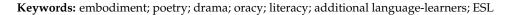*Article*

Poetry and Motion: Rhythm, Rhyme and Embodiment as Oral Literacy Pedagogy for Young Additional Language Learners

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Abstract: Literacy pedagogy that integrates oracy, poetry and embodiment can foster children's language development in multiple ways: (1) oracy is foundational to children's emergent literacy as writing extends from oral language, (2) poetry uses rhythm and rhyme to support letter-recognition and the learning of phonemes and morphemes, (3) embodiment and roleplay provide semiotic support and opportunities for expressive and receptive communication. This article shares findings from a phenomenological case study investigating how literacy pedagogy that integrated oracy, poetry and embodiment impacted three additional language students aged 6. A series of weekly literacy classes in a school in Sydney's multicultural western region were observed and recorded on video. This instrument was able to capture 'micro-moments' of learning between peers, depicting how physicalisation and the use of rhythm and rhyme effectively engaged students whose first language was not used in the classroom. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to data analysis, case study findings revealed that embodied explorations of poetry immersed participants socially and imaginatively whilst pushing them beyond their additional language comfort zone. The pedagogy was also shown to increase comprehension and support the acquisition of new vocabulary.

Keywords: embodiment; poetry; drama; oracy; literacy; additional language-learners; ESL

1. Introduction

The increasing diversity amongst students in modern classrooms is productively compelling innovation on the part of literacy teachers. Recognising the need for more culturally inclusive approaches, many educators are turning to arts-based methods to help teach language and linguistic concepts [1,2]. This is due to the playfulness and accessibility of arts methods helping to motivate language production for diverse student populations. The use of drama and physical enactment to activate children's linguistic and cognitive resources is a recent augmentation that shows promising results, especially for additional language learners [1–6]. Combining these drama approaches with poetry and music-based strategies focusing on rhythm, rhyme and syllabic rehearsal enables children to engage with texts on multiple cognitive levels [7,8]. This is supported by increasing neurological evidence linking early capabilities in beat and rhythm perception with children's later language outcomes [7,9,10].

This article reports on the significance for additional language learners when poetry and embodiment were incorporated into classroom literacy learning. Inquiry was framed around the following questions:

(1) What do additional language learners experience during a drama-based literacy session employing poetry, oracy and embodiment?
(2) In what ways do these experiences conform to relevant theories of literacy and additional language pedagogy?
(3) How does the use of embodied literacy approaches impact student engagement?

Findings from this study revealed that integrating poetry and embodiment meaningfully recruited children's social semiotic capacities and created repeated opportunities for

rhythm perception and phonemic recognition. This article describes the research conducted and shares an excerpted vignette as a demonstration of findings. Discussion links the experiences observed with future directions and possibilities in the realms of literacy and language.

1.1. Informing Theories of Language and Learning

Multimodal and sociocultural language theories provided the overarching frameworks used to draw theoretical links during this study. Multimodality is a conception of language influentially propagated by Kress [11]. Emerging from his work with the New London Group and multiliteracies [12], multimodal language theory proposes that globalisation and the audio-visual influence of the internet have generated a move in linguistics away from authoritarian rules of grammar towards the more inclusive domain of semiotics. Kress conceives that ideas and information are communicated through multiple, often synchronous, modes or 'ensembles of meaning'. These modes may be visual, aural, gestural, textual or graphic, and each has its own unique affordances [11]. Students' use of embodiment to represent objects, characters and emotions featured in poetic texts can provide a supplementary mode to help with text comprehension for additional language learners. Sociocultural theory stems from the work of Vygotsky [13], recognising that learning happens not only inside the mind of an individual but also in and through their environment. Conversations and interactions with peers are tools for learning, just as teachers, books and devices are. Sociocultural language pedagogy purposefully designs co-operative learning experiences that include frequent group work and encourage peer-to-peer conversations [14]. As Atkinson [6] argues, effective language acquisition features a combination of interaction, embodiment and positive affect. Drama-based approaches also feature these elements and can allow English as additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students to learn with and from peers in dynamically engaging contexts. Students' desire to perform the results of their collaborations is a persuasive influence on additional language learners, coaxing more reluctant speakers to share in front of their classmates.

1.2. Hermeneutic Phenomenology; Participatory, Embodied and Poetic

Given the young age and language-minoritised status of the participants, a phenomenological research approach was chosen. Quantitative measures of language output were consciously rejected as the use of empirical instruments in data gathering often results in minority students being cast through a deficit lens [15]. Capturing and comparing how participants perform in relation to mainstream language peers necessarily depicts them in terms of what they cannot do. Having worked closely with EAL/D students for many years, the researcher was motivated to depict a holistic representation of the young people involved. Research has highlighted the importance of honouring participant voices when conducting studies with marginalised populations [16,17]. In additional language contexts, the inherent power imbalances of teacher-student or researcher-participant can be exacerbated. Such contexts therefore necessitate added critical reflections on the part of the researcher to avoid unintended diminishment or misrepresentation of individuals taking part [18]. Accordingly, this case study has been informed by a hermeneutic phenomenological lens to ensure that the children, their personalities and lived-experiences, would remain central during processes of data gathering and analysis.

Hermeneutic phenomenology explicitly recognizes the influence of the researcher and has a heightened interest in the physical aspects of human experience. These reflexive and embodied characteristics were seen to align with exploration of embodied pedagogy and EAL/D students. Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analysis also helped to address power inequities by engaging the researcher in 'hermeneutic spirals' of reflexive consideration, moving from parts to whole and back again, in a process explicitly understood as subjective [19]. A key proposition of hermeneutic phenomenology is 'Dasein' or 'being in the world' which positions the observer, not as consciousness perceiving, but as consciousness existing-in-relation-to [20,21]. This concept casts researchers in intersubjec-

tive relationship with participants. This is a perspective that supports classroom research being conducted alongside teachers and students, as opposed to observations being made from a 'neutral' distance. Hermeneutic phenomenology also embraces creative language as a form of knowing [22], making it well-suited to inquiry around poetry and narratives. Drawing on these influences, this case study used poetic and creative writing as part of the analytical process and sought to evoke rather than explain lived experience. This is in keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenology approach of "turning the reading of the research into an experience itself" [23] p. 29.

1.3. Poetry, Rhyme and Learning to Speak and Read

The teaching observed in this study used embodied explorations of rhymed stories and poems to develop student literacy. Exposure to the rhythmic and rhyming language found in songs and poems is substantively linked to increases in children's overall phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge [24–27]. Frequent guided interactions with poetry and rhymed picture books help sensitise young children to language and literacy concepts, priming them for reading and writing [28]. Poems are often filled with vivid images and metaphors helping beginning readers to connect their physical senses with the ideas and objects the language refers to [8].

The study of poetry encourages creativity and divergent thought processes through playful exploration of language, words and meaning. In contrast to synthetic phonics, or programmes which focus on decontextualised phonic recognition and rehearsal only, poetry helps children identify phonemic patterns by observing their use in meaning-laden contexts. Poems and rhyming texts also encourage children to chant and recite in unison with reading. This form of oral rehearsal has been shown to positively impact language proficiency [25]. The repeated prosodic reading and oral recital that poems encourage make them ideal texts for advancing the fluency and phonemic skills of struggling readers [29]. Learning about poetic techniques such as rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm and meter can scaffold children's early interactions with language and reading by helping them identify patterns within and across texts [30]. Initiating children in joyful and communal recital of texts also encourages them to perceive of reading as a pleasurable, shared activity that is not limited to silent, solitary experiences [31].

For additional language learners, repeated oral recitation can provide valuable rehearsal of new vocabulary. The emphatic patterning and musicality of rhymes and poems can support remembering novel sentence structures. Enriching poetic approaches with objects such as props and puppets can encourage language-learner students to create performances of poems as a form of linguistic free play [32]. Students observed during this research were often seen to use performance and dramatic recreation as opportunities for oral language rehearsal. Confidence and affect are also significant factors in successful language acquisition [33,34]. The study observed that choral rehearsal and recital allowed a building of confidence in oracy with the playful, collaborative qualities of drama pedagogy creating a positive affective environment.

1.4. Singing and Language Development

Songs have a particular significance in the language learning context. Each of the classes observed in this study began with a programme of singing-as-literacy. Teaching approaches that include more frequent use of songs, chanting and rhythm-based games have clear implications for the development of students' auditory perception and receptive communication skills. Accordingly, the integration of music with literacy pedagogy is gaining traction in the educational landscape [35]. Research has linked interventions using the musical concept of audiation, or the deliberate skipping of notes in a song, to progress listening and pronunciation skills for English as additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students [10]. Rhythm-based interventions have also been shown to foster improvement in children's phonological awareness [7]. Songs and poems combine musical concepts with

storytelling and give children concrete sensory tools—their voices, eyes and ears—to learn about language and the world around them.

1.5. Drama as Embodied Literacy Pedagogy

Drama pedagogies emphasise the body as a tool for learning and communication. Significant research situates learners' bodies as crucial meeting points of emotion, senses, intuition and cognition [36–39]. Ways in which our bodies engage in the writing process have been theorised from various perspectives, with speech and oral language garnering particular interest [36]. Purposeful and well-structured classroom dialogue has been shown to have profound effects on cognitive development [40,41], with oracy often described as the bedrock of written literacy [42–44]. Drama has a unique ability to encourage oracy through imaginative, improvised and exploratory talk. Drama-based approaches have been clearly connected to progressions in student literacy [1,45–50]. Drama also effectively recruits the body as an alternate mode of communication and its pedagogical strategies have great usefulness for additional language learners [1,5,51].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design: Interpretive Case-Study

The research was designed as an interpretive case-study. This decision was based on available resources but was also a philosophical choice. An interpretive lens is one primed towards nuance and social complexity, as found in classrooms. This method entails thick description and can account for multiple subjective perspectives on a single phenomenon [52,53]. A key advantage of case study in educational research is its capacity to observe events in a close to naturalistic setting. Aiming to explore literacy pedagogy within a 'real-life context' [54], this design enabled observation of participants during regular literacy lessons, recording their teacher's use of poetry and embodiment to teach concepts of language.

The study took place in a small Catholic primary school with 164 students and 16 full time teachers. Despite being located in a traditionally low socio-economic suburb of Western Sydney, the area is undergoing a process of gentrification. Census data revealed a jump from 19% of the local population being employed as professionals in 2011, to 26% in 2016 [55]. Within this community, a majority of adults are educated to at least high-school levels, giving the school an index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) slightly above the national average [56]. Although this is a Catholic systemic school with a public chapel located on its grounds, school leadership confirmed that a majority of its students are Hindu. Accordingly, the school promotes an openness toward other faiths and proudly celebrates its diversity. Public records from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [56] revealed that 47% of the school were from additional language backgrounds, however the school has no full-time EAL/D specialist on its campus.

The research involved 4 participants, 3 students and 1 teacher. Students were selected from an early primary class comprised of 6- and 7-year-old children from various language and cultural backgrounds including India, China, Lebanon, the Philippines and West Africa. Although most students' families had recently migrated to Australia, only a small number of parents described themselves as always speaking a language other than English in the home. The 3 children selected were identified by their teacher based on their reluctance to speak in English in front of the class. One of the children had very recently migrated from China, another's family had moved to Australia from West Africa, and the third was originally born in India. The students were all 6-year-old girls who embodied a range of progressions in English. The participating classroom teacher was highly experienced, having worked in primary schools for 25 years. The teacher was approached to be part of the study as she was identified by the researcher in a previous professional capacity as having a natural aptitude for working with embodiment and drama.

The teaching methods being observed resulted from a year-long embedded professional development in the use of drama as literacy pedagogy. The strategies employed

included students miming and creating frozen pictures with their bodies, choral reading, singing, improvised in-role responses, and co-construction of a class poem supported by clapping and beat recognition. Activities centred around two picture books over the course of the term. First was *The Spider and the Fly* by Mary Howitt [57], an extended poem about a spider who tries to coax an unwitting fly into its web. The second was *Hey, Little Ant* by Phillip and Hannah Hoose [58], a poem and song about a boy about to squash an ant on the pavement when suddenly the ant starts pleading for its life. The little creature gives the boy all the reasons why he should let him live. The boy counters with all the reasons why he should squash it. The song ends by asking the children to decide if the ant should live or not.

The Spider and the Fly poem created several opportunities for students to physicalize unusual vocabulary and infer emotional states by recreating characters' body language. Creating a whole class poem about an Icky Sticky Spider allowed students to identify rhyming morphemes and phonemes during composition, and then to embody their chosen words. *Hey, Little Ant* became a vehicle for students to work in pairs, learning a couplet of lines and creating physical actions to go with them. These were then shared as part of a whole class performance. They also chose which side of the moral dilemma they stood for—to squash or to save the ant. In a class forum, students imagined themselves in role as either the boy or the ant and shared a verbal justification for their beliefs.

A total of 7 field visits were conducted during weekly drama and literacy sessions. These sessions ran for 1 hour each and were conducted in the school hall to allow greater freedom of movement. Data was collected in the form of observational notes, audio recordings of a teacher interview and student focus group, and video footage of the lessons. Two cameras were used to gather video data. One was set on a tripod in a corner of the hall recording each lesson in its entirety. This camera was positioned far enough away to capture the movements of the whole group but close enough to record student and teacher voices. A small, handheld camera was also used to roam the hall during partner-work and capture in greater detail the collaborative experiences of the three students. The gathered data was coded by the researcher and descriptively reconstructed during analysis to support interpretation of participants' experiences.

This case study was conducted as part of a series of ongoing explorations by researchers at the University of Sydney into the use of drama for language development [1,45,46,48–50,59]. Ethics approval for the research was obtained under protocol number 214/551. There were significant ethical considerations to filming young children whose parents' first language was not English. Information and consent forms were adjusted to ensure they were accessibly written. Parents were supported in their understanding of the research with verbal explanations and discussion with school staff and the classroom teacher. It was also necessary to gain permission from all the parents of the remaining students as they would be incidentally filmed during classes. The school distributed an information email and opt-out form to ensure no child would be filmed without parental consent.

2.2. Lesson Structures: Working with Poetry, Rhythm and Movement

Each hourly literacy session began with a simple song that the children had learnt as part of a school programme in the use of music for brain and language development. Teachers incorporated singing, clapping patterns and audiation to foster phonological awareness and neural pathway development in the language centers of the brain [7,9,10]. This was followed by chanting or rhythm-based drama activities. For the first few weeks, the children would then gather on the floor around large sheets of paper to compose a simple poem about an Icky Sticky Spider. The teacher began part of a rhyming couplet, and the students would offer ideas for rhymed words to use at the end of the couplet. When a word was chosen, it was drawn around the written poem and the children would have a short count down of time to find a space in the hall and make the shape of that word with their bodies before returning to the floor. The class recited the poem several times as

they composed, clicking their fingers in a simple beat denoting the syllabic rhythm of the language.

Over the first half of the study, this compositional work was interspersed with numerous drama activities such as embodying spiders on the floor, imagining and describing a pet spider in their hands, miming passing a very wriggly spider around a circle and so on. These activities were followed by the teacher reading several pages of one of the poem-based picture books. Several minutes were spent posing questions about each page, deeply noticing features of the poem's language or plot, as well as the visual features of the book's pictures. This use of extended questioning and discussion helped extend the children's comprehension and vocabulary in preparation for the next round of physicalizing and role playing. The second part of the term centered around a song-poem where children used drama to imagine themselves in the roles of a boy and an ant, having an existential argument about the ant's right to life. Here, the teacher used whole class debate along with physicalized performances of the song to immerse the children in the different perspectives being explored. Gestures and frozen images were incorporated throughout the learning as children empathized with the characters and made connections with their own life experiences.

2.3. Video Data and Narrative Reconstructions

Capturing these classes on video allowed for fine-grained observation of interactions between students. Having an ability to pause, zoom-in, slow down and replay instances of significance allowed the researcher to discern small moments of learning that might otherwise go unnoticed in the busyness of a classroom. Embodied interactions offer intensely rich material for analysis. Minute pauses and gestures can be inferred to hold meaning. Goffman [60] has named this phenomenon the 'interaction order', noting that body language is a domain offering seemingly limitless microanalyses. The research process required that decisions be made about which moments of bodily communication to include. Due to the logistical parameters of this research, coding was conducted by a single author-researcher. Over repeated viewings, participants' body language was coded for instances of physicalised language and peer-mediation. Data indicating high engagement, social connection or social dissonance was also extracted. It should be noted that moments of low engagement were not analysed, although they did occur. Participants could at times be seen to slump their shoulders and sigh, or look away, appearing to lose interest. This behaviour was usually observed after students had spent several minutes waiting for their turn or sitting on the floor listening to others.

Transcripts of the lessons in their entirety were coded and categorised in a series of hermeneutic cycles. Repeated viewing and reading of materials enabled the researcher to deeply immerse in the observed learning, identifying relevant moments of embodied language and peer-support for further analysis. Large tracts of dialogue were extracted from whole lesson transcripts and integrated into narrative vignettes which aimed to depict the active experience of drama as EAL/D literacy pedagogy. Unlike the video footage which focused largely on smaller, paired interactions, the whole-lesson transcriptions captured the events of entire lessons in sequence and gave a holistic perspective of the pedagogy in action. Within these transcripts, the class itself—teacher and students—emerged as a central character, one filled with dynamic personalities responding and reacting to the pedagogy with vigour and enthusiasm.

Composing research vignettes requires processes of selection, editing and refinement. Lesson transcripts needed to be compressed and elaborated upon in order to effectively describe the experience of being in these classes. In keeping with the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, the study aimed to capture for a reader the 'essence' of what these classes were like and how these strategies impacted experiences of literacy. Allowing the personalities of participants to shine through was also a key concern of the research. Aesthetic and literary tools were employed to ensure findings were presented as relatable human experiences rather than dry empirical observations.

To facilitate data transparency, full transcripts of all seven lessons were included in the research confirming the veracity of the vignettes. The most common alteration made was to extract moments from separate classes and combine them into one story to more effectively convey a sense of the busy classroom environment. All events and dialogue in the vignettes were lifted in-tact from videos and lesson transcripts, save for the occasional removal of paralinguistic features or overly repetitious words.

Member checking with the participant teacher during discussions of the research-in-progress also contributed to the study's trustworthiness. The introduction of a handheld camera to the learning environment was one factor affecting the naturalism of the setting. The camera was at times a distraction to the students. Over time the class seemed to acclimatise and simply ignore the fact that they were being filmed, but there were instances where the handheld camera inhibited children as they were carrying out their work. As a result, the roaming camera was used judiciously and with less consistency than the tripod device. Case study findings are understood to be non-generalisable to external populations and are instead used to build funds of knowledge. Findings can be generalised to theoretical propositions [61], and accordingly this case study found several links to theories of oracy, embodied learning and additional language literacy.

Following is an excerpt from the research where findings from video and transcript data were integrated into narrative form. This is from a series of three vignettes on a student named Xiao-Hong (pseudonym) from China. Xiao Hong and her family had only very recently moved to Australia, and she was still in the early phase of her English language progression. In this vignette, she is working with another student on a performance during exploration of a song-based text.

2.4. Research Vignette—Xiao Hong

Today the class are working on the *Hey, Little Ant* song. Pairs of students have been given two lines each, printed on strips of paper. They must create physical actions to go with their lines and prepare to share them in front of the class. Xiao Hong sits with her partner, Michelle, as they practice reading their lines out loud. Michelle's family is from China, but she was born here in Australia. Michelle is much smaller than Xiao Hong, with a gap-toothed, very frequent smile, and a short fringe that refuses to stay on her forehead. She reads the lines out first while Xiao Hong sits and listens, reading along over Michelle's shoulder and chewing on one finger. Then, Michelle hands Xiao Hong the paper to read from and they both sing the words together. Once this is done, they stand up excitedly, pulling down their jumpers and smoothing their skirts, ready to practice their performance of the beleaguered ant. Michelle takes the lead,

'Okay, let's start.'

She points upwards with one finger as if talking to someone very tall and starts singing very loudly.

'WEEEELL, you're a giant and giants CAAAN'T!'

Xiao Hong watches and follows along while Michelle continues.

'Know what it FEELS to be an AAANT!'

With this, Michelle turns and gives Xiao Hong a short hug, to represent 'feeling.' Xiao Hong is a little surprised . . . but goes along with it. On the word 'ant' both girls drop to the floor and wiggle their fingers under their chins to show their tiny insect 'legs'.

'Take a LOOK and you will SEEEE!

Following Michelle, Xiao Hong puts her hands up to her eyes as if holding a pair of binoculars.

'That you are very much like MEEEEE!"

Both girls point their hands towards themselves. Their rehearsal complete, the girls now sit on the floor with Xiao Hong chewing on one finger.

'Michelle, what should we do next?' She asks.

But Michelle's attention is now elsewhere, transfixed on other pairs working around them. Xiao Hong eyeballs the researcher's camera and leans forward on the floor.

'What's that camera for?'

And the clip comes to a hasty end.

It is time for the girls to sing their lines in front of the class. Everyone is seated on the floor and pairs of students having been taking turns around the circle. This is Xiao Hong and Michelle's second attempt. They had a bit of trouble the first time around as the rhythm of their couplet is slightly different to the rest of the song. Ms Connor gave them some extra time to practice again and they have now re-joined the others.

'Right girls are you ready? Up you get, one, two, three!'

She starts the song off with the little girls to help support them through the syncopated rhythm.

'Well, you're a giant and giants can't 'FEEL!' sing the girls.

'Ooops!' stops Ms Connor.

'No, this line ends with *can't*, remember?'

Xiao Hong leans back on her heels and slaps her forehead in embarrassment.

'Let's do it with them!' suggests Ms Connor to the rest of the class.

'Stand up everybody!'

The class all stand and together everyone sings the two lines, copying Xiao Hong and Michelle's actions. Then, the two girls are invited to perform on their own again. Success! Michelle and Xiao Hong wiggle their knees back and forth with glee and drop to the floor once they are done. Xiao Hong smiles and gives her face a quick rub. Then, she gently shoves Michelle's shoulder and whispers loudly,

'Out in front the entire class!

3. Results

Cognitive Support and Socioemotional Motivation

Video footage from these lessons captured frequent moments where participants were able to access sociocultural and multimodal language through the use of embodiment. During analysis, relevant moments were identified and presented in a total of 12 vignettes, 3 for each participant. The descriptive excerpt included above reveals the important role that Xiao Hong's peer played during the construction of their performance. Adopting a sociocultural lens, it is evident that Xiao Hong was able to lean on her more experienced peer for support in reading and learning the lines to be recited. By incorporating collaborative preparation and performance into the literacy work, the classroom teacher was able to consciously partner language-learner children with more fluent peers to help guide them through activities. Use of gesture and physicalisation also provided an additional modal layer to the language work, enabling Xiao Hong to access meaning in the language that sounds and words alone could not have supplied. In one of the video clips, it was clear Xiao Hong was using the miming of peers around her to understand the word 'gazing'. Being required to stand in front of the class and share an embodied recital added another layer to the learning as the two girls were motivated to rehearse several times to achieve the unusual rhythm of their particular line. With her partner providing social and linguistic support to bolster confidence, Xiao Hong was seen to experience the emotional satisfaction of persisting and succeeding in front of others. Having these types of experiences in the classroom is a key contributor to children's motivation to learn. In the student focus group interview, Xiao Hong spoke about her enjoyment of learning at school, although she did not like that her parents made her do extra work at home to practice her English reading and writing. According to her teacher, Xiao Hong was highly conscientious and doing well in her written classwork but outside of drama literacy was still reluctant to speak in front of the class.

Footage of another student, Deepika (pseudonym), revealed that embodied pedagogies helped her express ideas and engage with classmates. Deepika was normally quite shy and was also physically much smaller than her peers. In an activity where she had to imagine herself in-role as the ant in *Hey, Little Ant,* Deepika gave an impassioned speech about the unfairness of being picked on because of your size. Here, the element of dramatic role

play allowed Deepika to activate a verbal fluency that had not been demonstrated during other types of literacy work. In the student focus group interview, Deepika expressed that her favourite part of the classes was the physical aspect of embodied pedagogy. Videos depicted Deepika as having trouble sitting still for long periods. During embodied learning, however, she was seen supporting her partner in creating physical actions. One scene showed her working with a classmate on physicalising a metaphor for speed. Although she did not engage much orally, Deepika was easily able to contribute creative, physical ideas.

The third student, Shani (pseudonym), was shown learning through the social aspects of collaborative embodied tasks. In a paired activity where students took turns miming different verbs for their partner to guess, Shani was supported by her partner in vocabulary acquisition. Although it took her longer than her classmate to think of words in English, Shani's enjoyment of the activity was clearly visible as she persevered through long moments of thinking. In another scene, mimicking the postures of characters in a picture book contributed to Shani's understanding of context. Focus group responses revealed that Shani equated embodied literacy with other types of learning because performances were shared and discussed much like other class work.

Video data of the classroom teacher showed her actively modelling dramatic embodiment. Footage also showed the complications of corralling a large class of young children as she was often interrupted by students' unrelated questions and concerns, or by needing to regain control of the noisy learning environment that drama produces. Frequent laughter was a feature of these lessons, with the children particularly enjoying the teacher's own comic roleplaying. During her interview, she commented on the creative nature of the pedagogies used and how they gave her a greater sense of freedom in her teaching. Her reasons for using extensive embodiment in her literacy programmes was to give students enjoyable, socially interactive experiences of texts to stimulate oracy and writing. She valued how use of embodiment could quickly communicate aspects of each student's level of comprehension, thus allowing her to make immediate teaching adjustments.

Case study data overall revealed that standard literacy activities such as identifying alliterative sounds and composing with matching phonemes were augmented through the addition of performance and creativity. Students exhibited strong engagement during work that used chanting and clapping rhythms, making shapes with their bodies, performing characters and miming imaginary objects. Videos depicted few instances of disruption or loss of focus amongst the class. Performance-based language strategies encouraged creative exploration and a sense of productive playfulness during learning. Strong themes of semiotic and socioemotional support emerged for the EAL/D participants. These findings were in keeping with multimodal and sociocultural theories of language. There are large bodies of research around the benefits of using drama for literacy pedagogy. Less understood are the implications of combining embodiment specifically with the phonetically focused genre of poetry. Findings from this case study appear to support such approaches, as the observed EAL/D learners benefitted from the addition of embodiment and rhythmic rehearsal.

4. Discussion

Unique Affordances of Embodied Poetry

A key theme of the study was the positive influence of role-play and mime on the children's experiences of poetry. Exploring poetry through the body is a methodology which capitalises on students' physical selves as sites of knowledge-production and social connection [62,63]. Embodiment has been used by humans for teaching and learning for thousands of years. It is an acknowledged pedagogical technique for increasing content accessibility for diverse communities of learners [64–67]. Although traditional, Western literacy practices still dominate classroom approaches, there is a growing understanding that these are not the only ways of reading and writing the world around us. Though we often read and write in quiet solitude, the teaching and practicing of these skills need not

always be a solitary experience. Collaborative learning has been shown to improve literacy in a wide range of age-groups and classroom contexts [68]. In this research, performing for the group and as a group allowed participants to feel socially connected while 'rehearsing' their nascent identities as English language-speakers.

Using poetry as the textual jumping point for language exploration also had distinct benefits. White, Mammone and Caldwell [69] outline evidence of genre-based approaches improving English language learner literacy outcomes, and poetry as a genre is unique. Poems tell stories, but they also play word-music and paint word-pictures with a playfulness and freedom that no other text-type offers. Grammar is not king in the land of poetry, instead grammar is more often a court jester, tumbling out of bounds and mocking expectations. This freedom can unshackle additional language learner students from fears of linguistic imperfections. Poems can be simple yet still highly profound. The integration of poetry and drama creates lessons that are enticing vehicles for interactive and contextual language experiences, but also have potential to cover deep philosophical terrain in the classroom. Curiosity about ethical dilemmas such as that found in *Hey, Little Ant* does not discriminate on the grounds of academic ability. Such subjects are of interest to us all and lay rich ground for authentic discussions as captured in the case study videos.

5. Conclusions

Researching the synthesis of embodiment and poetry for additional language learner literacy revealed clear links to oracy, phonemic perception, multimodal semiotics, and positive affect. Ability in rhythm and beat perception is associated with improved listening and pronunciation skills for additional language learners. In this study, poetry provided rich and imaginative contexts for the nurturing of such skills. By adding physical interpretation to the study of poetry, EAL/D students were able to access increased comprehension and receive valuable social support. Detailed video-observations revealed several instances when integrating embodied, rhythmic and choral exploration of poetry and songs enriched their understanding of language concepts. These methods were also seen to foster verbal fluency and generate positive affect and socioemotional motivation. Findings suggest that these strategies warrant further exploration.

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