1. Generative divergent analysis is a model I devised to support development of the Creative Analytic Paradigm that I’m working on for my PhD thesis
2. It’s particularly useful where research is understood as a contemplative activity without any specific research question. The quality of the experience is paramount and ideally the model supports a sense of **being-in-relation** to the research object. Where there is no research question, ideas have time to incubate and the example I’m going to refer to extends back over several years.
3. Although the example extends back over several years, I want to emphasise that generative divergent analysis is not a constituent of a longitudinal study so much as an existential **being-in-relation** to the research object. Where research is driven by a research question, particularly where a performance gap has been identified, research is an interrogative process – almost an immoral extraction of information from the data source. By comparison, generative divergent analysis is part of a relationship concept of research. Relationships are full of surprises and value also exists in the less tangible qualities. Relationships develop less by one person interrogating the other and more by a sensitive and responsive mutual valuing.
4. Relationships also develop in unpredictable ways and the Creative Analytic Paradigm is more consistent with contrived serendipity than systematic data collection and analysis. Although there is no research question as such, research proceeds by exploring ideas evoked by evocative objects encountered within the general area of the research interest. The initial encounter is marked by a ‘turning towards’ the evocative object as a potentially interesting snippet of experience. As an existential concept the ‘turning towards’ also involves maintaining the evocative object within consciousness for an extended period of time – which supports the becoming acquainted part of the relationship – the **being-in-relation** to.

The ‘turning away’ aspect of the GDA model entails exploring the ideas evoked by the object and developing ways of thinking.

1. The approach to analysis is not systematic; there is no pre set order. The process needs to be understood more as a burgeoning of experience where the evocative object is revisited as part of the ongoing relationship and where the ideas are developed flexibly and opportunistically.

As a divergent concept of analysis, generative divergent analysis may be regarded as an additive process of overlaying meanings on the evocative object. One strategy for kick starting the generation of divergent ideas is through use of orienting concepts from a range of not necessarily related discourses. Fluency and flexibility of thinking are supportive of this process. These concepts of creativity refer to the ability to generate intra discourse and trans discourse ideas which add meanings to the object.

The GDA model was also developed to facilitate meaningful encounters with snippets of data, rather than with copious descriptively vivid data or thick descriptive detail. Ambiguity and partial data allow for imaginative elaboration of ideas, exploration of possibilities and speculative thinking – with the potential for originality amidst the range of generated ideas.

1. I’m now going to exemplify the model using a pictorial timetable in a Reception class. You can see the entrance door on the right, children in computer area behind the curtains and then there is the pictorial timetable, located in the reading area in the foreground. Initially, several years ago actually, I wasn’t sure why but this image became a memorable moment – possibly because it seemed strange to have a pictorial timetable located in a reading area. In other Reception classes I’d either seen no timetable or it was located in the teacher’s area. As an evocative object, I was able to start generating meanings and this has continued over an extensive period of time. Consistent with the unsystematic nature of the model, although ‘reminder’ was chronologically the first meaning it remains, as with all the other possible meanings, as an ‘unfinished resource’ for thinking. For example, a recent idea is that it could be understood as a non human actant within a distributed cognition or actor network relating to classroom management.
2. The direct ‘turning towards’ component is the maintenance of the consciousness of the image but the literal point of contact was the more literal understanding as reminder for the children of how the day was organised. When I finally noticed the book bags the location seemed more rational. The divergent thinking aspect of the model relates to the fluency and flexibility of the reflective thinking in relation to the evocative object.

Basic categories here could be ‘support for learning’ because location in the reading area could help present a broader concept of reading e.g. reading images, left to right, alongside other media such as posters and even a computer with a non-linear text.

The discourse of parental involvement is brought into focus because parents stayed with their children at the start of the day and some sat in the reading area – where they could also see how the day was organised.

An idea in relation to design would be the potential signification of the specific timetable images e.g. a single book image might signify a different connotation of reading compared to an image of a book being read by three children together, sitting on comfortable cushions

And then, the size of timeline could suggest the rigidity of the organisation of the day and draw attention to the power of the teacher when changing what happens during the day.

1. Taking a look now at the ‘turning away’ constituent of the model, an accessible theme would be ‘classroom as third teacher. And so what I’ve done here is to draw attention to potential orienting concepts. From the point of view of ‘support for learning’, if the timetable were to be relocated to the maths area, it could become a learning resource for learning about time and sequencing. From the point of view of the authority of the teacher there’s the Foucaldian concept of insidious disciplinary technologies where the encompassing environment can contribute to a less coercive exercise of power.