Kuby, K. Spector, & J. J. Thiel (Eds.), *Posthumanism and literacy education* (pp. 95-107). Routledge.

Nail, T. (2017). What is an Assemblage?. *SubStance, 46*(1), 21-37.

National Reading Panel (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* NICHD Clearinghouse.

Oxford Languages. (2022). Motivation definition. Searched using Google on 17 Feb, 2022.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher, 41*(3), 93-97.

Pressley, M. (2002). Effective beginning reading instruction. *Journal of Literacy Research, 34*(2), 165-188. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s15548430jlr3402_3.

Quirk, M. P. (2005). The development of reading fluency and motivation to read : An examination of the causal relationship [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia]. Retrieved from https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/quirk_matthew_p_200508_phd

Reitz, M. (2017). Analyzing and communicating action research data: Practical approaches to conveying the quality and texture of experience. *Action Research*, *15*(4), 424-440.

Rosiek, J. L., & Snyder, J. (2020). Narrative inquiry and new materialism: Stories as (not necessarily benign) agents. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *26*(10), 1151-1162.

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*. SAGE Publications.

Simon, R. I. (1992). *Teaching against the grain: Texts for a pedagogy of possibility*. Bergin & Garvey.

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *21*(4), 360–407.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2011). Post-Qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.) (pp. 611-625). SAGE Publications.

Taguchi, H. L. (2012). A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analysing interview data. *Feminist Theory*, *13*(3), 265-281.

Urdan, T., & Schoenfelder, E. (2006). Classroom effects on student motivation: Goal structures, social relationships, and competence beliefs. *Journal of School Psychology*, *44*(5), 331-349.

WETA Public Broadcasting. (2022). Reading rockets. Retrieved on 17 Feb, 2022 from https://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-motivation-what-research-says

Wigfield, A., Gladstone, J. R., & Turci, L. (2016). Beyond Cognition: Reading Motivation and Reading Comprehension. *Child Development Perspectives*, *10*(3), 190–195. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12184

Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth or their reading. *Journal of educational psychology*, *89*(3), 420.