

# INTERLUDE

ON THE CRITICAL ART OF INQUIRY



fig. 01.06 Light table 'Crystalline' explorations

## CRITICAL ART OF INQUIRY

“The way of the craftsman...is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practice and observational engagements with other beings and things around us. This is a practice what I would call an art of inquiry” (Ingold 2013, p.6)

The research methods enacted through the proposed tactical approach, involve significant photographic and moving image based documentation. This captures the meaning making of young learners parallel with teacher reflections formed throughout professional learning experiences facilitated by myself.

The tactics proposed below in a collection of booklets suggest a multimodal methodology by applying a range of modalities to make meaning of the practice based research findings.

The primary research site was situated in Delft, The Netherlands with further occurrences taking place in Utrecht, The Netherlands, Sheffield, UK and Luxembourg.

International School Delft provides an inquiry framework of learning through the Primary Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate.

The International Baccalaureate has an underlying educational philosophy aspiring to create a global community with the shared value of

international mindedness. The school community comprises of families from diverse international histories including visiting academics from the Technical University of Delft to parents working within multinational corporations. The actual research subjects within the school belong to a mixed age class, named Group 7/8, of 11 children aged between 10 and 12 years of age- They represent, often bilingual families from over ten different nationalities. There are seven males and four females in class. The primary learning space is of moderate size within two opposing gazed walls. There is flexible seating and desk arrangements which are modified regularly to support inclusive learning. Walls and windows hold captured learning artefacts which are curated with the conceptual understandings and lines of inquiry that the class follows. There is no specific teacher desk.

Whilst the site cannot be specifically said to exist in a ‘post-digital’ school as the above section proposes, the majority of research took place in what could be described as a post-digital classroom or learning space, stitched with the threads of the theoretical framework alluded to in, The ‘Post-Digital School’.

#critical making  
#curriculum  
#digital  
#inquiry  
#making  
#multimodal  
#network  
#tactics

## SIDE NOTE

The young learners of group 7/8 were brought together in 2018-2019 with diverse experiences of inquiry learning pedagogy and experience of having independence in their learning. Curriculum prior to joining International School Delft include: British, Indian, Spanish curricula and homeschooling.

Therefore the post-digital tactics in this thesis are suggested as a means of navigating and unfolding the layers of learning within school institutions and systems through a cycling methodology of critical inquiry, as Ingold (2013) suggests, "to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practice and observational engagements with other beings and things around us."

The following vignette highlights the pathways of inquiry whilst capturing the tactics employed, intertwined between the shifts and drifts of student curiosity, directions and impulses. The critical art of inquiry is woven into learning by the threads of this tactical approach albeit delicately, like the network of voices. Each thread depends on the other.

The learning experiences contained within this vignette took place in the research site described above.

This inquiry into how humans express themselves through writing poetry and song lyrics began with the provocation of the song *Crystalline*, written and performed by Icelandic singer, composer and DJ, Björk Guðmundsdóttir. *Crystalline* is taken from the album, *Biophilia*, a body of work which sought to inspire children to explore their creativity through working between the disciplines of science, nature and music.



fig. 01.02 *Crystalline* Collaborative line drawing expressing inner & outer emotions

# CRYSTALLINE

**Vignette:** Crystalline by Björk- a **Comparative study**  
**Inquiry:** Humans express themselves through writing poetry and song lyrics.

As a provocation to launch their inquiries into how humans express themselves through writing poetry and song lyrics, Group 7/8 listened to Crystalline written and performed by Björk.

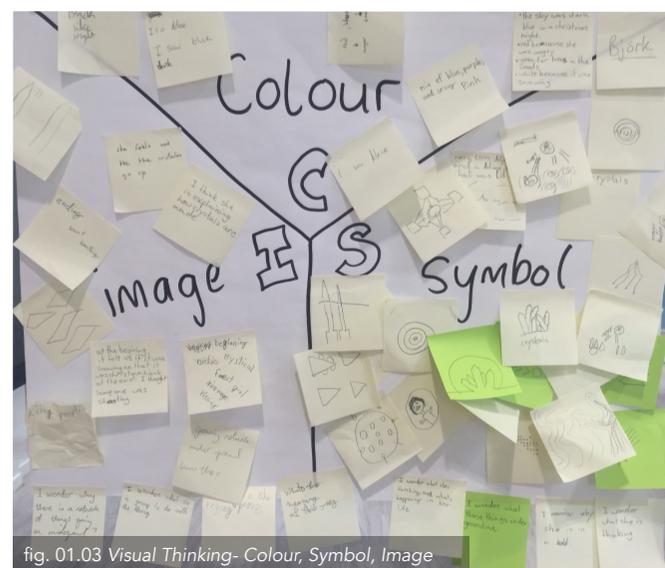
Björk's moving image/ animation video and music provided a backdrop to a discussion centred around Björk's intentions and feelings whilst composing the piece. Students analysed the lyrics and initial thoughts were captured through a visible thinking routine where learners responded to the provocation by analysing the colour choices made in the music animation/video highlighting any key images and symbols observed. The thinking routine provided a framework for thinking about the song and video in an alternative mode.

In the ensuing discussion learners grappled with complex, abstract systems and structures through exploring their ideas together with the materials provided. They were invited to pose questions to further their inquiries and through this dialogue opened up further insights and meaning,

structuring the initial directions of the inquiry.

The line drawing above (fig. 01.02) was created as a direct response to connections uncovered between inner and outer emotions. Children interpreted the song, Crystalline as an expression of these emotions, often inwardly dark, hidden and dwelling but manifested as colourful crystals growing outwardly.

Between the initial inner black line drawing and outward colour drawing was a period of around two weeks of inquiries to further uncover understandings of symbolism, imagery and personal expression, detailed below.



Evident from fig. 01.03 the symbols observed were geometric, crystal type structures.

■ mapping

■ situational reflection

embodied learning

Through this imagery the children began create short stop-motion animations to further their initial use of descriptive language connected within their collaborative observations.

Wonders were captured below:

***I wonder what Björk is thinking and what is happening in her life?***

***I wonder what those things are underground?***

***I wonder what Björk is trying to prove?***

The framing of visual language supported an initial collaborative understanding of figurative language.

We asked the question; what would it feel like to be inside a crystal? Having drawn on the notion of emotions dwelling within, often hidden and growing outward, we wondered what this would actually look like from within. Zooming in from a macro perspective to a microscopic viewpoint the group was challenged to create three dimensional structures that would be big enough to sit inside. Following initial experimentation with art straws they created a larger idea of a crystal structure. During the construction there was a negotiation of movement and bodies as individuals moved within the confines of both spatial and material restrictions. Material choices were restricted to eight, long bamboo canes and masking tape



fig. 01.04 Crystal Building Structure

## #multimodal

## ■ positioning

and, whilst complete freedom was given to the group to interpret the open-ended task thoughts of inward and outward emotions were kept close to mind.

As an outside observer it became apparent that as children worked together they moved around each other's bodies, sharing materials, discussing and suggesting ideas. Working within the confines of a three dimensional structure, their inner emotions were manifested through restricted movement appearing hidden and guarded whereas outside the frame there was a greater expressive freedom of movement and space.

## ■ materiality

## ■ situational reflection

The crystalline structure became the sculptural, community reflective space of the library...

On completion of the structure the decision was made to cover the faces in coloured transparent foil to create the effect of the faces of a crystal. Sitting inside, your outward views are coloured or filtered and due to the confines of the space, time is created for reflection.

The crystalline structure became the sculptural, community reflective space of the library where individuals or small groups spontaneously chose to sit, read and write

together. Further into the inquiries the crystal contained poetry, written and remixed during the course of the explorations, suspended within, as a form of embodiment of the emotions that are ever present inside us. This had a deep connection to ideas initially presented by Björk in both song lyrics and her music video.

Continuing the idea of emotions being above and below the surface, we created a single line drawing in a colour of choice. The objective was to draw freely on the paper whilst being conscious of others around you. Trying to draw in a continuous flow without inhibiting thoughts.

The line drawing was then covered completely with black sand, each child then prompted to draw freely with their finger being mindful of the movement of others.

The drawing was completed whilst responding to the song Crystalline.

The resulting sand drawing revealed the lines beneath. A metaphor for previous discussions around emotions

## #remix

## ■ open - space - disrupt

## SOUND SCORE

We then asked, what if the art work became the score to a piece of music?

How would the music sound?

A resulting soundscape was captured in a spontaneous performance with music created in a web based music lab.

The meaning of the original illustration was reimagined as a music score and hence modality shifted from a drawn response to a digital music score. The musical response to the drawing, created space for different emotional interaction to manifest, where the sounds became the emotions embodied in the score.

Each individual interpretation of the score mirrored personal characteristics of each student. The assemblage of these expressions fused together in an orchestration of collective emotions.



fig. 01.05 Community exploration of line drawing

The explorations contained within this vignette are the woven threads of a tactical approach to the critical art of inquiry which grew through listening to the voices and movements of each individual.

Aside from the initial provocation of Crystalline both in image and music, all experiments blossomed from detailed observations of ripples in feelings which responded to the subtle ruptures in time and space.

“ The idea of dissensus enables an understanding of (the) art (of inquiry) as a space of difference, a rupture in the settled norms of everyday life.” (Rowell & Shillitoe, 2019)

In this example, the settled norms being learning habits, pre-planned curriculum, school routines and teacher centred classrooms.

Observation of senses and feelings, “...is where affect, embodiment and senses undergird the process. It is the act of craft and making across digital and nondigital texts, objects and artifacts that ignites senses, emotions and affect.” (Rowell & Shillitoe, 2019)

Therefore, the proposed tactics, born out this practice based research directly respond to these acts of making. In each case, they could be termed, ‘ways of listening’ - a tactical approach to critically making of learning and curriculum.

If critical making encompasses any practice between making and criticality then, the following expressions of each tactic share this common line, highlighting how thinking unfolds for the co-makers of learning and curriculum.