

RHIZOMATIC CARTOGRAPHIES OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY  
WITHIN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

Set in two primary schools in Manchester, England and drawing on personal reflections, my pursuit of what it means to belong within the early years takes me through a myriad of personal stories, inner struggles, crisis points and glimpses of hope. A significant feature running through this thesis is my own biography and my own rhizomatic journey where belonging and identity oscillate with the experience of the young participants. The main philosophical underpinning is Deleuze and Guattari's work where specifically concepts such as majoritarian/minoritarian and the rhizome, which is symbolic of both theory and research that allows for multiplicities, interconnection and fluidity, have the effects of destabilising my common sense understanding of what it means to belong.

This work takes a multidisciplinary qualitative positioning to make sense of, as well as critique taken-for-granted assumptions of both researching and conceptualising belonging and identity. Drawing from art, I utilise Hellman's notion of pentimento to illustrate the fluidity and multilayeredness of human experience as well as the complex nature of 'seeing' where 'each layer mixes with the other and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it' (Donald, 2004:24). I may, therefore, never come to a conclusive understanding of the 'pure' 'original' beginnings of children's sense of belonging and identity as there are as multiple explanations as there are ways of knowing, neither will I determine the end. In this regard, 'tracing' pure origins of children's belonging and identity is a futile endeavour. Rather 'mapping' allows for connections that are not 'readily perceptible to the normative subjects of dominant reality' (Lorraine, 2003:269). The purpose is not to provide definitive answers or assertions, but rather to illuminate the materialisation of belonging and identity within the early years context. It utilises observations and discussions whilst capturing the complex ways in which bodies, both human and nonhuman connect. In a minimal way, it also

makes use of pictorial data to enhance the description of the geographical contexts of the two schools.

This study affirms that children's sense of belonging and identity is dynamic, always in process and, therefore, constantly mutating. This has consequences for the ways in which we activate relations with children particularly in relation to language and special educational needs. Like a mirage, attempting to pin down what it means to belong and the determination of identity remains elusive. Therefore, we are left with moments-in-time of manifestations of belonging and identity in a spectrum of infinity where 'tracing' the beginning is as futile as reaching out to the end. Thus, this work questions what the repercussions are in terms of these fleeting glimpses of manifestations.

The minute you or anybody else knows what you are, you are not it...as everything in living is made up of finding out what you are, it is extraordinarily difficult really not to know what you are and yet to be that thing... Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and build up what we could be ...we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries... Where psychoanalysis says, 'stop, find yourself again,' we should say instead, 'let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self. (Stein, 1937:92; Foucault, 1982:216; Deleuze and Guattari,1987:151)

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Even when you think you're writing on your own, you're always doing it with someone else you can't always name (Deleuze, 1995: 141).

The business of undertaking a project is too mammoth to be carried out alone. It is a labour of endurance, beset with hurdles and quagmire. It is not for the faint-hearted, neither is it for the lone-minded. Yet with helping hands, providing support and guidance, the impossible becomes a possibility and doors long-shut slowly open up – presenting a whole host of possibilities, albeit entangled showing only glimpses of unfolding realities, 'connectable, reversible, modifiable, multiple entryways and exits' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:24).

I wish to acknowledge remarkable individuals without whom this treacherous endeavour may not have been possible. In keeping with the theoretical traditions in which this work is grounded, I present this as a pentimento blending the musings of Crouch (2010) with my cogitations of gratitude – a bastardisation of the theoretical and the heartfelt.

My journey, being more than individual and private, epitomises the very essence of this work. Setting out to learn about belonging and identity, I relied on a network of individuals to whom I was connected – the strongest links. My, Director of Studies Professor Liz Jones and supervisor Dr Rachel Holmes have been guiding lights which never went out even when, at times, I saw no light at the end of the tunnel occurring 'in and amongst instants and moments but acting relationally with time'. Not keeping me on leash every time, Professor Liz Jones' responsible liberalness allowed my creative instincts for 'getting lost as a way of knowing' (Lather, 2007:161). My husband, Contie, who has been with me, literally and figuratively, believing in me even before this journey became a reality, has been an undying fountain of strength and support, even as 'our pasts are mutually eloped, unevenly and awkwardly enfolded in this mass of convolutions, challenged and affirmed'. Thus, even when I felt

lonely, I was not isolated, all because 'moments in journeys are not isolated but prompt and are prompted by other loops and re-loops, temporary suspensions, threads of that commingling of space and time as spacetime of life'. I am also indebted to the two schools which opened their doors to me, initially a mere stranger, welcomed on the basis of trust which was carried within my adopted identity as a student of the Manchester Metropolitan University which, to them, became a source of reassurance that I would not tarnish the illustrious identity of this institution which also funded this project. From this I learn 'what's in a name'. Identity matters.

Perhaps most importantly, the heroes of this piece are the very children who opened up a part of their unadulterated lives to me. I will never relegate them to history, for 'memory is not simply 'placed' in time in a linear 'order-ing' of being but tumbles amongst others, or exists in a net with others, open to being grasped anew in other moments...' The parents were also key to giving consent. My profound gratitude also goes to my son, Junior Gabi for his moral support and for lending his artistic skills in drawing the rhizome image. Indeed, 'in journeys our feelings about ourselves and our relationships in the world are negotiated but also happen to us. Identity, belonging and creativity emerge in this complexity'.

**Prologue: No longer I that Liveth: a narrative of belonging, where attempts are made to pick up a new identity without shedding the old self**

No man is an island, entire of itself,  
Every man is a small piece of the continent,  
a part of the main  
(Donne, 1624:xvii).

This wide and universal theatre  
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
Wherein we play. All the world's a stage.  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts  
(Shakespeare, 1968:41).

**Introduction**

In general, individuals have a desire to associate and to be associated with and this desire is on-going as individuals move through different phases, places and identities. Belonging is the 'desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become' (Probyn, 1995:19).

In this prologue I set the scene, exploring the intricacies of belonging and identity as embodied in my relocation from one country and continent to another. The aim is to describe this personal journey, and in so doing map out some personal reasons for undertaking this study. It navigates the precarious landscape of trying to detail what it means to belong to a person who moves from a place of their birth to a totally new home faced with the challenge of confronting new values and connections while simultaneously finding it hard to shed the old ingrained in them. It is in the context of this inward tension that the question about whether belongingness and identity are an *attainable* rather than an *ongoing* state

revolves. The existing body of knowledge on the subject of belongingness and identity suggests that identity is increasingly argued to be a constantly shifting and fragmentary phenomenon best characterised as an *always incomplete* process rather than a *finished* outcome (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007). That belongingness and identity have been found to be dynamic and fluid, as opposed to being fixed and inflexible, makes it the more difficult to have a firm handle on a consistent meaning and, thus, each time the subject is tackled questions, rather than answers, spring up. While this prologue will not provide answers, it is conceivable that the kinds of questions thrown up by reflecting on a journey from one country to another and an attempt to trade or, at least, blend an old identity with a new one will draw us closer to an understanding of what it means to belong and the complexity of the notion of identity as embodied in the constant inner tensions individuals go through whenever shifts happen in terms of belonging and identity or the quest for both.

This prologue begins by showing the divergent views on the meaning of the belongingness and identity. A critique of existing literature on the subject is given, followed by a personal reflective account of the quest for, and process of, belonging and identity from one country to not only a new country but to a new continent with sharply contrasting ethos. Questions emerging from this personal experience are thrown up as a 'conclusion' which serves to broaden understandings of the subject.

### **Belonging: The *state* and the *process***

The metaphor of an island and the mainland affirms that no one exists on their own, independent of the social web of which they are part. The cited devotion above depicts the human nature of being, and indeed the need to be, connected *to*, and interconnected *with*, a complex web linking humans with a particular place. Butler expounds on this as follows:

This interdependency, which is foundational to being human, challenges the notion that we are separate, independent, self-

contained individuals and, thereby, offers the potential to rethink communities as based on this (mutually dependent) vulnerability. In other words, we are always of and for an other whilst not merging indistinguishably into an other. Moreover, this vulnerability keeps in mind a sense of becoming, of always being open to others and affected by them as well as affecting and impacting upon them. (Butler 2004: 19).

This vulnerability seems to emanate from the fluidity of identity and being constantly caught in an endless process of becoming. So becoming as a constant unending process of change, when individuals interact with both human and nonhuman, contributes to the notion of belonging and identity as fluid. From this perspective, belonging and identity are not fixed, it has the potential for multiple, infinite and unpredictable bursts of manifestations. The fluidity of identity and consequently belonging has its own challenges. Using liquidity as a metaphor, Bauman (2005: 2) observes that '*liquid* life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty' wherein lies the intimacy between becoming and belonging and identity. Like becoming – which is an eternal process of being without quite getting 'there', where 'there' is an abstracted 'destination' – belonging and identity are ideals unreachable or heights unscaleable which, like a mirage one feels like drawing towards it only to draw away when you feel it is within grasp. It is about the rhizomatic conjunction ...And...And...And... (Deleuze, 2004). That is what becoming and belonging and identity are, an intercourse of the unassailable, always building up to it without getting on top of it, a guild of bastards. Yet we keep moving towards it, with the full knowledge we will never get there, satisfied with fleeting glimpses of what it might be like.

In other words, the tenets of membership are not only dictated to the individual by others, but are also dictated to others by the individual. This is illustrative of the bidirectional influence, between an individual and others, on what it means to be a member of a community. Thus, membership could be seen as fallout of the interaction between the individual and the others. In this respect, it is, therefore, intriguing that for one to be or feel a part of a community their membership is in more than

one sense. For example, it might be part because they actually live in that community or just because they have historical links to a community or both – which makes it almost insurmountable to give an all-encompassing and universally agreed-on definition of what belonging might mean.

The problematic nature of what it means to belong is encapsulated in my own story, having been obliged to move from my country of birth to my new adopted 'home'. Economic upheaval, political instability and persecution by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ruling party and its followers prompted me to engage in introspection, an inward quest for, and a realignment of, belonging to consider where I would feel welcome and compatible; whether I could still claim to belong to a society that was 'ejecting' one of its own daughters because of a difference in opinions. Following on from the bidirectional process of belonging, perhaps I was 'rejecting' my own country by not conforming to 'their' beliefs – at least that is what they believed. My belongingness to the community was no longer hinged on my citizenship but rather how individuals within my community appraised my membership; actions and beliefs. As posited by Giles and Middleton (1999:37) 'we are defined and define ourselves in terms of how others see us, how we see others, how we act with other people and how other people respond to us, not only on the individual level, but also within the social institutions'. Even though I still wanted to be part of this community, I felt I was no longer at ease as I began to realise my life was in danger. As I reflect on this emotional turbulence, I realise that being a member of a group is complex. It did not only depend on me but also on other members of the immediate society I lived in – an alignment of binaries. I learned that security of the individual provided by the social institution was crucial to a continued sense of belonging in me. Once that security was threatened, allegiance and membership dwindled and began to shift. It was like I was engaged in a non-verbal argument with them. My position was 'I belong to you,' and they were retorting, 'You don't, because you have a divergent political ideology to ours'. 'But we are similar in

everything else except politics,' I seemed to answer back. 'Yes,' they seemed to say, 'Political affiliation and ideology are more important than *everything else*.' As noted by Weeks (1990:88):

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your relationships, your complex involvement with others and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. Each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled, 'British' or European... Which of them we focus on, bring to the fore, 'identify' with, depends on a host of factors. At the centre, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others (Weeks, 1990:88).

The binary oppositions here do not represent a continuum –infinite possibilities – which further confuses the notion of 'community'. In spite of the many similarities I considered important which I shared with 'them', this community brought to the fore political ideology as a distinguishing identity which determined whether I was one of them. This was a clear shift due to the changing political climate from the previous glue, cultural values, which bonded us together. I was no longer in sync with others. Again, this highlighted the mutability of membership and identity which affected my relationship with the wider community. I was faced with two choices: to flow with them or to leave, to realign or to detach. I chose the latter. I was not ready to sacrifice my own individuality (*all*/or *some* of it) in the name of comradeship. I considered that in such a situation I needed to turn to another group to which I belonged – my siblings, whom I felt would offer me the appreciation and love which I felt had eroded from the community I was living in at the time. It was as if, while I looked for a community to replace the one which was ejecting me, something had to fill the void – in this case my membership to my family. On the basis of this experience I figured out that individuals are never completely isolated even in transition periods. Their connectedness to certain communities helps in becoming and being a member of new ones. It was this search for a place 'out there', a yearning for where I would feel I belonged that



prompted this uncertain, yet hopeful, journey over ten thousand miles away from a place I had, up until this point, called home.

### **Belonging: performance and performativity**

Questions arise regarding the significance of place in the construction of belongingness and identity. What is the meaning of place and how is my belongingness and identity structured through it? Place is a source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity and these are typically facilitated by meaningful relationships made possible by bonds to it (Tuan, 1977). On the same note, Crang (1998:103) posits that 'the lived connection binds people and places together. It enables people to define themselves and to share experiences with others and form themselves into communities'. Likewise, Fortier (1999) notes that belonging is 'the blending of a performatively reiterated social identity with the claim to the ownership of a place' which seem to point us to a sense of belonging that is generated through both performance and performativity (Bell, 1999). However, performativity is 'not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual which achieved its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration' (Butler, 1999:xv). Bell's exploration of performativity and belonging highlights how 'sometimes ritualistic repetition, of these normalised codes makes material the belongings they purport to simply describe' (Bell, 1999:3) This implies that through ritualistic repetition of certain normalised behaviours, members can achieve a certain attachment to a place and a collective identity. Here what makes place significant is the inter-relations among individuals within a setting. Therefore, performance and performativity relates to identity and becoming. My performance was in the form of participation in community activities like going to church and engaging in social discourses as prescribed in the norms and values of my community. So, if I was to continue being regarded as a member of my 'community' I had to 'perform' according to the changes that were happening around me. It was now more important to be a member of the

prescribed political party than to be a party to other activities, such as church-going, previously held important. Again, this is gesturing towards the notion of 'community' as fluid which can be affected by political change. The fluidity of 'community' is seen in the movement of individuals in and out of different communities to which they belong. In respect of this, it is useful to think of belonging as something momentary, as neither fixed nor stable. To this end, Probyn (1996:19) defines belonging as an impulse for 'some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.'

### **Becoming-fluid**

Before this point I had thought belongingness and interconnectedness were fixed aspects of life. But this was being challenged by the unfolding events. For the first time, I was beginning to realise that for belongingness to be constant, all cognate factors had to remain constant. This was not the case in my situation and my affiliation to Zimbabwe was inevitably shifting together with the changes, often rapid, happening around me. This panoply of factors persuaded me and my family to seek sanctuary in the United Kingdom.

Questions still linger in my mind, however, whether my being *here* means I belong *here* or my not being in my country of origin means I no longer belong *there*. Or is there a possibility of belonging somewhere *in-between*? So how does being *here*, as opposed to being *there*, affect my sense of belonging and identity? Did I cease to belong to Zimbabwe when I settled in, and became a citizen of, Great Britain – after writing and passing a citizenship test? Or will I always belong there, in Zimbabwe? This echoes Turner's concept of liminality 'a period of ambiguity and ambivalence' (1979:234), where identity is posited as 'a kind of restless movement in the unstable spaces in between boundaries' (MacLure, 1996: 274) described by Bhabha (1994) as a state of being in-between 'here'

and 'there', in-between places and in-between cultures – whilst inhabiting in hybridity. This hybridity is born of 'transgressions', as refusal to 'seek resolutions of boundary dilemmas and transcendence of contradictions' (MacLure (1996:277). Thus, it resonates with the concept of the hyphen which performs both the conjunctive and the disjunctive purposes – joining and yet keeping apart: giving birth to a sense of *intersectionality* – belonging neither *here* nor *there* but *somewhere* between here and there. This notion of hybridity or a hyphenation is a drive towards the 'perpetually unfixed and the unfixable identity' (Bauman, 2005:31) and belonging.

According to Agamben (2003:153) a hyphen is the dialectic of both separation and connection in the sense that 'it unites only to the degree that it distinguishes and distinguishes only to the degree that it unites'. Thus, the hyphen is a symbol of liminality, in-betweenness and threshold, which opens up possibilities of 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Similarly, Mahtani, (2002:1 – 2) describes a hyphen as a 'union of contradictions...marking places of both ambiguity and multiplicity' Here, what comes to mind is Derrida's term *La brisure* which illustrates the concept of the hyphen or dash – a separation and connection at the same time, linking former identities to a process of becoming. Thus the hyphen simultaneously connects and separates the places I have lived, my culture and my language (Van Dyke, 2005). As noted by Deleuze (1988:249), 'the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities' which implies fluid subjectivity. The hyphen as connection also relates to the concept of rhizome as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1983:47) in that 'it has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle through which it pushes and overflows', whilst proceeding by 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, stitching'. Like Bruno (2002), I have places I still cherish those 'places I have lived, loved, absorbed, and traversed. I negotiated myself in them, wrote about them, I have called them home' (p.402) and now living in this country, in-between cultures and languages, means 'home is hyphen. Hyphen is home' (p.402). Thus, the notion of home implies something that is constantly shifting, always in-between. I

have become hyphenated, as both British and Zimbabwean citizen with sturdy ties to both countries giving me a hyphenated identity that is Zimbabwean-British; not completely belonging to either of the two but rather in a state of intersectionality between the two. However, as noted by Papastergiadis (2000:143), to say that my identity is Zimbabwean-British is not a 'declaration of the two constitute parts...but rather the [result] of the conjunction and juxtaposition'. This position, however, raises questions regarding the side of the hyphen which I am more aligned with, taking into consideration that identity is 'constantly in the process of redefinition and discovery' (Tierney, 1993 cited in McDonough and McLaren, 1996:376). What then are the possibilities for me? Perhaps Kristeva (1991:7) aptly sums up the experience when she writes, 'not belonging to any place, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present is abeyance. The space of a foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping'. It is the dilemma of being betwixt contrary positions.

### **Home away from home**

Mohanty (2003:126) ponders;

What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are 'my people'? Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional, sensory space?.

The notion of home is 'multilayered, complicated and contradictory' (Gamble, 2006:282). Thus, questions posed by Mohanty are crucial in terms of experiencing a sense of belonging and identity, or at least feeling at home. *Home* is imbued with connotations of hospitality, warmth, intimacy, friendliness and harmony all of which further complicates what constitutes home, belonging and identity and what it means to feel at home and belong. Is home *here* in the UK or *there* in Zimbabwe my country of birth/origin? Do I belong *here* or *there* or in both places

concurrently? Is there a possibility for me to achieve a sense of unity? Hall (1996) states that identities are never unified but always fragmented and multiple. Individuals constantly have multiple identities, which differ in their relative significance according to different situations in which they are embedded. Consequently, they might end up having multiple belongings (Fail, Thompson and Walker, 2004). This ambiguity of what constitutes home between *here* and *there* creates the liminal space. Within my own circumstance there exists an interminable liminality between Zimbabwe and the UK. This liminal space for me is about inhabiting a ceaseless state of ambiguity 'between that of being-at-home and that of yearning-for-home' (Dovey, 1985:46). Thus, being in-between is about continuous becoming. Baldassar (2011:22) perceives that:

migration is not simply about departure and establishing one's family in a new country; it is also about ties to the homeland and the influence of this attachment on the development of ethnic and regional identity.

Like a snail, even in a foreign habitat it is bound to its shell (Smitherman, 2003) so we too carry our home with us wherever we go. This is reminiscent of Friere's (1994:32) inference that, 'no one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self-soaked in our history, our culture; a memory, sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear'.

When I left Zimbabwe I did not consider these aspects much. I thought I would be in the UK for a while and then return where I 'belonged'. Now I have come to a realisation that I have several invisible engrained threads which continuously pull and stretch shaping who I am and who people around me think I am which impacts on my belongingness. This pulling and stretching highlights the inner struggles of trying to embrace new values and beliefs whilst not relinquishing the old values and beliefs ingrained in me. Perhaps the inner tension or internal dilemma emanates from the fact that I have to perform in a certain way to be accepted by the host country or people I interact with which might mean experiencing moments of swimming against the current – going against my values and

beliefs which inhibits the development of a sense of belonging in me. I went through a series of inner monologues and dialogues during this transition. As noted by Probyn (1996:19), belonging includes 'desire' and 'attachment' while, as noted by Fortier, (2000: 2) it also sees 'narratives of identity as part of the longing to belong, as constituted by the desire for an identity, rather than surfacing from an already constituted identity'. Identity in this instance will then be viewed in light of its transience and fluidity and not immobilised in belonging but rather proceeds by the social processes of fitting in. Thus belonging would be seen as being constituted through both movement and attachment. Included in the formation of belonging is identity as a momentary positionality which is always already becoming (Hall, 1996). Hall (2000:19) further notes that identity is

the point of 'suture' between: on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.

Identity can, it appears, force the recognition and remembrance of the past while concurrently founding a site for the possibility of a different future (Fortier, 2000). This implies that, insofar as belonging is concerned it is not necessarily confined to physical attachment but other forms of attachment as well. Since belonging is, up to a point, an emotion, emotional attachment could be equally important to other attachments. It appears that once one leaves a community, as I did Zimbabwe, the level of attachment or sense of belonging to that community is likely not to remain static – it is likely to wane. Perhaps Neshat (2000) was in a similar state when she pondered on her experience of leaving Iran;

'Leaving has offered me incredible personal development, a sense of independence that I don't think I would have had. But there's also a great sense of isolation. And I've permanently lost a complete sense of centre. I can never call any place home. I will forever be in a state of in-between. One constantly has to negotiate back and forth between one culture and the other and often they're not just different, they're in complete conflict' (Cited in Angier, 2007:35).

Perhaps, the *in-between* is a place of belonging. Belonging in relation to identity turns out to be far more complex, fluid and multi-layered. We may simultaneously experience belonging in both places at times and in particular circumstances. There are many sides to belonging that are constantly subjected to change, fluctuation and multiplicity. Identity and belonging are constantly evolving between the past and the present in relation to where we come from and where we are now. Lippard (1997:85) stresses the need for 'more fluid ways of perceiving the layers that are everywhere and new ways of calling attention to the passages between the old and the new'. Nothing is fixed or static, as I am constantly in a state of becoming within 'identity spaces in between' (Krzyzanowski, 2007) or 'passages' (Probyn, 1996). Deleuze and Guattari (1987:293) note that a state of becoming is:

not defined by two points that it connects or by the points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived...a becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination...a line of becoming has only a middle... a becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both...it constitute a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's land, nonlocalisable relation sweeping up the two distant or congruous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other.

My arrival to the UK was marked by a multilayered bureaucratic interest in my identity. The forms I filled in on arrival and the questions I was asked in immigration interviews centred around who I really was and, up to a point, who I wanted to *become* once granted leave to remain in the country. I was asked to provide identity-laden information which, among other things, included my name, gender, age, nationality and whether I was fluent in English. Failure to satisfactorily answer these questions meant I would not have been granted passage into Britain. It was as if I would not be allowed the right to start the journey to being a part of this society until I had divulged 'adequate' information about my identity. I did not fill any forms nor did I have to answer any such questions for me to become a citizen of Zimbabwe. I automatically became a citizen by both

birth and descent. This, in a way, put birth and descent above desire and choice. Then, I realised that, while certain things in life can be subject to choice, citizenship and identity tend to be pre-ordained. Even the conditions to *be* and to *become* are predetermined, precast even. The questions asked at immigration raised questions about who I really was, questions I have never been asked before in such a formal, and somewhat interrogatory, way back 'home' in Zimbabwe. This was new to me and different from my previous experience of belonging as a citizen of a country. Going through this prescribed immigration process triggered genuine insecurities about whether I would really belong whilst marking a point of no return, a travelogue of ambivalence and fragmentation of identity. It felt like a rite of passage, an initiation ceremony. This redefined belonging and identity. Added to this, I was aware of the stigma attached to being of Zimbabwean origin owing to the tarnished political image of the country. Even when I was finally allowed to get into this country, I continued to be asked the questions such as 'where are you from?' by my new neighbours, my general practitioner (GP) and fellow church members. To identify with place, to say that I am from Manchester occasionally prompted the question, 'I mean originally?'. As noted by Raj (2003:2);

These quintessential questions of identity are one way to invite a conversation about self and other. Asking 'where are you from?' can be a friendly gesture to learn more about and get to know a person. It certainly seems to have become socially acceptable and can be heard in everyday conversations, especially when people first meet. But this seemingly innocent question can also be experienced as a disruption. It is a question of ethnicity and difference, especially when the identity connections between people and places are destabilised, become problematic, or are entirely undone.

This further highlights the fluid and multilayered 'nature' of belonging and identity where skin colour becomes a perceptible difference, a bodily inscription for the legitimacy of belonging. These questions are a constant reminder of the significance of place in the negotiation of belonging and identity. I found 'settling in' better among people to whom I had adequately introduced myself than those to whom I had not given a chance to 'know' me. This 'knowing' sounds modernist because if I



perform in a certain way in order to be accepted, what exactly do people really 'know' about me? Is it possible to 'know' someone? Highlighting this quagmire, Kristeva (1991:8) poses a fundamental question 'I do what they want me to, but it is not 'me' – 'me' is elsewhere, 'me' belongs to no one, 'me' does not belong to 'me'...does 'me' exist?

Therefore, in order to fit in, I had to be known – at least up to a point. However, as it unfolded, these were just external factors affecting my journey towards belonging. Internal processes were more complex as I was supposed to make significant adjustments myself in order to get used to the new order – language, way of life, diet and living in a more pluralistic society than the one I was used to. This was a kind of shift from the old to the new order during which process the transience and fluidity of belongingness began to dawn on me. A while ago I belonged elsewhere and now I was attempting to belong without, of necessity, emptying myself of all my prior belongingnesses. While I still felt I belonged to the society I had moved from, here I was, attempting to belong – to fit in. According to Bell (1999: 3) 'one does not simply or ontologically 'belong' to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction and as an effect of performance' – a theatrical tool to belong. These several levels of abstraction, as noted by Yuval-Davies (2004), 'might relate to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groups as well as ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s'. If belonging is transient and always becoming, as I have been arguing, then the 'several levels of abstraction' could be explained by my belongingness before, during and after transition at different levels and different ways which would be linked to the fluidity of identity. Drawing from my earlier musings, this is helpful in understanding my 'rejection' to conforming to ZANU-PF's political ideology and my being consequently 'ejected'. These levels of belonging are 'mobilised for different political purposes, leading to ... insiders and outsiders to communities being constructed in new ways' (McNevin,

2006:136) whilst constructing a dichotomy of those who belong and those who do not belong.

Butler contends that even the notion that one belongs to a gender or sex can be problematised not merely because of cultural and historical variations, but because gender is an effect performatively produced 'a construction that conceals its genesis, the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions' (Butler, 1990: 140). It shows how one may identify but not feel that they belong in the sense of being accepted or being a full member. Thus the question 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?' is ever evolving.

### **Chameleon effect as theatrical tool for belonging**

During my undergraduate degree at the Manchester Metropolitan University, I first became aware of cultural differences in my physical environment. I weaved through a journey realising the differences and similarities of my culture and my fellow students'. I also noticed different views of the world from mine which is built on sets of values, norms, assumptions and beliefs. It was surprising and sometimes distressing to find that my fellow students did not share some of my values and beliefs. I had taken my values and beliefs for granted and assumed they were universally held. I was more inclined to binaries and experienced moments of uneasiness during taught sessions in modules such as *Explorations* where my way of thinking was constantly challenged. Like Craig and Deretchin (2010), I realised how much my upbringing had instilled deep rooted beliefs and values that I remained oblivious to until my encounters with postmodern thinking enabled me to visualise them. I found myself oscillating between different ways of thinking where, on one the hand there was a strong binary belief influenced by my culture embedded in church values, on another a compelling wave of change – a result of the inner desire to learn new ways of being propelled by the work

of, for example, Deleuze, Butler, Derrida and Foucault. Navigating around academic work was a treacherous undertaking. Subconsciously, in some of my writings I would slip back to a binary perspective which was my comfort zone. I struggled between the two in the process of transition. I felt the need to submerge some parts of my identity in favour of identities that seemed more favourable because I feared that I would not fit in and risked being seen as different. Yon (2000:109) states that 'in the process of claiming who one is, one is also announcing who one is not.' The construction of identity is a very complex process continuous and incomplete (Hall, 1994) that can 'shift and change in contradictory ways' (Yon, 2000:13). Belonging and identity could, therefore, be considered in terms of discursive fields whereby the practices and positions of each field of discourse shape how we come to think and therefore feel about belonging. Certain discourses may facilitate our shared understandings, but at the same time, it may also work to constrain as it sets up boundaries, parameters, and criteria for membership. This seems to reverberate Butler's (2004) view that;

as a result the 'I' that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy because the 'I' becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this 'I' fully recognisable (Butler, 2004:3).

My first year at university was not easy. I had to remain silent most of the time while I studied what people said or did. Even though I felt I had invaluable knowledge and experience of early years and childhood from a different continent which could have brought another stance to the dialogue, mine still remained a silenced dialogue during taught sessions. I always tried hard to keep my counsel until I understood how parts of a culture fitted together. I was open to new concepts and willing to adapt and modify my perceptions, attitudes and beliefs in order to accommodate new knowledge. Such versatility was confirmatory of Chartrand and Bargh's (1999) submission that mimicry creates liking and serves an affiliation goal. They use the term 'chameleon effect' to refer to

‘nonunconscious mimicry of the postures, mannerisms, facial expressions, and other behaviours of one’s interaction partners, such that one’s behaviour passively and unintentionally changes to match that of others in one’s current social environment’ (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999:893). This should not be taken to infer a simplistic reproduction of those traits but rather what is produced, as argued by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007:126) is a ‘blurred copy’ as ‘mimicry can be both ambivalent and multi-layered’. Furthermore, implicit in this notion of mimicry/imitation is the idea of resemblance which seems not to sit well with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming’ which is not about imitation but rather, in terms of identity, is about the denial of resemblance whilst acknowledging that as individuals interact;

something else entirely is going on, not an imitation at all but a capture of a code, surplus value codes an increase in valence, a veritable becoming... [for] there is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on a line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated to anything signifying (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:10).

Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas prompt us to go beyond conceiving mimicry in terms of merely ‘copying’ or ‘imitating’.

### **Faith-based belonging**

Because of my allegiance to the Christian community I attended Baptist church services. The church became a place I recognised as a cultural haven. The process of belonging within the church context was different from what happened at community level. While my development of a sense of belonging in my new community was based on geographical vicinity, in the church context it was, first and foremost, faith-based. Of course it was important how I was received by other members. But it was probably more important what theology this group had. I remember being asked about my theological standpoint more than about where I came from and whether I was baptised. It took a relatively shorter time to settle into church than to the larger community outside. Probably this was because the belief system within the church was singular and, therefore,

less complex than the multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith neighbourhood I lived in. The lesson I drew from these contrasting experiences of belongings was that it is easier to develop a sense of belonging in a less ambiguous, straightforward, less fragmented community with a single unifying value, which remains idealistic. I also think that familiarity was an important factor to my settling in since there were similarities between church services I had previously attended and the ones I was now attending. The church to me was like a community characterised by togetherness or collectivism (Clark and Holquist, 1984). It was a place of collective memory, in which elements of the past were cobbled together to mould a communal body of belonging (Fortier, 1999).

### **Belonging to both the tangible and intangible**

When I started my research degree, immediately after graduating from the undergraduate degree, I joined two research bodies, BERA and AERA. These were different kinds of 'communities' which are joined not for tangible reasons such as their geographical location or specific individuals constituting them but rather the calibre of people who join them. I did not have to find out who the members were before I decided to join. I was more interested in what they stood for and I guess that there are many members who are part of these bodies for similar reasons. Again, it was less complex process for me to start feeling I 'belonged'. All I wanted was a membership to receive journals and to be invited to submit papers for conferences.

### **Final(e) reflections**

Over the years, I have now developed a network with different people, communities and institutions in pursuit of a sense of belonging. In the process, my view on what it means to belong has also progressed. I feel that, for me, belongingness will ever evolve and thus change in shape and, as a consequence, will not carry one meaning. New memberships

will be forged, some will be modified and others will be severed, in response to inward and outward changes. I think that the longing to belong will always be unquenchable as long as I live. I will almost always want to work out and, at times, review my memberships to the various institutions, ideologies, places and people I am and will be connected to. The changes I have gone through have obviously had an impact on my own identity. Besides, I now have British citizenship which I obtained after meeting set minimum requirements, one of which was passing the *Britishness* test which demonstrates knowledge and understanding about life in the United Kingdom. But does that mean a loss of my Zimbabwean identity? Is it possible to fully belong to both? I still speak my first language and still hold some old cultural values. Yes, I have adopted some form of British way of life as well since I now speak more English than I previously did and have adopted a new culture, a hybridised culture. So, I now find my identity located between Zimbabweanness and Britishness – sitting on the hyphen in Zimbabwean-British. In light of this, it is perhaps apt to ‘close’ with the following extract from Meredith (1998:3);

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’, which enables other positions to emerge. (Rutherford 1990: 211) Thus, the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a *productive*, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new *possibility*. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ (Bhabha 1994) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity.

The third space, although it implies a space which can be occupied, is about nonfixity and fluid subjectivities. It is a dynamic space imbued with feelings of placelessness and loss of certainty. Thus, as will be argued in the present work, belonging and identity, like a mirage, are neither fixed nor static. Rather they are dynamic and, by nature, present us with an uncertainty about their absoluteness; far from being *attainable* entities – properties for which we constantly aspire; ever reaching out to grasp, yet

we are left to grapple with what it really means to belong and what identity we 'possess' within the bodies we inhabit. Even so, I set out to explore belongingness and identity, with that hope that maybe, just maybe, I will move a step closer to unpacking the intrigue that is belonging and identity.

## 1 Beginning intermezzo

What is 'familiarly known' is not properly known, just for the reason that it is 'familiar'. When engaged in the process of knowing, it is the commonest form of self-deception and a deception of other people as well, to assume something to be familiar, and give assent to it on that very account. Knowledge of that sort, with all its talk, never gets from the spot... (Hegel, 1967:92).

The fact is that the beginning always begins in-between (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:329).

In this thesis I explore what it means to 'belong' within two early years settings. The aims are: to investigate the development, function and process of children's sense of self and membership in two early years settings so as to appreciate what it means to 'belong'; to examine how children become aware of their membership in communities whilst at the same time identifying some of the repercussions when children are unable to negotiate a sense of 'belonging'.

Jackson (2000:1) notes 'ours is a century of uprootedness. All over the world, fewer and fewer people live out their lives in the place where they were born. Perhaps at no other time in history has the question of belonging seemed so urgent'. This observation explains, albeit in part, the significance of research on belonging and identity in the contemporary world. My own interest in researching belonging and identity within the early years, as intimated in the prologue, came about as a result of trying to establish *what it means to belong*, after leaving my country of birth, where I had lived for the greater part of my life, due to political upheaval. I found myself lodged in-between; on the hyphen between being in one place and longing for another (be-longing). It was a matter of learning to inhabit the hyphen between past and present experiences without, of necessity, 'assuming that they must meet each other in full embrace' as within such a space, in-betweenness, 'contradictions are not only acknowledged and accepted but also put into movement to enable new layers of the self' (Wang, 2004:9). Thus, this project was born out of this in-betweenness. Therefore, throughout this study, I, among other things,



constantly (as appropriate) draw on my own personal experience as the basis of understanding the children's experiences whilst not letting my experience dominate by engaging reflexively with my own positioning within the research context, including the interpretation(s) and understanding(s) which such a position offers (Buchbinder et al, 2006 and Mason, 1996). I take cognisance of Denzin's (1997:225) argument that 'a responsible, reflexive text announces its politics while it ceaselessly interrogates the realities it invokes while folding the teller's story into the multivoiced history that is written' whereby 'no interpretation is privileged'. This is necessary as it accords the data a 'voice' even when being presented using the 'teller's' lens.

Belonging and identity forms part of the fundamental aspects of early childhood where children are trying to get a sense of 'who they are' (Stein, 1937) conversely they might 'refuse who they are' (Foucault, 1982), by resisting discourses of schooling. Thus, an understanding of belonging and identity in the context of the early years is perhaps as important as practitioners' understandings of the curriculum. This is premised on the assumption that children's successful experience of the curriculum is linked to their sense of connectedness to their educational setting and their sense of identity and belongingness (Brooker and Woodhead, 2008).

Research that has been done so far within the early years context has concentrated on belonging and 'participation' thereby overlooking other key factors to belonging such as identity, loyalty, engagement and conformity. Furthermore, the diversity of forms of belonging and identity – for instance by geographical area, ideological leaning or demographic labels (e.g. race, age, gender or social status) – appear not to have drawn balanced attention with participation dominating the empiric dialogue. Another shortcoming within the existing research evidence is the underlying impression or assumption of an inherent fixity of belonging and identity, an 'attribute' one either possesses or does not possess. This seem to overlook the dynamic nature of belonging and identity where

people's sense of belonging and identity is influenced by their present circumstances, background and environment and changes in these factors may lead to 'shifts' in how they perceive themselves in relation to their contexts. Thomson (2002) eloquently notes that children enter schooling with 'virtual school bags' filled with knowledge, experience and dispositions gained outside school which need unpacking in order to 'establish a shared horizon of understanding and to open dialogue within that horizon' (Fitch and Loving, 2006:5). Thomson and Hall (2008: 89) observe that 'school only draws on the contents of some young people's school bags, those whose resources match those required in the game of education'. Along similar lines, Illich (1977:15) points out that 'educators tell society what must be learned and are in a position to write off as valueless what has been learned outside of school'. Thus, what are the repercussions when children bring 'contents' which are not valued or are perceived as being *different* to others in general but particularly those who carry power, including other children and the practitioners? It is inevitable that children will experience the curriculum differently influenced by, for example, cultural, religious, linguistic and historical backgrounds. Lenz Taguchi's laconic observation on the current state of affairs in education contexts is of interest here, she notes;

The challenges of one way of understanding the educational arena in a wider perspective today is that there are two strong contradictory movements at work; one of complexity and diversity increase, and one of complexity and diversity reduction...the more we seem to know about the complexity of learning, children's diverse strategies and multiple theories of knowledge, the more we seek to impose learning strategies and curriculum goals that reduce the complexities and diversities of learning and knowing (Lenz Taguchi, 2008:1 cited in Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

Migration trends for the past ten years as a result of globalisation have had an impact on countries in all continents across the world including the UK (Cantle, 2005 and Zetter, Griffiths, Ferretti & Pearl, 2003). A close look at the Home Office Statistics (2007) will show that migration in the United Kingdom (UK) has steadily increased. As stated by Oikonomidou (2009),

such migration has tended to lead to ethnic diversity in schools where children from other countries converge in the classrooms of the host country. Such has been the case in the UK where the outlook of classrooms has evolved to reflect the cosmopolitan make-up of the communities in which they are. As a result of globalisation, 'difference is becoming increasingly normative' (Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004:3). Thus, things that used to tell us 'who we are' are constantly transmuting. There have also been implications of migration to policies promoting 'cohesion' between the 'newly arrived' and the 'already there' children (Cantle, 2005). The government has introduced policies to promote inclusivity in society in general and in schools in particular. This has meant government encouraging schools to extend their tolerances to certain values, beliefs and traditions once considered 'foreign', changes that inevitably challenges long held notions of belonging and identity (Zetter, 2007; and Zetter et al, 2006).

Belonging is perceived as a function of both the individual and the community in which individuals are situated. It is a result of the interaction between the individual and the environment which tends to be constituted by the people and resources such as, in the case of a classroom, the building, the furniture and the literature. In general, it has been established that it is important for the young child to have agency (Rogoff, 1990; Sewell, 2001) particularly as it is manifested within a community of learners (Wenger, 1998; Maynard, 2001). In this instance learning becomes both an individual and a joint enterprise (Mittendorff et al 2006; William and Sheridan, 2006; McGrath, 2007; Lee and Roth, 2007) thus foregrounding the dual importance of 'belonging' to the group whilst simultaneously recognising the individual's unique participation in (co)constructing the group. Whilst the interplay between 'learning' and 'participation' has been documented less attention has been paid to the issue of 'belonging' in general and what it means to 'belong' and to have an identity within a 'community' of learners specifically.

## **The story so far**

Most of what we know about belonging in education is influenced by studies conducted in post-compulsory education settings, particularly in the United States of America (e.g. Osterman, 2000; Faircloth, 2009 and Goodenow, 1993). These studies employ quantitative research methods and have tended to be interested in the role played by students' sense of belonging in their decision to stay or leave their education settings with the hope to establish ways to reduce student turn over and increase student retention. This is suggestive of a research skew towards 'belongingness' in adult education settings (e.g. Sari, 2012; Rovai and Lucking, 2003; Lee and Robbins, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Goodenow, 1993). As much as this knowledge is important in informing further research on 'belonging', it leaves questions with regard to the formative stages prior to adulthood. If, as it is contended, 'belongingness' is one of the most important factors affecting children's ability to learn effectively (Summers, 2006; Linnenbrink, 2005; Summers, Beretvas, Svinicki and Gorin, 2005; Hancock, 2004; Johnson and Johnson, 2003; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone, 2002; Hoffman and Rovai, 2002), then it seems imperative to gain some insights into factors and elements that may constitute or influence what it means to 'belong' within the early years. It, therefore, is important to complement current knowledge so as to further our understanding of what it means to belong and how children negotiate the intricacies of an educational setting in their development of a sense of belonging and identity. In Australia, the attraction 'belonging' is gaining is evident in the government's emphasis on 'belonging, being and becoming' within the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (The Council of Australian Government, 2009). Here, interest is not only in belonging but also identity. By emphasising these aspects of children's lives, the Australian government seeks to influence 'positive' child development where the assumption is that a child with a sense of connectedness and security is likely to develop more 'positively' than one without.

In the UK interest in belonging and identity as researchable concepts is also gathering currency with particular focus on children. For example, Woodhead and Brooker have examined ways of enhancing a sense of belonging (2008), recognising the importance of belonging to children's development of self-identity (Ibid: 2008a). As much as these studies highlight the significance of belonging and identity among children and young people, they also show that belonging and identity is still a concept in development.

Although there is near consensus that belonging is important in education settings, there is also a general assumption that belonging is a definitive, fixed and stable trait whereby children can be seen to attain (Anthias, 2006). Yet, identity (and also belonging) as Derrida (1998:28) suggests, is 'never given, received, or attained only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures'. Therefore, the present study takes a somewhat different perspective on belonging and identity; arguing that neither is stable nor fixed – it is constantly transmuting and is sensitive to time, context and culture. In the next segment I consider the key theoretical influences to my perceptual approach.

## **Underpinnings**

The question of the knowledge and the nature of knowledge is also an important one in this study since it influences the construction of the concept of belonging. I wanted to know the different constructions of belonging and identity and the perspectives influencing how the two are understood. Another important consideration when it comes to the two terms is consistency of meaning between parties, in this case between researcher and participants. It is a question which still concerns me. When I talk about belonging and identity, do I mean the same thing as do my participants? While this investigation attempts to unpack the different, sometimes intriguing facets of belonging and identity, it does not claim to

present the 'ultimate' knowledge and understanding. Rather, it hopes to make a further contribution to the dialogue about belonging and identity in the early years using the philosophies of poststructuralism, postcolonialism and queer theory. This affords me a way of examining, indeed questioning, the commonly-held and at times taken-for-granted assumptions of identity and what it means to belong, particularly in the early years context. It allows me to examine influences and discourses that constitute relative 'understandings of 'belonging' and identity.

In my formative academic experience, one of the most intriguing parts of writing scholarly work is probably where to start and how to start. Having made several divergent considerations, I found Lazarus' (1999) logic reasonable; bearing in mind that 'reasonableness' is, at best, subjective and, at worst, elusive. Lazarus' logic proposes that it is reasonable that a body of work should, from the onset, declare and define its theoretical, both epistemological and architectural (here 'architectural' meaning the design and 'structure' of the scholarly work), underpinning(s):

In all scientific disciplines, theories depend on working assumptions of all kinds, which are not subject to confirmation or disconfirmation, though they should be evaluated with respect to their internal logic, reasonableness and fruitfulness. ...In an era characterised by deconstruction, it should be recognized that, implicitly or explicitly, we adopt an epistemological position about how we can know about ourselves and the world, and employ a metatheory about the nature of our being, without necessarily being explicit about it (Lazarus, 1999:3).

Defining my epistemological positioning is helpful in lessening ambiguities whilst at the same time enhancing clarity. It aids the reader's ability to appreciate the lens through which I am approaching belongingness and identity. Ontologically, this study is underpinned by the assumptions that a human being has multiple identities; that these identities are both ascribed and acquired; that he or she is aware of some or all of these identities and that the development of a sense of belongingness within him or her is dependent on how the dominant identity or identities is/are accommodated within a given group/setting or how much one adapts own

identity to prevailing identities and/or circumstances in a 'community' (Champion; Ambler and Keating, 1998). Epistemologically, belongingness is also influenced by how one identifies himself or herself rather than how many identities one has (Levett-Jones; Lathlean; Maguire and McMillan, 2007). With regards to children, because they are likely impressionable (Thompson, 2006), dominant discourses and constructions tend to shape the corporeal experience, how they can feel they belong or otherwise. Societal agents, prejudicially decide for children which differences make a difference (Lathey, 2006 & Olagnero and Rei, 2011). For example, among the existing obvious multiple identities, society has a biased preference for gender as a distinguishing social marker (Kimmel and Aronson, 2010). Toilets, for example, are dualistically labelled *male/female* while, curiously, toilets for disabled people are just labelled *disabled*. This appears to imply that, at least when assigning toilets, distinguishing characteristics which matter are gender and disability. This is how we, as society, have been conditioned to think. In school, there are expectations for normative performance in children which in themselves have gender connotations.

### **Policy context**

The Early Years Foundation Stage is underpinned by two main legislative frameworks: Every Child Matters (ECM) and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS significantly influences practice in early years settings (Brooker et al, 2010) and is driven by four themes namely, a unique child; positive relationships; enabling environments and learning and development. These themes each have underlying assumptions; a *unique child* as a theme assumes that 'every child is a competent learner from birth, who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured'. When it comes to *positive relationships*, the assumption is that 'children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a *key person*.' The third theme, *enabling environments*, is based on the belief that 'the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.' Finally,

the *learning and development* theme makes 'clear' that 'children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all learning and development are equally important and interconnected.'

Every Child Matters, also incorporated in the Children Act 2004, sets out five outcomes for children being served by the UK education system: *being healthy; stay safe; enjoying and achieving; economic wellbeing and making a positive contribution*. Of interest to this study are outcomes two, three and five. *Staying safe*, which is the second outcome, generally has to do with the child being in a secure, stable and caring environment. The third outcome, *enjoying and achieving*, is of interest to the study, among other things, it has to do with attending and enjoying school as well as achieving personal and social development. Finally, *making a positive contribution* looks at the child's interconnection with the community. Both the ECM and EYFS framework appear to make an assumption of a fixed, stable and conclusive hence 'attainable' state of belonging and identity. The issues with these assumptions of fixity are also problematised in this study primarily because belonging and identity, at least according to the argument being put forward in this treatise, are not straightforward or simple. They are complex, at times, elusive constructs.

In our society, and education in particular, there seems to be an inclination towards an individualistic culture, seeking to promote individuality while at the same time attempting to foster cohesion between and within communities (Quinn, 2010). The ECM outcomes and EYFS themes show a commitment not only to individualism, but also to fostering individual connection and attachment to, and participation in, the community they are located in. Whether or not these ideals are lived up to is subject for analysis in the latter part of this thesis. Some authors, for example Gordon and Browne (2011); Anning, Cullen and Flear (2009); Block (2008); Brooker (2008) and Varga (2007), have observed that the British education system, in particular the early years pedagogical practices are imbued with values and beliefs that nurture individualism, as opposed to belongingness and community. The significance of community



in children's learning is also highlighted in Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which introduced a duty on all early years settings and schools in England to promote community cohesion and on Ofsted to report on the 'contribution made by the school to community cohesion' (Education and Inspections Act, 2006: 107). Additionally, Goodenow and Grady (1993:66) observe that 'motivation is not a purely individual, intrapsychic state; rather, it grows out of a complex web of social and personal relationships'. Therefore, for individuals to 'belong', they need to share something within their identity that is consistent with the group or community they are connected to thereby promoting both individuality and collectivity, two seemingly contrasting aspects.

### **Metaphorical Mappings**

In making sense of belonging and identity within the early years, the present work integrates the use of metaphor in an attempt to understand these otherwise complex abstractive constructs. The three principal metaphors influencing this study are *rhizome*, *pentimento* and *stage*.

This study utilises Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of rhizome to consider belonging and identity. The notion of the rhizome offers multiple ways of engaging in and making sense of the fluidity and fragmentary nature of belonging and identity. A rhizome is a horizontal underground plant stem which produces roots and shoots from its nodes. It is characterised by lateral growth, an example of which is a couch grass. Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of the rhizome is symbolic of both theory and research that allows for multiplicity, interconnection and fluidity whereby, in making sense of belonging and identity, no one 'theory' and/or 'method' can be said to have priority. It affords a way of considering the complexly overlapping layers of theories, philosophical underpinnings, multiple identities, cultures and belongings which continuously evolve and interlink with a variety of concepts and ideologies whilst both complementing and enhancing our understanding of what it

means to belong. The notion of rhizome is characterised by a relentless movement, unpredictability and constant change (transformation). As noted by Chia (1999:222) 'rhizomic change is anti-genealogical in the sense that it resists the linear retracing of a definite locatable originary point of initiation'. Thus, rhizomatic approach to research takes into consideration the immeasurability and non-closure of belonging and identity.

In addition, Hellman's (1973) notion of pentimento is utilised to represent the multilayeredness of reality and meaning-making involving belonging and identity. Hellman describes pentimento as different paintings painted over prior paintings as the painter changes their mind; each initial painting representing original thought and the newest (topmost) painting showing present thinking or state-of-affairs. This painting-over then helps preserve for us instances of changes in decision and perspective, telling us a story of the initial thought, how that thought developed. Over time, ghost-like traces of the different paintings become transparent thereby revealing the progressive layering. This illustrates the way I 'see', the multilayeredness of 'seeing' which is inevitably influenced by my past and present, experience and knowledge. The notion of pentimento also acknowledges the non-fixity and multi-layeredness of human experience. This is similar to how belonging and identity is constantly evolving, each belonging and identity showing a unique thinking at a point-in-time of the individual as they navigate the sometimes treacherous terrain of membership and individuality. Thus, while the early years is the first formal level of learning within the context of English primary schools in general, by the time the child gets to early years they will have experienced different learnings, albeit informal, which inevitably influence their 'first' formal learning. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that children's belonging and identity does not, of necessity, 'begin' and 'end' in the early years. Instead, they will likely come into the early years with prior belongings and identities which, most probably, will influence their sense of belonging and identity within the early years. We may, therefore, never come to a

conclusive understanding of the 'pure' 'original' beginnings of children's sense of belonging and identity as there are as multiple explanations as there are ways of knowing, neither will we determine the end. In this regard, to attempt to retrace 'pure' origins of children's belonging and identity would be a futile endeavour.

The *stage* metaphor re-presents performance and performativity involved in children's attempt to connect and be connected to other members of the community (i.e. school) and subcommunities (e.g. different groups within the school) they are situated in. Children within the early years start school at different times during the year. Just like in the theatre where actors do not come on the stage at the same time, some leave the nursery as they join the reception class in September while others remain. This is resonant of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004:23) notion of the rhizome with its 'multiple entryways and exits'. Newcomers enter in the *middle*, when the play has already started. In theatre the actors already know the script, but for children starting school, the script is already written for them. They have to learn how to participate as members of a group, learning the rules and expectations as they go which tends to be characterised by a movement between past and present knowledge and experiences as individuals negotiate their belongingness. That performances tend to be scripted does not render these children passive recipients, rather, in their desire to connect and be connected, it is likely that there will be multiple interpretations and improvisations to the script influenced by, for example, cultural background, experience and, occasionally, spontaneity. Deleuze (1991: 59) notes that the past is 'contemporaneous' with the present it has been;

the past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and the present do not denote two successive moments but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass'.

This interweaving between past and present (also linked to the notion of *pentimento*) experiences and the subsequent influence on individuals' sense of self and connectedness further contributes to the challenges of researching belonging and identity. This is because individuals' belonging and identity are not only situated in the 'now', but also are affected by previous experiences and 'groundings'.

### **The Plateaus**

This thesis is organised in plateaus that are different but interrelated. Each plateau has 'its own climate, its own tone or timbre' (Deleuze, 1995:25). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2004:24) put it this way, 'lines leave one plateau and proceed to another' in a rhizomatic way. This is different from orthodox, linear way of organising a thesis where there are distinct chapters such as the *literature review*, *methodology* and *presentation of findings* and *analysis*. In support of the organisation of the present work, Deleuze and Guattari (2004:24) further point out that a thesis 'composed of chapters has culminations and termination points' whereas a thesis composed of plateaus are interconnected and 'each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau' as I have illustrated in Map 1 below. A plateau is described by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:24) as 'any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome'.



Map 1: The Plateaus

Thus, following Deleuze and Guattari's notion of plateaus, the stories presented within these plateaus are not final or complete, although they are interrelated; they are open and can be connectable. Thus, unlike traditional linearly structured narratives which have a beginning, middle and an end, the narratives in this thesis are rhizomatic, non-hierarchical 'multithreaded story-webs' (Kraus, 2002:6) that refuse closure. The ideal way of presenting a thesis following a rhizomatic approach, as put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:10) 'would be to lay everything out...on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.'

### **An outline of the plateaus**

In the *Prologue*, I explored the intricacies of belonging and identity as embodied in my relocation from one country to another. The aim was to

describe this personal journey that plays into my interest in undertaking this study.

*Setting the scene* situates the present work by providing the background. The aim is to describe the two schools in which the research is set so as to put the work in perspective. It is with the understanding that individuals and their experiences of what it means to belong are understood within particular contexts, including ways in which belonging and identity are produced in discursive practices. This makes it imperative to also focus on, among other things, the 'multiple levels of messages that characterise a classroom. The use of social space, dress, body movement and voice pitch are all part of an ecology of relationship; and they all are complex, culturally embedded sign systems that must be interpreted...even the design of desks and the layout of classroom physical space can be understood as a coded message system that conveys meaning and must be interpreted' (Bowers and Flinders, 1990:21).

Next, *Mapping Belonging* reviews key literature about belonging and identity. *Rhizomatic Methodology* utilises Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome to grapple with methodological issues. *Two Stages and the Actors*, sets the scene across three schools, Bee and Willowbrook Primary Schools in the UK and Chawanda Primary School in Zimbabwe and in so doing provides a thick contextual description with the purpose of giving background information about the study. These contexts are being seen as stages on which different characters interact and different scenes are played out. *Becoming-minoritarian* takes a piece of data to explore notions of belonging and identity and ways in which individuals and groups are 'caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become' and the possible catalytic factors for that becoming (Probyn, 1996). *(Be)longing: Sean's Narrative* examines belonging and identity in circumstances of contravention of a 'community' rules. *Hyphenated Belonging: Khalid's narrative* explores experiences of navigating belonging and identity in the nursery classroom for a child who has recently moved from Lybia to the

UK. *Fragmented becoming: Gemma's narrative* discusses Gemma's experiences of belonging and identity at Bee Primary School. Then, *Connecting the dots* focuses on Aisha's narrative of navigating the terrains of be-longingness at Willowbrook Primary School. *Melancholy: Khadija's narrative* reveals the multi-layeredness of meaning and the intricacies of entering into the participant's subjective space, including the ways in which exchanges between the participant and researcher opens up an affective space. Whilst *Affective encounters* focuses on Joshua to explore what it means to belong for a child with Down syndrome in a mainstream school. Finally, *So what?* is an attempt at closing, albeit messily, where I reflect on the research journey and put forward some reflections and introspections on the partial understanding of belonging and identity

## **2 Setting the scene**

But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight...the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe (Berger, 1972:7).

### **Introduction**

The aim of this plateau is to describe the two schools in which the research is situated. Whilst my efforts will be directed at providing a clear and coherent account I am nevertheless conscious that writing such a report will invariably be infected and, therefore, skewed by aspects of my values, experiences and ideals. Richardson (1990: 12) notes 'no textual staging is ever innocent. We are always inscribing values in our writing. It is unavoidable'. Thus, a second aim of the plateau is to reflexively consider my own inscribing practices. In practising 'writing from ourselves' (Richardson, 1993) there may be possibilities to, 'understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular situations at specific times' (Richardson, 1993, p. 516). Finally, I consider what might be the relationship between my own reflexive musings and the notion of belonging and identity. As noted by Schutz 'the everyday world is a world of intersubjective culture. Its intersubjectivity comes from being bound to others through common influence and work, understanding others and being understood by others.... The relation to others obtains its meaning only in reference to the individual' (1978:134 – 135).

### **Embedded objectivity and reflexive positioning**

The present study is set in two Manchester primary schools serving two somewhat different communities. The principal similarities are that both



belong to the same local authority and both are for the three to eleven age groups. One school, alias Bee Primary School is situated in the south of the city while Willowbrook is an inner-city primary school. In the following sections, I attempt to give a somewhat objective description of the school profiles. 'Surely it is possible to describe a particular place as a school with a degree of objectivity? Are not bricks, mortar and playgrounds tangible things which could be described accurately?' (Jones, 1999:20). Jones (1999) citing Parker notes;

...'con\text'; the separation '\ makes play with the idea of the text setting a context (passive) and the (active) process of selling, persuading by a confidence trick. The con trick here is the method by which we are swindled into committing ourselves to the claims to literalness of the text through our misplaced confidence in its authority to underwrite such claims (Parker, 1997: 86).

It has to be noted that in looking at the two schools I use a prism of subjectivity where an interpretation of the factual is constantly interrupted by a baggage of biases feeding on my personal experiences and perceptions of what 'reality' should *be* rather than *is* thereby giving a representation in lieu of a representation of 'reality'. I attempt to minimise the contamination of, (or is it an attempt to purify the already-contaminated?), the profiles by wedging in 'other' people's descriptions and perceptions. By others I mean other people than me, for example teachers, parents, and children directly associated with the respective schools. So, no attempt at 'othering'!

### **Willowbrook Primary School**

The following excerpt of my chronicle of observations, formed part of my first impressions of Willowbrook Primary School, when I was more 'outsider' than later on when the school had gradually, and sometimes without me being aware, submerged me into its culture.

*What immediately strikes me when approaching Willowbrook Primary School are the trees (shown in the photograph below). These are huge and well established and form a natural boundary around the school. The second thing that I notice is that in addition to the trees is a blue fence that surrounds the school. It must be over twelve feet high. The early years play area is easily recognisable because of the way in which it has been landscaped so as to give the children pathways on which to ride their bikes. There's also a climbing frame. The high wire fence completely rings the play area so that it is both secure from the outside world as well as the rest of the school.*



*Map 2: Street outside Willowbrook Primary School, demarcated by a fence boundary*

*As I walk towards the main entrance I pass signs that are displayed on the lampposts including 'beware vehicle thieves operate here!'; 'beware who is robbing here?' and 'who is robbing you?' (shown in photographs below).*



Map 3: Warning signs outside Willowbrook Primary School

*I also pass close-circuit television cameras. Immediately by the school gate is a notice board. Besides stating the school's name it details both the head and deputy head's names and their academic qualifications. It also brandishes the following statement from Ofsted:*

*'This is a good school in which pupils of all abilities achieve well '.*

*The school's world-wide web address is also on the board. A short stay car park sits alongside the school whilst on another side is a Unit for 11-16 aged pupils who have special educational needs. The high wire fence separates the Unit from the school...(07/01/09).*

## **Mapping and belonging**

My description of the school serves as a starting point of a journey that is concerned with 'belonging', specifically in terms of 'belonging' as *lived* and *experienced* within Willowbrook Primary School. In approaching the school it is evident that the first object that caught my eye were the trees. Clearly what a tree might mean to a child is matter of conjecture (a point I will return to subsequently) but, to me trees, represent and are symbolic of fertility, wealth, prosperity, stability and have aesthetic value. Back in Zimbabwe trees hold a particular place within my culture. They are a source of livelihood – an economical and renewable resource – providing

the citizenry with fruit, biological medicine, energy, utensils, furniture and farming equipment as well as shade, shelter from rain, wind, and outdoor seating in various niches where people can relax. Furthermore, trees are a preservation agent – helping curb erosion and its shed leaves enhancing soil fertility by forming a humus layer which prevents water runoff while enabling the gradual percolation of rainfall into perennial and intermittent streams. Modernisation has added a further dimension to the value of trees – they are a source of paper mainly used for educational purposes in form of books and other educationally-relevant material such as newspapers and pencils. Historically, trees have also been used to make traditional weapons. It is this cultural place trees occupy among Zimbabwean people which is the basis of the Shona saying *miti hupenyu* (trees are life). Evident from the above, trees, therefore, hold a common significance among Zimbabweans, a shared meaning which, in some ways, is part of the glue which brings the people together. They symbolise a common interest and a shared heritage – caring for them is caring for your kin and kith. They remind a people they are one, hence the native belief that *whoever draws life and livelihood from the same as me is one with me*. Thus trees are a symbol of identity and connectedness which remind Zimbabweans that people's identity and connectedness is discernible in what they value, feed on, shelter in or under and rely on.

On coming to England where as a family we were faced with the huge task of finding a home and schools for our children trees very quickly became synonymous with 'leafy suburbs' with its connotations of being a relatively prosperous bordering on the rich neighbourhood. I surmised that within such communities there would be shared values and kinship brought about in part by 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1988) that works at affording values such as constancy, steadiness and solidity as well as conferring power and status.

Additionally trees are often aligned with education, progress and civilisation. It is not merely chance that they often feature on school

badges and logos. Trees are a metaphor for life. They represent growth, including spiritual growth.

However, trees here might be taken to symbolise the innocence and beauty of un-tampered with nature akin to a presumed innocence of the rawness of the children that are unsuspecting and unassuming (Rousseau, 1712-1778, in Duschinsky, 2009). The significance of trees lining the streets around Willowbrook Primary School is not clear. This is not, by any stretch, a 'leafy' neighbourhood in the sense of the proverbial English affluent communities. If anything, the community is socio-economically disadvantaged. The hints of material wealth are represented by a multi-million pound brewery and a university generating more revenue than Manchester United and Manchester Airport combined. Residents of the school's immediate community are poor and lowly educated (Venner, 1981) which, considering the close proximity of the university, renders this community a place of contradictions. But in many various and curious ways the metaphorical and symbolic meanings that circulate around trees are tampered with by the presence of the high wire fence. If trees represent notions of growth and progress, the fence by contrast is redolent with feelings of captivity, enclosure and territoriality. To fence something in can be protective but it also marks a boundary between the inside and the outside. And what of the outside?, Instone (1999) following Deleuze conceives fence as space between, neither one nor the other and what the conjunction AND is, 'neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight ... AND ... AND ... AND ...' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007: 9 – 10). To adults, especially those responsible for its erection, the fence might obviously be an epitome of security. It denotes to the 'outside world' (wherever that is!) that the adults have a duty and sense of care towards the children whom the fence is intended to protect. From whichever direction, no one gets into the school, and indeed to the children except through it – of course using designated gates. For it to protect, the fence

is supposed to be invincible, unbreachable by potential intruders. The paradox is, however, that, as much as it is there to keep out, it is also there to keep in – children kept in and intruders kept out whilst defining a collective identity. Another paradox is that the fence's unbreachability exposes the children's vulnerability; otherwise had the children not been vulnerable, then the fence would not need to be secure. While children's security is its strength, the boundary it sets around children is its limitation. It limits children to its confines. You cannot help but wonder if the limiting dimension of the fence is not, indeed, limiting children's adventure and exploration of the literal world around them. How much that affects children's development of a sense of connectedness to the place can only be surmised.

Whilst the aesthetics of trees might gesture towards a place that is nurtured, the signs displayed on the lampposts direct me towards a more toxic community. The statement that 'car thieves operate here' suggests that the immediate vicinity of Willowbrook is a crime scene, one that demands constant vigilance. 'Beware who is robbing here?' incites caution and wariness. Whilst 'who is robbing you?' suggests that individuals might be harbouring useful evidence and that they are, as a consequence, implicated in criminal activity. And whilst the close-circuit television cameras could induce me to feel more secure, the guess is that they are a means of surveillance where, at best, they might help catch the perpetrators of the car crimes or, at least, work as a deterrent. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's work, Haggerty and Ericson (2000:605) came up with what they call 'surveillant assemblage' a system of surveillance which operates by 'abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings and separating them into a series of discrete flows. These flows are then reassembled into distinct 'data doubles' which can be scrutinized and targeted for intervention'. This also resonates with Foucault's (1977) analysis of 'panopticon' as a machine of power where inmates' behaviour is modified to suit jailors' rather than prisoners' designs.

Ofsted notes, Willowbrook is;  
*a 'good' school in which pupils of all abilities achieve well.*

Meanwhile, the school brochure highlights the mission statement:  
*We aim to provide an environment in which children can learn and teachers can teach. Children should feel safe and secure. Our rules and expectations and approaches are made explicit to children, parents/carers and staff to raise achievement and to develop optimistic and reasoned behaviour. We work hard to create a positive ethos in which the whole school community shares a sense of purpose, fairness and has clear expectations. We value the diversity of the various cultures<sup>1</sup> represented within our school and this is evident in all aspects of school life.*

Further on is the head teacher's personal welcoming statement:  
*'What all visitors to our school comment on is the warm atmosphere and the family feeling to the building. I may be biased but [Willowbrook] children are the funniest, keenest to learn, kindest and loveliest bunch I have ever come across. They are simply the best to work with'.*

*'This is a good school in which pupils of all abilities achieve well'.* Given the posters on the lampposts is the implication here that the school by contrast to its immediate community is 'good' in the sense of abiding by the law...a morally good school? Why assert the 'good'...shouldn't we assume all schools would be good? Does the good therefore nod to its absent negative partner –'bad'? Arguably, the word 'good' isn't necessary in the sentence at all because the pupils themselves demonstrate that it is good by achieving well but it is asserted and so we have to ask why ...? Also why not write *'all pupils achieve well'*. Why assert 'ability'? What exactly does 'achieve well' mean? Grammatically, 'well' in 'achieve well' is redundant as achievement is, on its own, a good thing. The centrality of 'rules' and 'expectations' in the ethos of the school is curious. If it takes

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<sup>1</sup> The various cultures include, British, Somali, Cameroonians, Lybian, Kenyans and Pakistanis.

rules and expectations, rather than inspiration, 'to raise achievement and to develop optimistic and reasoned behaviour' then the place of children in the eyes of the school's adults raises a lot of questions. Empirical evidence suggests children's natural pattern of development is primarily through imitating adults, not rules, as they are their role models (Wilford, 2007). In line with this thinking, is it not the adult's role to inspire children rather than set rules for them? Let me move on to Bee Primary School.

### **Bee Primary School**

As well as giving my own description, another function of this section is to destabilise and disrupt what is dominant in this setting as I reflexively engage in what Eisner describes as 'an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events'(1991:3). In my journal I record:

*Although I have been to Bee Primary School on numerous occasions as a parent, my first research visit to this school is at the end of the day after the school has closed. I have made this decision in order to just have the 'feel' of the geographical context of the school minus the key protagonists. To a passer-by Bee Primary School is just a 'regular' English school. A cursory scan of the school and its environs does not reveal any 'surprises'. There are council houses built around it, a twenty mile per hour school-zone speed restriction along the road on which the school stands, bright yellow tarmac markings restricting parking outside the school gate and again a high but this time green fence. A sign post bearing the name of the school also has the school's logo – a bee – under which the school motto 'working together for success' is written. There are also contact details and a rectangular sign post with 'main entrance' in bold unmistakable letters. There does not seem to be any 'stand-out' features I am looking for to turn on my 'researcher instincts'. Still waters run deep, they say. There must be something unique in this 'regular-looking' school, something that should make it different to other schools. In other words, what makes it Bee Primary School and not another? Like a crime scene investigator, I set out to find out the underlying qualities of*



*Bee Primary School and how they possibly shape children's belongingness within the school. I remind myself, the detail is in the finer details which, probably like delicate instruments in the hands of a surgeon, I should use the research tools I have acquired so far to unpick those aspects of the school which do not immediately jump out on a first visit. Of course I am not here to mend the school as the surgeon would, but just to find out aspects of the school, relevant to my research some of which are not too obvious though significant. Like an investigator, I have made note of all my observations in my research diary for initial analysis when I get home (08/01/09).*

Generally, schools, children and teachers are situated within an array of intersections, networks, relations of power and discourses (Nespor, 1997). In relation to this complex web, Giddens (1990:18-19) suggests that 'place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the 'visible form' of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature'. However, while the significance of place may not be considered in a straightforward sense as influencing an individual's sense of belonging, *place* remains a factor in the bricolage from which a sense of belonging and identity is created. Thus, belonging and identity is individually and communally constructed in terms of relationship to place and practices within the setting.

School zone speed restrictions are now general to most areas in England supposedly established to constrain motorists and protect children. This reminds us of the likelihood of accidents involving children around school areas. It might be suggesting children are not particularly careful road users and therefore need drivers to be extra cautious. But then why not have the twenty mile per hour speed restriction everywhere else where children are found? We need no reminding that these children who suddenly need protection within the environs of the school come from the

community where the normal speed limit is higher than that around their school. Is a school an artificial place where everything suddenly becomes different from what is in the community where the child lives? There are no high fences around homes where children are. If they are safe in their 'normal' homes, can they not be safe in a school without the high fence? Perhaps as suggested by Instone (1999: 371), we could imagine a school without the boundary fence 'what would happen? What fears would be let loose? What would fall apart? What would come together?'

While the school fence might evoke feelings of belongingness, it also constrains, enclose and exclude the community within which children come. By fencing the entire perimeter of the school, while it makes the premises more secure, it also turns it to a 'prisoner of war institute' as alluded to by one parent who got upset after having to wait outside the school gate a long time to pick up her child in nursery for a hospital appointment. This resonates with Instone's (1999:6) observation that:

... boundaries connote the site at which things are done differently or the limits to where things are done in one way, they are social constructions. And as the site where different ways of doing things meet, they are likely to be replete with tension and conflict...one may think of people's acting according to a set of laws on one side of a state boundary, for example, and others on acting on the basis of a different code on the other side of the boundary. Boundaries are barriers that people establish, but by no means are they airtight (Instone, 1999:6).

Are we becoming cautious or just paranoid as a society? Or are we suggesting a school is a dangerous place to be hence all the rules and regulations? Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 252) state;

Instead of the great paranoid fear, we are trapped in a thousand little monotonias, self-evident truths, and clarities that gush from every black hole and no longer form a system, but are only rumble and buzz, blinding lights giving any and everybody the mission of self-appointed judge, dispenser of justice, policemen, neighbourhood SS man. We have overcome fear, we have sailed from the shores of security, only to enter a system that is no less organised: the system of petty insecurities that leads everyone to their own black hole in which to turn dangerous, possessing clarity on their situation, role and mission even more disturbing...

To compound my bemusement, on my way home I find the same children who go to this school playing freely where there are no high fences, speed restrictions and no parents in attendance. My own son prefers to go to this school on his own as he argues, 'I'm grown up and I'm safe. Other children of my year group are not accompanied by their parents. What's the fuss, mum?' Indeed what's the fuss?.

The dictum 'working together for success' seems to be aimed at parents rather than children. A conversation with my son reveals he always looks forward to go to school for the 'fun' rather than the 'success'. I am by no means saying my son is representative of the pupil population of the school but my long experience in the foundation setting suggests most children indeed go to school to have an enjoyable experience. The first *Every Child Matters* outcome is 'enjoy and achieve'. Fun comes first ('fun' ahead of 'fuss!'). Has the school got it wrong here? Children's choice of school tends to be on the basis of whether they have friends there or not.

The image of bees together with the caption 'working together for success' also need a further examination. Why did the school choose the bee symbol? Do bees work for success or do they just work together? What is the aspiration? There is a difference between 'working together for success' and working together successfully. It doesn't say the school is successful. So where is the school in its journey towards success? Is it now close enough or still far off? If the school is what it says on its sign post – yet to attain success – this makes me curious. Is the message going to change once it has attained this 'success'?

Let us look at the symbolism of a bee for a moment. It is generally agreed bees work together although it is not known whether or not they do so for success. Who are the bees in the school? The teachers, the children, the parents or everyone? Or do we have sections of the school playing the bee role while other sections are playing the human role? Too early to tell. Interestingly, bees work on behalf of other species. Here I am thinking

about the honey and the cross pollination. This benefits others more than them. If children work hard in a school, who gets the credit? Who is the good Ofsted report for and does it matter? Do the children really care about this collective 'success', league tables and outcomes? Are they even aware of these things? Do they share the bee ethos?

Are children being asked to aim for lofty goals, to do the impossible? With what seriousness, and to what extent, is the success agenda taken? The other characteristics of the bee community are mutuality, interdependence and community-ness. In respect of this, Derrida makes an insightful observation in relation to the position of the 'other' in the community, and the problematic nature of the connotations of fusion and identification inherent in depictions of the relationship between individuals and community. Following Derrida, community and notions of belonging that are integral to the idea should be placed under erasure:

If by community one implies, as is often the case, a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement beneath the phenomena of discord or war, then I don't believe in it too much and I sense in it as many threats as promises (Derrida, 2001: 66).

Can the community-ness aspect be generalisable to the school culture? However the notion of 'community' within a school setting especially where children as young as the early years pupils are involved, is problematic. Probably the threats in a school community derive from an assumed difference in aspirations and perceptions between the adults and the children. Thus children 'position themselves in the light of the expectations and evaluations of significant other' (Devine, 2000:190). For there to be mutuality, as with a bee community, I assume everyone must be informed about the agenda and sign up to it. However, as noted by (Wenger, 1998:77) mutual relations among participants are 'a complex mixtures of power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helplessness...authority and collegiality, resistance and compliance...' The problematic nature of the notion of 'community' within the early years context is further explained by Derrida and Caputo:

the word community while it sounds like something warm and comforting, the very notion is built around a defence that a 'we' throws up against the 'other' that is, it is built around an idea of inhospitality, an idea of hostility to the *hostis*, not around hospitality...in hospitality I must welcome the other while retaining mastery of the house; just so, the community must retain its identity while making the stranger at home. If a community is too welcoming, it loses its identity; if it keeps its identity; it becomes unwelcoming. Thus, the impossible, the 'paralysis' of community is that it must limit itself, remain a community while remaining 'open' forbidding itself the luxury of collecting itself into a unity (Derrida and Caputo 1997:113).

It is reasonably doubtful that most of the children attending Bee Primary School do so for success. Even if we were to assume they come to school for success, would it mean the same thing as it means to the adults? What exactly is success and how is it determined? Is there mutuality between all members of the school, the most important being the children, on the agenda? This is what makes the slogan 'working together for success' problematic. Every day of my observation children's most frequent question is 'can we go and play now? By making children follow a formalised routine, are the adults in the setting forcing children to follow their agenda? A case of children being turned into adults before they are ready to. Childhoods being socialised into adulthoods where adults are more prominent.

### **Navigating unknown terrain**

In light of the treacherousness surrounding the notion of 'community' and 'belonging', as noted by Benhabib (2004:6) 'we are like travellers navigating an unknown terrain'. The navigation of the construct will have to be a careful, albeit painstaking, one. The slipperiness of the concept of belonging makes it the more complex with a lot of grey areas which, not only need untangling, but also should have its distinctiveness as a concept established. The fact that belongingness on its own – apart from its effects and triggers – is un-discernible, calls for a delicate dissection exercise of the various constituent tissues making up the phenomenon. This involves constantly placing the notion of 'community' and 'belonging'

under erasure, uncovering complex literature and undertaking intricate analysis.

### 3 Mapping 'belonging'

The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with pre-existing, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:204).

#### Introduction

In this plateau I muse on presentations and re-presentations of 'belonging' and its inevitable shadow 'identity' as described, contested, debated and argued in the literature. Whilst I am not certain whether I will be able to erase previous or, indeed, familiar notions of what 'belonging' means, I will, nevertheless, try to flatten and maybe even shred certain narratives that cling or circulate around belonging. Such activity might breathe air into my more fixed ways of thinking and in so doing alter my own vision. The ambition is to work the literature whereby 'unfolding words upon words' there are possibilities for words to 'shatter and explode the pre-existing words' (Larrosa, 2001:40 cited in Aquino, 2011:649) and thus create a necessary space to think, reflect and to (re)consider how we might understand 'belonging'. Guattari (1995:131) observes that 'the work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself'. Therefore, by mapping the literature, it allows for both an appreciation of why certain formulations have emerged whilst also making 'clear' the disciplinary heritage that underpins these. As I weave through this textual landscape, I also dip into my own life mosaic and how this in turn impact upon notions of belonging and identity. This, hopefully, sheds light on some inevitable personal influences on meanings associated with the twin concepts. The review then considers dominant, and at times, competing understandings and the contribution these make to contemporary discourses surrounding notions of belonging and identity. Finally, the conclusion rehashes the main themes whilst explicating implications for the study as a whole. This,

hopefully, contextualises my current study within the already-existing dialogue in the field of identity and belonging thereby conceptually locating my study in the relevant area of study.

### **A Cartography of belonging**

Globalisation means that notions of identity and belonging are evolving. Lines of separation marking the distinctiveness of groups and individuals are constantly shifting and, in most cases, become blurred thereby making categories of belonging 'less easily defined as distinct groups into which people neatly fit' (Marsh et al., 2007:8). In addition, Minha-ha (1989:94) states that 'despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak'. That belonging is not fixed, but rather fluid, transient and takes different meanings according to perspective makes it complex and uncertain (Walton and Cohen, 2007:82). Within such complexities, belongingness and identity are understood as a shifting and fragmentary phenomenon best epitomised as an always incomplete process rather than a finished outcome (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007; Leon, 2009). This fluidity makes it more difficult to have a firm handle on a consistent meaning. As noted by Laclau and Mouffe (2001:112), 'the impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there has to be partial fixation – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning'. Yet, as highlighted by Deleuze (1995: 157), 'there is nothing more unsettling than the continual movement of something that seems fixed'.

Presented with increasingly broader choices, individuals have found themselves affiliated to multiple groups where memberships are as loose as they are transient. This has led to what Lee (2010:174) calls 'liquidity' which refers to the fragmentation of life where 'increasingly connections and changes to those connections have become available'. These might be connections to, for example, places, people and narratives. The advancements in technology also means that boundaries, including



geographical ones are at times rendered meaningless (Bauman, 2000 and Hannam; Sheller and Urry, 2006). Children now have opportunities to 'belong' to both real and virtual communities (Graham and Marvin, 2002) as well as symbolic and imagined communities (Quinn, 2010). Such fragmentation means that both 'belonging' and 'identity' are seen as complex and rhizomatic, characterised by 'an image of movement that can come to temporary rest in new places while maintaining on-going connections elsewhere' (Bell, 1999:9). This temporary rest implies a 'partial fixation' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Yet, despite and maybe even because of such fluidity there are still texts that opine views relating to both 'belonging' and 'identity' which, as I go on to argue, are clichéd, predictable and over familiar.

Owing to different standpoints, defining 'belonging' remains problematic. In spite of divergent views, there are perceptible similarities where belonging is described as feeling connected and being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by teachers and peers (Goodenow, 1993; Jørgensen, 2010; Willms, 2003 and Faircloth, 2012). Meanwhile, Osterman (2000) describes 'belonging' as having a 'sense of community' where connections are rooted in both social and emotional factors. Community is not only so much about its homogeneity, but also its heterogeneity. In the context of community and connection or belonging, homogeneity plays a key role. It has to do with shared 'territories' where there is some ground of commonality. This can include, though not limited to, common aspirations and goals, ideologies, culture, language and interests. These, in a sense, are the 'excuse' for coming together, for forming a 'community'. Even in this homogeneity, there is a place for heterogeneity. When people come together to form a community, they also realise the diversity that exists within that homogenous grouping. These are the differences between its constituents, the mutual boundaries that exist between its members and how well these boundaries are negotiated. The boundaries, and indeed roles, are based on a range of

facets. These can be by age, gender and, in some cultures, social hierarchical/ political role. A functional community requires a dose of heterogeneity to survive and even thrive. These boundaries are helpful in maintaining a degree of orderliness where, presumably, community members know their place and role and function to the requirements of those roles. Even so, depending on dispensation and activity, these roles are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. In this respect, Lorde (2000:54) contends that conceiving belonging as a sense of community 'must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist' but, instead, should be viewed as a way of navigating those differences and identifying subtleties which can engender new links.

Most of what we know about belonging has been influenced by, for example, psychological, humanism and sociological studies. Therefore, exploring belonging and identity within these disciplines allows for both an appreciation of why certain formulations have emerged and also the underlying philosophy.

### **Psychological Framing**

The conceptual framework of psychology has been a huge influence in terms of how we understand belonging in general and, particularly, in relation to the young child. Specifically, behaviourism has sought to establish that a sense of belonging is a discernible, if unstable, 'fact' in human behaviour, something that each individual has within himself or herself that can be observed through their external manifestations (Skinner, 1938 & 1972; Hull, 1943 and Bandura and Walters, 1963). Aberrations to what constitutes 'normalised' demonstrations of 'belongingness' are considered deviant, where behaviours considered 'maladjustment' may be construed as a deficiency insofar as 'belonging' is concerned (Clegg, 2006; Ashworth, 1997; Aanstoos, 1987). For example,

children who do not 'show' 'discernible' signs of belonging may be considered 'social isolates' who may be having communication problems.

Another significant contribution of the field of psychology to our understanding of belonging is located around Maslow's work on the 'hierarchy of needs' (Maslow, 1943). These needs are often depicted as a pyramid where the lower foundational stages referred to as physiological factors (e.g. school meals, water, sleep and so on), security needs (e.g. high fences and CCTVs) whilst the top of the pyramid is seen in terms of progressing from feeling 'loved and belonging' to 'self actualisation' where individuals can demonstrate creatively or solve problems. According to this taxonomy, deficiency needs must be met first after which individuals 'hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group' (Maslow, 1943: 381). Whilst Maslow's conceptualisation has contributed to theories of personality and motivation, questions have been raised regarding the hierarchical arrangement of needs. Wahba and Bridgewill (1976), for example, found little evidence for the existence of a definitive hierarchy. The theory also seems to overlook cultural differences in terms of significance and how these needs are fulfilled. What is, however, important about Maslow's contribution is that it has entered into what could be described as mainstream common-sense views surrounding young children and 'belonging'. These are predetermined linear views of child development whereby belonging is viewed as *attainable* before an individual can move to the next level of development. These views have shaped and dominated how adults in education settings, in particular the early years (in the earliest weeks of starting school), classify and judge children. Such discourses continue to 'dictate' how we come to 'know' about the lives of children within the early years. It gestures towards what Deleuze and Guattari (1987:12) refer to as arborescent, symbolised by the metaphor of a tree which is a 'logic of tracing and reproduction'. This way of thinking is dominant within the early years practice whereby allocating every child a key person in their earliest days of school is thought to enable them to

*settle* in the setting. The assumption is that once they *settle* they *belong*. Such predetermined linear views contain unquestioned 'assumptions and investments' (Mansfield, 2000:141) where belonging has been generalised to mean that if certain indicators are present such as abiding by institutional rules then a child has *attained* belongingness. Very little further probing, beyond these assumptions, has been done.

### **Humanistic framework**

Humanistic theory of child development has also been a significant framing approach in psychology. Rogers' (1951) work has been influential in terms of our understanding of how children develop a sense of themselves as autonomous individuals. Rogers believed that through an intimate interaction with their environment, children gradually develop a 'dawning awareness of 'I' experience' where they 'positively value experiences that they perceive as enhancing themselves and negatively value experiences that appear to threaten their development' (Rogers, 1951: 499). Within the humanistic framework, humans are viewed holistically rather than in social, psychological and physical components (DeRobertis, 2006). Belongingness is generally understood as both a need for and a capacity to develop constant relationship with others (Bugental, 1964). Additionally, Ma (2003: 341) states that the 'extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment' is also important in enhancing positive emotions for example happiness. However, Van Den Hemel (2008) points out that belonging is a complex process where one can be included but still does not experience themselves as belonging. Thus a definitive understanding of belonging remains as elusive as having a deterministic 'attainment' of it. It has, within it, a slipperiness that sometimes renders it undefinable. Yet, when it is talked about, there is a sense parties 'understand' what it means though explaining what it *is* exactly remains a mirage.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) have identified the relationship between identity and membership and how this links to integration where it is then possible to experience shared emotional connections leading to a consolidated notion of belonging. Furthermore, Summers and Svinicki (2007) and Daws (2005) found that collectivity is made possible by the manner in which group members engage with each other's beliefs so that as a group there is both an acceptance and a valuing of what each individual contributes. This seems to go some way in countering the argument that groups need to have mutuality that is embedded within a shared vision. Without this, it is argued, the group can become dysfunctional (Rogoff, Mutusov and White, 1996). The complexities of what it means to belong are further thickened by variables such as social class, gender and ethnicity. What, for example, are some of the repercussions when individuals of different ethnicities try to fit into the dominant group as is the case in those settings that are predominantly of white English heritage? Clegg (2006:56) states that there is a correlation between not belonging and feelings of 'rejection, ostracism, loneliness, insecurity, marginality, shyness, unpopularity and limited group membership'. It would seem from studies located around refugee children's experiences of schooling in England that they were positioned as 'other' where, rather than belonging, they were isolated and marginalised (Candappa and Egharevba, 2002; The Greater London Authority, 2004). However, of interest to this study is Croucher (2004), Yon's (2000) and Gardner's (1995) work where it is argued that 'Othered' individuals are not passive; rather they practise resistance to the positioning by children of the dominant group which puts into jeopardy notions of 'belonging' whilst simultaneously raising queries over whether their practices infiltrate into and effects learning. Similarly if, as it is claimed, for 'belongingness' to develop children need material and cultural tools (Lim and Renshaw, 2000), numerous questions then arise. For example, what are the repercussions when children have tools which differ or are perceived as being different to others in general but

particularly to those who carry power, including other children and the practitioners?

### **The contribution of sociology**

Teachers play a fundamental role in the construction of institutional practices that define school norms including those that are connected to children's experiences of belonging (Larrivee, 2000). Because schools act as instruments of social regulation of children attending them (Semetsky, 2010a; Semetsky, 2010b; Steedman; Urwin and Walkerdine, 1985), their ethos – usually channelled through teachers – tend to have an underlying influence on children's activities when they are in these settings. These are 'distinct values, norms, expectations, and reputations, of which members are more or less aware and accepting' (Dahlbeck, 2011 and Hamm and Faircloth, 2005:64). Fitch and Loving, (2006:5) observe, 'the educator has an ethical duty to both help establish a shared horizon of understanding and to open dialogue within that horizon'. Thus, teachers have, so it seems, considerable influence on pupils in terms of how they understand themselves as pupils. This would include those roles they are designated as well as the practices, traditions and cultural resources within which they experience themselves as pupils (Candela, 2005). Pignatelli (2010:2) points to the performative discourses surrounding teachers which impact on ways in which the curriculum might be received by children;

The ubiquity of standardisation tempts the educator to regard this condition as normal and predictable, something to be witness and suffered with resignation. High stakes tests, tight scripted curricula, fixed blocks of instructional time, and all the associated practices and policies that drive towards uniformity and sameness regardless of interest, need, and the best judgment of educators situated in specific contexts present a danger and causes suffering. (Pignatelli cited in Mercieca (2011:1).

Such a drive towards uniformity, sameness and homogeneity might mean children giving up certain cultural identities, a process that Rosaldo (1989) calls 'cultural stripping'. It is this process that creates 'lines of direction' (or the standard) which renders bodies that do not flow 'in line' deviant

(Kojima, 2008:89). Such practices can be viewed as an attempt to create cultural homogeneity and fixity (Jones, 2007). There is, however, a school of thought that constant adult involvement in children's activities can be a hindrance to their development as they may not go on to develop a sense of autonomy which enhances the development of their own identity and belongingness (Van Ryzin; Gravely and Roseth, 2009). However, the extent to which individuals are autonomous in the development of their identity is questionable. Perhaps we should be asking whether children could have autonomy if they have to follow imposed norms and rules within their social milieu (Hill, 2011; Bauman 1998), particularly so in schools where regimented routines shape and regulate children's conduct. How this shapes what it means to belong then becomes important as it raises questions surrounding regimentation and routinisation as tools of acculturation of children into to the ethos of school contexts. In such environments, there is the pressure on children, compulsion even, to conform in order to 'fit in'. Perhaps it is worth looking closely at schools and belonging and the impact of this on children.

### **School Belonging**

The importance of belonging within the context of the classroom and the school cannot be overstated. With the increase in emphasis on citizenship, participation, engagement and inclusion, children's sense of belonging remains one of the cornerstones of early years education (EYFS). The significance of the social context in fostering a sense of togetherness has been highlighted by Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1958 and 1966) where learning is viewed in terms of collaboration and reciprocity between children and adults. This seems to be contrary to practices and processes in the English schools which tend to be influenced by developmental theories and adult-centric paradigms which are largely based on the assumption that 'learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, that it is a result of teaching' (Wenger 1998:3).

Conceiving learning as a by-product of teaching has its own problems. It makes teaching more important than learning whereby the latter cannot exist independent of the former. Moreover, by presenting learning as an individual endeavour, this perspective neglects the importance of collectivity in meeting the goals of learning. Resultantly, the goals of learning have been defined narrowly in terms of mastering a set of basic academic skills (Bergen, 1998) and have, in the process, compromised the importance of belonging.

Säfström (1999: 224) argues for a postmodern-inspired curriculum theory that deals 'with difference as a prerequisite for conversation' while aiming for a 'harmonisation of opinions and stand points'. However, the question still remains whether harmony of opinions is achievable within a school community. It is important, however, to take cognisance of the fact that 'harmony' in this context is not synonymous with 'sameness'. Rather it speaks to how well different viewpoints can sit together in spite of, and at times because of, their diversity. Harmony is, thus, about functionality; how well components work together. Therefore, harmony can still exist regardless of heterogeneity or homogeneity within communities – here the term 'communities' is used loosely to refer to a collection of people. Confirmatory of this, Deleuze (1994) conceives identity as becoming, as constantly in flux where connections between individuals within early years contexts might not necessarily be realised in sameness but rather within the unfolding differences or 'difference-in-itself' (Deleuze, 1994:63). In terms of language, for example, there might be possibilities that children can form relations regardless of whether or not they share a common language (Aboud and Sankar, 2007).

Looking back at my own life; of course thinking as a child, acting as a child and talking as a child; the significance of belonging has constantly transmuted. This influenced by age, education, geographical location and even mood. What mattered to me, for example, when I was five may no longer matter or may have just taken a sophisticated turn. As a child, all



that mattered to me was having fun and, therefore, my choice of friends and connections evolved around the *fun* factor. Whoever made me happy was a friend and whoever infringed on this happiness was a foe. Simple! No sophistication whatsoever. I grew up in a monocultural community where culture, did not exactly matter to me. And, therefore, common interests were central to my selection of friends.

Several commentators, for example, Baumeister and Leary (1995); Leavitt and Power (1989) emphasised emotional ties where empathy and attachment are viewed as important to individuals' sense of connectedness. This implies that emotional attachment enhances children's sense of security and belongingness regardless of whether or not they share the same language. Murphy's (2003) study of non-English speaking young children's experiences of school found that, unlike their English speaking peers who benefited from their cultural haven, they had difficulties navigating the cultural and linguistic landscape and, consequently, experienced low educational attainment and not fitting in. Clegg (2006), on the other hand, observes that children in these circumstances experience 'isolated belonging' where one is accepted within a setting but not in one particular category and with disconnected relationships. Thus, as pointed out by Bell (1999:3), individuals do not 'simply or ontologically 'belong' to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction'. This makes belonging in a school setting multifaceted. The challenge emanates from the idea that for children to experience belongingness, the practices and processes in school must be culturally responsive, ensuring that all children, regardless of, for example, language, religion, social class, gender and ethnicity, feel at home. It is the teacher's remit to acknowledge the unique cultural and familial experiences children bring to the classroom (Venn and Jahn, 2004) in order to foster a sense of belongingness.

In a school, there are policies which are framing mechanisms that, to some degree, impact on each member of the school community. For

example, a school's inclusion policy will, to varying degrees, affect all children but for those that are deemed as having special educational needs its impact will be enormous. It will, for example, influence how such children experience pedagogical practices (Berman, 1997 and Glasser, 1986). More importantly, however, it will affect how they are positioned within the mainstream where it might well be that they experience themselves as marginalised. These children tend to be viewed as Other and, therefore, deviant from the standard (Goodley and Roets, 2008) which undermines their psycho-emotional wellbeing (Goodley and Lawthom, 2011:3; Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011) and compromises their belongingness in the setting. This also affects the children's participation within the school community – an important factor in children's development of a sense of belonging.

There has been concerted interest among researchers on the interplay between belonging and participation within the early years setting. More recently, Bath (2009) investigated the meaning of participation within three English reception classes and its role in children's sense of belonging. It emerged that a participatory approach to teaching and learning enhances children's sense of self and belonging within the school context. This study exemplifies the centrality of a sense of belonging to key aspects of children's educational experiences within the early years. Similarly, it has been reported that participation in school activities enhances a sense of connectedness to and being accepted within, the school (Kenan, 2010 and Bath, 2009). It has also been established that as children's participation increase, their sense of belonging also increases (Voelkl, 1995). In light of this, it would appear that children's sense of belonging goes a long way in improving how they perceive their experiences within educational settings. This position however does seem to overlook the role of friendships and peer relations and how this affects participation. Taking part in activities in the setting may not always be a sign of belonging. When individuals participate they might do so in response to, or in compliance with, rules and expectations which might render such

participation performance. In relation to the extent to which participation can be viewed as an indicator of belonging, Derrida (1980:59) talks about a 'sort of participation without belonging-a taking part *in* without being part *of*, without having membership in a set'. Similarly, children might drop certain connections, make new relations and engage with one another. This leads to questioning what the relationship is between 'participation' and 'belonging'. Is involvement or participation between groups of children an indication of 'belonging'? (Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris, 2004; Dathari, 2007; Appleton; Christenson and Furlong, 2008). Thus, is 'participation' both a cause and effect of belonging?

Perhaps the danger of morphing 'belonging' and 'participation' is that it skews our looking and indeed vision of what 'belonging' could be. It means that focus would be on the observable actions of individuals where, by simply looking at whether or not children are taking part in activities of groups to which they are connected or are a part of could determine 'belonging'. What this overlooks is the depth and quality of this participation and focuses instead on the assumption that individuals belong because they participate and that they participate because they belong.

Osterman (2010: 239) observes:

when students experience belonging in the school community, their need for relatedness are met in ways that affect their attitudes and their behaviour. They like school and are more engaged in learning. They have more positive attitudes toward themselves and others and are more likely to interact with others – peers and adults, in positive and supportive ways. They are more accepting of authority and more empathetic to others.

While it may be difficult to make direct parallels to studies on high schools, which obviously have much older children than the ones being studied here, some inferences can be drawn. For instance, research by Fine (1991) and Bond et al (2007) found belonging to be a direct cause of high school student drop out. Confirming this, in 1992 Schlosser found that teachers who promoted a sense of belonging among their pupils had a relatively higher student retention rate than their counterparts who did not.

As much as these studies were conducted in somewhat different contexts, they tell us something about how students felt about their lack of sense of belonging. It can be safe to infer that a feeling of disconnection led them to search for a school community that would accept them; one to which they felt connected. If not belonging affected high school students to this effect, it is highly likely that the impact of not belonging on younger children will be more adverse. Not leaving for a different school should, therefore, not be taken to mean they are content with not belonging. Whether they leave or not, a lack of sense of belonging is likely to generate within the child a dislike of school. Additionally, Goodenow's (1991) study revealed that there was a positive correlation between students' sense of belonging and students' expectations of academic success and interests in school activities. This is complemented by other investigations (e.g. Goodenow and Grady, 1993; Blum, 2004 and Ryzin; Gravely and Roseth, 2009) which revealed that children's sense of belonging to their school was a significant predictor of their intellectual development and sense of autonomy.

### **Postmodern understandings of belonging**

Belonging is conceived in multiple ways and there does not seem to be a single understanding capable of painting a complete picture of this construct. Perhaps one way to approach this subject is by acknowledging the complementarity of the unity of these understandings wherein each understanding is a layer making up the 'onion' of understanding belonging. Therefore, no single understanding of the subject of belonging can do without other understandings (Sumsion and Wong, 2011; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010; Cohen and Kratz, 2009). As we peel at each layer we gain a partial understanding. But could it not also be argued that each layer blocks the layer beneath and that we have to undertake conceptual work including interrogating why some views and not others constitute the layers?

Notions of belonging often gesture towards a fixed binary perspective where one either belongs or does not (Pugh, 1993; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005; Nocker, 2009 and Butler and Spivak, 2007). This negates other ways of knowing. As suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:23), 'it is not easy to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left to right or right to left'. Individuals do not tend to derive satisfaction from just one form or type of belonging. As pluralistic as our identities are, so are our yearnings to belong to communities, which makes belonging multifaceted and multi-layered (Lovell, 1998). Demographic factors such as age, sex, religion or social class can be a legitimate source of the need to belong which makes it imperative to see what happens in-between whilst mapping the different transitions individuals make between and within different communities. This echoes Deleuze and Parnet's (1977: 21 – 22) observation that 'what matters on a path, what matters on a line, is always the middle, not the beginning or the end. We are always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something'. In her novel *Between*, Brook-Rose (1968) postulates that individuals are constantly in transition from one point to the other where perhaps belonging might be experienced in-between. Within these communities, as observed by Patton (2000:77), 'what matters is the manner in which [individuals] can act upon the actions of others and the kinds of assemblage in which and through which [they] desire'.

### **Performance and performativity**

While identity concerns itself with what makes us different, belonging appears to be the reverse side of the same coin. To belong, an individual needs to find within himself or herself what is similar to members of a group they want to be connected to (Gilroy, 1997). These similarities or common interests might then be the 'glue' that keeps individuals together in widely diverse memberships. Yet, as argued previously, belonging is not only confined to similarities or sameness, but rather has within it a

sense that one gets when they are accepted, not only because of, but also in spite of, who they are; in spite of their unique qualities; the qualities which define their individuality; indeed what makes them different from the next person. Belongingness, then, implies opening up to the other whilst trading in some of one's unique aspects to find common ground with the group. Loss and vulnerability, as noted by Butler (2006:20), 'seems to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure'. Depending on group characteristics and structure, how belonging is framed or even conceived then becomes sophisticated, complex and, at times, elusive.

Butler's notions of performance and performativity are therefore useful in terms of understanding belonging and identity in school. Butler and Salih (2004:212) argue that 'there is no being behind doing, acting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything'. Although Butler was referring to how gender is performed, we can also draw insights into how other identities are repetitively performed. For example, how judgements are made about children might depend on how they respond to rules and expectations in the setting that is observable in 'acts' such as being polite, kind and helpful to the teacher. Performances of identity in school tend to be scripted following 'highly rigid and regulatory frame' (Butler and Salih, 2004:91). These include carpet time routine, lining up to go to either the assembly hall and back, outdoors and back indoors. Thus belongingness in such contexts might then be realised through both performance and performativity (Bell, 1999). The difference between performance and performativity is that performativity is 'not a singular act' but a 'reiteration of a norm or set of norms' (Butler, 1993a:24) from which identity emerges. Thus, it privileges children who comply with adult expectations. They are the audience to whom the 'performance' is rendered. In a sense, they pay the piper and, therefore, call the tune. They are in possession of the 'rewards' and, therefore, skew the 'performance' in their favour. As argued by

Hetherington (1998) 'the production of chosen identities takes place...through a series of performances or occasions in which identity processes are played out'. It is not a singular act. Whereas, performance 'involves the deployment of signs which have already attained meaning and/or standard usage within the legitimated discourse...' (Patton, 1995:182). This can be seen in the practices and processes in school, such as the ritualistic reiteration of normalised ways of being in school which works at cultivating a culture of similarity/identification (Fortier, 2000:2).

When belonging becomes conditional upon achievement of certain skills and compliance with a given ethos, those children who are incapable of attaining, or choose not to bend to, others' expectations might be marginalised and feel isolated thereby exhibit signs of not belonging. A sense of belonging to school might therefore be achieved through performance and performativity where children 'learn to perform the emotions and moral qualities that are valued' in the setting (MacLure et al, 2008: 2). Such performances might foster a sense of togetherness among children who identify with these acts. Fair to question how a togetherness born out of performance is not a *performed*, as opposed to *bona fide*, togetherness. These performed acts conceal what remains 'unperformable' such as those acts that are deemed inappropriate and those that should not be acquired as a habit (Hayden, 1998; Butler, 1993). So, through the repetition of normative ways of being, some children might acquire certain identities that foster in them a sense of togetherness and membership.

Within a school context, as argued by Foucault (1972), discourses constrain whilst at the same time regulate ways of being and behaving where expectations are rooted in notions of what is or what should be normal manifest in, for example, routines and rituals like religiously rehearsed and re-enacted carpet time and lining up whenever children are going outside to play and coming back into classroom. Butler's notions of

performance and performativity affords a way of problematising belonging and identity where to belong might mean performing to regimented rules and expectations in the setting. The assumption is that the performance of reiterative act to expectations creates a homogeneous identity where all children would feel connected and eventually 'attain' a sense of belonging. Thus, Butler helps us understand the link between discourse and performativity and belongingness and identity. We understand how *performativity* – a reiteration of norms is a bi-product of perceived expectation of a group to which one is connected. In this respect, belonging and identity can, therefore, be legitimately viewed as 'scripted' which resonates with William Shakespeare's (1968:41) musing that 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts'. The performance of belonging and identity in certain gendered spaces in the classroom such as home corner, construction area, boys and girls writing areas will not always create stable identities. They tend to be spaces of contestation (Mouffe, 1999), of 'on-going tension and openness' where individuals tend to create lines of flight as 'a state of yearning, of movement, and, as such, never set on fixing limits but reaching beyond them. Within these dynamics, there is no resting point but always the alertness and readiness to connect in new and different rearrangements...' (De La Concha, 2006:201). Whilst children's performances in school might be scripted, individuals' interpretation of the script depend on whether or not they possess the valued cultural capital where perhaps children who identify with the dominant culture might have the currency to decode the cultural codes when other children might find themselves having to 'play catch up' in constantly shifting cultural terrains within the early years contexts.

### **Belonging while the surface shifts**

Probyn (1996) proposes that identity is an ongoing process of the interaction between the outside and the inside, which creates the 'surface'



within which individuals are recognised. 'Surface', as put forward by Probyn (1996:12), denotes 'the processes by which things become visible and are produced as the outside'. These surfaces are not merely fixed but are a constant (re)negotiation between the outside and the inside, perhaps also past and present knowledge and experience which in the process determine belongingness 'not in some deep authentic way but belonging in constant movement, modes of belonging as the surface shifts' (Probyn, 1996:19). Surface, then, is characterised by 'deep historicity of why, how, where, and with whom we may feel that we *belong*' (Probyn, 1996:35 emphasis in original). Relative to shifts beneath, belonging is thus not an isolated and individual affair. Instead, it refers to the complex interlinking of different aspects of what defines an individual, their identity and how this influences the connections the individual develops and establishes with other people, groups of people and/or ideologies. Thus, being included may not necessarily mean one belongs 'fully' (Van Den Hemel, 2008). While an individual might experience moments of isolated belonging, it is possible to consider belongingness as experienced in-between (Bhabha, 1994). This in-betweenness creates possibilities for nomadic thinking (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), which means ceaselessly seeking new connections whilst rethinking old ones in the quest for belongingness. Nomadic consciousness as noted by Braidotti (1994:33) is about 'not taking any kind of identity as permanent' but fluid whilst acknowledging that these isolated children are not passive beings, they invent and reinvent themselves or find new ways of being. The development of a sense of identity and belonging thus becomes not only a dialogical process but also takes into consideration the 'role of embodiment as a technology of identity, and, the agency children have in shaping and negotiating the way their identities are read off their bodies' (Skattebol, 2006:508).

The importance of belonging to particular groups changes over time. Children are constantly repositioning themselves in relation to others, developing new connections, discarding others and re-establishing old

ones in a continuous process of fitting in (Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Gee, 2004; Rogers and Cooper, 2000; Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner and Cain, 1998; Ilcan, 2002; Anthias, 2002 and Woodward, 1997).

### **Rhizomatic belonging**

Applying rhizomatic thinking to belonging and identity challenges the linearity that is embedded within common-sense views associated with belonging. Rhizomatic thinking also challenges categorisation and representation in which a child's development of a sense of belonging is already predetermined and fixed. Representation, as put forward by Deleuze (1994:56), 'fails to capture the affirmed world of difference'. Rather, belonging and identity is understood as a continuous and continual process, ever-changing and ever-changed by a range of aspects and does not follow a 'predetermined path, but rather has multiple entryways and lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:21). The ever-changing terrain of belonging and identity is influenced by episodes or a series of events which might be appraised by children differently. Therefore, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea of 'mapping', it is possible to map the ways in which individuals start activities, the roles they take up and how other children are invited to join the activity. Mapping new or unknown lines and entry points children make in accordance with their psycho-social development will draw us closer to an understanding of the fluid and fragmentary nature of belonging and identity as opposed to fixity and static construct which adhere to the idea of tracing/reproduction. In distinguishing a map from a tracing, Deleuze and Guattari (1987:134-135) state;

what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed upon itself, it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields...it is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modifications (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:13).

As far as belonging and identity are concerned, this means that although the two are constantly tested, at times weakened, they are not completely severed. Individuals will always have a resemblance of an identity and, at any given time, they will always have some kind of connection to a group or an ideology and will constantly seek new ways of defining themselves and pursue connections that satiate these constantly transmuting identities or self-definitions.

My own story is one of 'uprootings and regroundings' (Ahmed et al, 2003) as a result of forced migration, where the quest for and process of navigating the belonging terrain from one country to not only a new country but to a new continent with sharply contrasting ethos created in me the uncertainty of belonging (Walton and Cohen, 2007). I was, as Hedetoft and Hjort, (2002) aptly describe, in 'a certain position or state whilst longing for another' which as they note gestures towards 'the ceaseless yearning for connectedness'. Dropping old connections, forging new ones and selectively revisiting some, resonates with the rhizome in that 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 10). They further explicate that a rhizome can be 'broken, shattered at a given spot', but has the capacity to 'start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 10).

### **Community-ness and belonging**

If, as it is argued, a community exists when individuals experience a sense of belongingness to the group (Osterman, 2000) then it is worth reflecting on the challenges of what constitutes 'community' and 'belonging' as put forward in the literature so as to situate the discussion. The notion of 'community' opens up a range of allusions to its historical and religious usage within communities wherein members viewed each other as 'brothers' and 'sisters' (Peters, 1994). Whether or not that equates to belonging is a matter of conjecture. However, overtime, there have been shifts in meaning of what constitutes community and belonging

as shared meanings are perpetually (re)created. Goh (2006:218) argues that for there to be a community 'there is to be no disagreement to the practices, codes, and norms that are already in place'. Thus, the notion of community has become a cliché for it is characterised by lofty and, perhaps, unsustainable aspirations (Glendinning, 2011 and Callus, 2006). Derrida and Caputo (1997:113) query the implicit assumptions of warmth and comfort in the notion of community (and belonging);

in hospitality I must welcome the other while retaining mastery of the house; just so, the community must retain its identity whilst making the stranger at home. If a community is too welcoming, it loses its identity; if it keeps its identity, it becomes unwelcoming'.

This highlights the dilemma between the need to be accommodating and the desire to maintain the identity of the group. There is an urge within groups to make new members feel welcome while at the same time ensuring the group retains its unique identity which might serve as a magnet to new members. Yet, Lorde (2012) states that there are so many ways in which we are not proper or not quite matching up to expectations of what you should be. As observed by Eckert, Goldman and Wenger (2012:13) 'part of being a member of a community is knowing how one's own knowledge fits into the activities of the community, and how knowledge is distributed among others within the community'. Perhaps, the lack of a shared horizon within the setting stymied efforts of establishing dialogue. Meanwhile, Giroux (1981) submits that in school, institutionalised cultural capital works at reproducing the existing social relations using pedagogical mechanisms that privilege children who possess valued cultural capital; those who are able to express themselves in a culturally acceptable way.

Apple notes that within school, it is the 'the hidden curriculum that teaches important norms and values related to race, class, and gender divisions in society' (Apple, 1999: 141-172). It is these standard meanings and practices in classrooms that become part of the complex process of

reproduction of unequal class, race, ethnicity, religion and gender relations (Moore, 1999; Thew, 2000) resulting in a form of subordination (Smyth, 1999; Devine, 2002). According to Christensen and James (2001: 79), 'Children find themselves as having little or no control over how to spend their time at school, who to sit by, what to wear, who to talk to, when to talk, who to work with and what work to do'. Thus, it would seem that children are given little space where, through their own efforts, they might materialise their own notions of what it might mean to belong. Also of interest is Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) notion of nomadology where individuals constantly 'betray the fixed powers which try to hold [them] back' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977:40). In terms of gender, for example, these fixed powers perpetuate the dominant discourses of what it means to be a boy or girl. Thus, nomadism is about constantly challenging notions of fixity – fixed e.g. class, gender territories and belongingness. Thus, demarcations marking out these territories is relentlessly shifting, in the process, enlarging some while contracting other territories. With these shifts comes a fluidity of how these territories are defined. When territories shift, dominance, values and expectations also evolve. Thus, individuals 'framed' within these territories have the burden of adaptability and versatility saddled on them. Members are expected to move with shifts or risk being spewed. Hence, discourses of community, belonging and identity have now been characterised by complexity, uncertainty and contradictions.

### **A case for belonging**

As demonstrated in this plateau, belonging is a key factor in both individual and community functioning. More so, in educational contexts, children's development in schools mostly hinges on their sense of being connected and accepted. This, as most research (e.g. Booker, 2007; Summers, 2006 and Linnenbrink, 2005) has found, influences children's ability to learn effectively. This puts belongingness at the forefront of the childhood education agenda. The importance of belonging is further

highlighted by McHugh's (2007:258) observation that individuals are 'threaded with diffuse yearning for meaningful connections with people and place'. It might well be that this yearning to belong fosters a sense of being valued, which is important in building one's confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and a sense of security (Nuñez, 2009; Törrönen, 2006; Semetsky, 2005; Schofield and Beek, 2005 and Bolger; Patterson; and Kupersmidt, 1998).

Belonging and identity as we understand the concepts today, are a result of a gradual development of communities and individuals. While it is understandable that being *a part of* is important to an individual's belonging and identity, being *party to* solidifies the connection. Whether identity is a proxy for belonging remains contestable. For example, while an identity can be independent of how the individual feels, the same cannot be said about belonging. A sense of belonging is how one feels about their association with or to a group or an ideology.

As observed in the existing wealth of literature, it is suggestive that there exists a research skew towards belongingness in adult education settings (e.g. Rovai and Lucking, 2003; Lee and Robbins, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Goodenow, 1993). As much as this knowledge is important in informing further research on 'belonging', it leaves questions with regard to the formative stages of a sense of belonging prior to adulthood. It is, therefore, important to complement current knowledge by directing attention to children so as to further our understanding of what it means to belong and how children negotiate the intricacies of an educational setting in their development of a sense of belonging.

## 4 Rhizomatic Methodology

The question is not: Is it true? But: Does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? (Massumi, 2004: xv – xvi).

### Introduction

In this plateau I attempt to retrace my footsteps in the weaving of this research, with the hope of retelling the story of the process, which led to this particular piece of work. Every step of the way, I intimate the reasons behind the direction and, at times, directions I took in exploring belonging and identity among early years children. Although I had my own purposes and goals of pursuing this investigation, the direction taken in and by this investigation was not always obvious – it was rhizomatic and this gave this work a unique character which I hope to bring through in this plateau. The plateau also considers the ways in which methodological concerns are privileged to the detriment of other considerations. Following Derrida's notion *sous rature* (under erasure), I deliberately strike through the term methodology in the title of this plateau as a way of indicating that the term and concept are 'being deterritorialized and reterritorialized as a rhizomatic process that does not engage in methodological considerations in a conventional way' (Masny, 2009:16). Lather (2007:94) suggests 'getting lost as methodological stances', which is about experimenting with ideas to see what new thoughts open up as opposed to following a linear logic which attempt to 'fix or pin down' notions of belonging and identity through methodological filtering. As noted by Richardson (2000:253) 'postmodernism awakens us to the problematics of collecting and reporting data, and challenges disciplinary rules and boundaries on ethical, aesthetic, theoretical and empirical grounds'. In addition, the plateau goes on to discuss the metaphors that informed this research and their usefulness in deconstructing taken-for-granted assumptions of both researching and conceptualising belonging and identity.

Belonging as a subject of research has been constructed, deconstructed and reframed from multiple perspectives, of which the main ones have been re-viewed in plateau three of this thesis. This means belonging and identity 'cannot be thought in the old way' (Hall, 1996:2). Although it is somewhat a statement of the obvious, it is of interest to highlight the fact that investigations tend to be driven by their underlying purpose. Thus, methods and methodologies chosen for different research work are, in a way, a reflection of the goals, usually predetermined, of the researcher. My own influences in this particular endeavour have been re-presented in the prologue – my own journey, from belonging to and through belongings as defined by and defining my constantly evolving identity. It is a story which appreciates the affective aspects of the dazzling effects of the quest to belong through a maze of identities and, at times, pseudo-identities. It brings to prominence the endearing and compelling elements of belonging and identity as both processes and emotions – unquantifiable qualities with invaluable meaning to human life. Thus, if I was to explore belonging and identity, it was decidedly going to be from an interpretive perspective considering that my own view to this irrepressible part of life was and is from an assumption that we experience and go through belonging and identity in the sphere of relativity – relative to dispensation, place and culture, all of which are immeasurable which characteristic renders quantitative approaches to research inappropriate to and inconsistent with how I was going to approach the subject. Yet I was all too aware that while the subjectivity of the subject of belonging and identity made my pursuit to understand these phenomena an exciting and unpredictable endeavour, it also exposed this inquiry to questions of reliability and validity which have persistently muzzled the positivist world. Massumi (2004) (in the epigraph above) mentions that interpretivism is not about pursuing absolute 'truth' as the subject is elusive. Instead, as I maintain throughout my present work, a myriad of baggage(s) is the underlying driver of this work. In this context, baggage is defined as things that influence and, at times, encumber an individual's perceptions. This includes, but is not limited to, an individual's past and present



experiences, culture and ethnic background. There are individual 'baggages' (mine, individual children's, individual teachers' and individual teaching assistants') and collective 'baggages', that which forms the 'unity' of the people involved in this inquiry. These are 'baggages' which add 'shades' to the lenses through which the meaning of belonging and identity within the early years is viewed. Whether one belongs or has a sense of identity is, after all, a function of how that particular individual relates with, and makes sense of, the world around them relative to their own 'baggage'. If it 'works' for them, then it should be taken to be 'true'. In this regard, outside of the individuals involved, there is no 'truth'. This is why individual stories, or narratives, form the trunk of my present work. It is not an abstract belonging and identity, out-of-this world experience. Rather, it is about belonging and identity as (co)constructed and experienced by the participants of this project, notwithstanding that I also occupied a type of participant role in my own research which 'contrasts starkly with the positivist assumption that the social relations being researched are left unaltered by the research process, and that findings merely represent or reflect the world neutrally' (Gillies and Alldred, 2012:57). Yet, Mercieca and Mercieca (2010:79) suggest (re)thinking research as becoming through engagement with the intensities of the research rather than as 'interpretation of a pre-existent reality out there'. They argue that this can expose the researcher to new possibilities of understanding.

My subsequent interaction with Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) seminal work on the notion of the rhizome which led to a realisation that the development and re-development of the rhizome without distinct beginning and end but always in the middle, fits 'perfectly' with how I perceive the development of belonging and identity among humans where people are constantly discovering and re-discovering new belongings and identities and, at times, (re)rooting existing ones to bring about a semblance of renewal. One of the defining characteristics of the rhizome is its multiple spontaneous entryways and exists. These are several self-

determined opportunities for growth, development and (re)direction without a distinct opening or closure but collectively forming the character of the structure of the rhizome. The result is undoubtedly an intriguing yet amazing body, distinct in its own right with no other with exactly the same features as it. Although it carries some similarities it still is nonreplicable because it is one of its kind. Likewise, each research journey is unique, harbouring its own signature characteristic. It is not only the phenomenon being observed, neither is it the participants on their own nor the enquirer. It is a mishmash of all, a combination, rather than a singularity, of ingredients which interact in a delicate and unique way producing a rhizome-like web of connectedness and belongings.

My journey through this research project typified all of this and more. The timing, the places, the characters, the background (both historical and contemporary) – particularly my background – and how these complexly interacted led to the process which I attempt to retrace in words. Although my research began when I started collecting the data, its influences can be ‘traced’ back to what defines me as a person; my own journey of the quest to belong after fleeing my country of origin due to political persecution. This meant constantly dwelling in an ambiguous ‘territory’ in-between, between longing and belonging– having to navigate between two different worlds while not fully belonging to either (Butler, 1999). This is what led to the inquisitive consideration of commencing and pursuing this topic the way I did it.

During the conception stage of my present study, I was faced with one of the key decisions researchers tend to face. At my disposal, owing to previous studies in the field, was a plethora of competing methodologies from which I had to choose at least one approach that would allow me to meet my research goals. At this stage, it was not only about data gathering, but also about how the collection ‘methodology’ would sit with my preferred meaning-making. Chamberlain (2000) argues against ‘a canonical approach to methodology’ where too much emphasis is on

tracing 'correct or proper' methods. As I have just pointed out, data gathering and meaning-making, or interpretability even, are inextricably intertwined. There had to be mutual consistency between research purpose, approach to collecting data, analysis approach and philosophical underpinnings. In the absence of this mutual consistency, data interpretability and the subsequent meaning-making become dysfunctional.

Galtung (1977:40) notes that: 'to work with any methodology [...] is a political act [...] the choice of a methodology is implicitly the choice of an ideology, including the mystifying, monotheistic ideology that there is but one methodology—the universal one. To the extent that we are conscious, the choice is for us to make, not to be made for us, and to the extent that we are free for us to enact'. Before coming to a 'methodological' position, there were a range of considerations I had to chew over. To me, the most important consideration to ponder on was what belonging really means and how individuals as social beings 'experience' it. How I would gather the data had to be in keeping with the 'nature' and process of belonging and identity. Because belonging and identity is primarily an individual's *lived* experience, sensitive to context, dispensation and individual perceptions, I figured out that standardised methods which rely on standardised instruments (e.g. the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSMS), Goodenow and Grady, 1993) would not sit well with my study because no single instrument can purport to capture the fluidity, intricately multi-layered nature of human life experiences. Thus, this eliminated questionnaire surveys. This was after my initial literature survey, of which one of the key purposes was to examine approaches taken in prior studies. Although other researchers such as Sari (2012) and Willms (2003) have previously researched belonging using quantitative methods, I still conceived that the key limitations of these approaches would inhibit key characteristics of belonging and identity from emerging in my own research. Considering that belonging itself as a *lived* experience is not standardised, but rather

based on individual values, perceptions and experiences, use of standardised instruments would fail to capture the relativity of these phenomena. In tandem with this, some of the key weaknesses of quantitative research are its tendency to objectify participants which, in the process overlooks their individuality and uniqueness and the legitimacy of subjective interpretation in making sense of the world around them, their connections of and experiences in it (Robson, 2005). Given that belonging and identity are naturally occurring, 'methods' of exploring these also need to take cognisance of and allow for their *(un)fold*ing, rather than static or fixed, nature. Belonging and identity are unfolding realities. Thus, in my exploration of available approaches to studying belonging and identity, qualitative research emerged as an obvious and most suitable approach in my study. The qualitative approach was suitable, among other things, because of its acknowledgement of the role of the participant and the researcher in the co-construction of the unfolding meanings (Walliman, 2005), in this case a co-construction of what it means to belong within the early years.

Before getting into the details of the 'methodologies' utilised in the present work, I will begin by 'painting' the contextual picture – a look at the threads onto which the picture is painted. As much as the picture is important, so are the threads making up the fabric on which the picture has been painted. Up to a point, regardless of the colour of the paint, the eventual look, indeed the aesthetics, is influenced by the shade of the thread and the texture of the fabric resultant from the intertwining of the threads. Thus, the context helps in the (co)construction of meaning and its interpretation. Put another way, paint behaves differently on different fabrics and each fabric is defined by its threads and these threads are woven together.

The fabric of the context of this work was set in two early years classrooms in two primary schools in Manchester. One school, alias Bee Primary School in this study, was situated in the south of the city. On

its roll were predominantly children of white-British heritage blended with some from minority ethnic backgrounds among whom were refugees and asylum seekers. Entitlement to free school meals, a widely accepted indicator of child poverty (Bramley and Besemer, 2011; Perry and Francis, 2010), was also high in this school. The second school was Willowbrook Primary, an inner-city school with a multi-ethnic intake including asylum seekers and refugees. The school served an area with a high crime rate. This concoction of backgrounds within the two contexts was discussed in detail in the second plateau (setting the scene) of this study.

The selection of two primary schools was a product of both chance and purpose. It was purposive in that these were two of the five schools I approached. The degree of chance was in that the two schools happened to be the ones which acceded to my request notwithstanding there was a good possibility they could say no. These schools were chosen for their richness in background. The diversity of children in them helped provide insights into how children from a range of backgrounds (e.g. racial, ethnic, linguistic and religion) develop a sense of belonging and identity and how these backgrounds influenced the children's sense of belonging and identity. It was assumed that differences in background would have an impact on children's belonging and identity. The following research questions were formulated which served to orientate this project. These were;

1. What factors affect 'belongingness' in a school?
2. What sorts of communities exist or are possible within the early years setting and how does the young child negotiate access into these?
3. What roles are played by individual members in maintaining/upholding the unity (comm/unity) in the setting?
4. How does the fluidity of individual roles impact on the structure of the community?
5. What is the impact of cultural/ethnic diversity on community dynamics?

6. What does it mean to have or to feel emotionally acceptable within a group setting?

The first question, dealing with factors affecting belonging aimed at unpicking individual, contextual and collective or social aspects underpinning the development and sustenance of these children's belonging and identity. Thus, it entailed an examination of the constraints, tensions, dilemmas and negotiations encountered in that process. Building on the first question, the second research question, *what sorts of communities exist or are possible within the early years setting and how does the young child negotiate access into these?*, sought to explore terrains within communities and sub-communities nested within the settings and how the young child navigates these terrains and the impact of the co-existence and interaction of these terrains with children and their effect on the children's belonging and identity within these striated contexts. Butler (2004) and Lenz Taguchi (2010) acknowledge the importance of communities within which individuals are embedded in defining who they are and fostering connectedness. Without these communities there are no identities, nor is there belongingness. Communities within which individuals are situated make it possible to appreciate relationality and to rethink communities as based on the interdependency and interconnectedness between humans and their contexts (Butler, 2004). The third question, *what roles are played by individual members in maintaining/upholding the unity (comm/unit) in the setting?*, was a kind of acknowledgement of the importance of individual children themselves in mapping their sense of belonging and identity. Of course, this is taken in the context of other constituent factors. It was envisaged that the development, and the extent of this development, of children's belonging and identity would also be influenced by the children themselves as active participants in charting the course of their development. Up to a point, this was expected to account for some observable differences in development processes between individual children whilst acknowledging the potentialities of these 'swarms of

difference' (Deleuze, 1994:50) to generate new connections and belongings. The fourth question, *how does the fluidity of individual roles impact on the structure of the community?*, was aimed at addressing an assumption that individual roles within group contexts are not fixed, but rather fluid. Thus, this question was interested in examining how the fluidity of roles affected the structure of the communities of learners within which children were situated. This created possibilities of seeing as well as understanding what happens in the middle or in-between multiple transitions (Deleuze, 2004). A further area of interest, which the fifth research question (*what is the impact of cultural/ethnic diversity on community dynamics?*) set out to address, was the impact of cultural/ethnic diversity on community dynamics. Here, the purpose was to try and illuminate one of the important threads making up the individual fabric which would, hopefully, provide deep insights into the complex intricacies of culture and ethnicity in relation to a sense of belonging and identity. The final question (*what does it mean to have or to feel emotionally acceptable within a group setting?*) concerned itself with finding out what meant to the children to have or to feel emotionally acceptable within a group setting. Turner and Stets (2005:70) acknowledge the significance of emotion to processes of belonging to a community stating that 'collective solidarity is the result of the arousal of positive emotions'. This understanding of emotion adds another dimension to our appreciation of the interaction between emotion, belonging and identity. In addition to emotion, 'affect/affection' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1992) described as the 'non-conscious experience of intensity [...] the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience' (Shouse, 2005:5), was also another important thread in making sense of belonging. Baumeister and Bushman (2012) also highlight the significance of 'automatic affect' and 'conscious emotion' in how individuals formulate reactions in any given situation which inevitably impacts on their sense of togetherness.

## **Becoming-ethical**

Having obtained access into the settings, I was left with the issue of how the actual observations would work. O'Brien (2005:49) following Deleuze notes; 'there is no standard individual, person, or self that could be the object of study'. What was abundantly clear was that to try and look at all children regarding this study would be a complex undertaking. At the back of my mind I harboured the infinite nature of human attributes which interminably manifest themselves. Therefore, the participants in this study were not selected to represent all the children within the early years. Rather, my interest was in troubling dominant discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions of what it means to belong within the early years context through the narratives presented in this thesis. One thing I was determined to do was to allow data to naturally occur and, while in that process pursue possible lines of inquiry which, in my judgement, would help answer set research questions. Thus, the data led me to certain lines of inquiry which I examined elsewhere within this thesis.

A further consideration I had to make prior to coming to the setting was ensuring that all participants had an opportunity to either take part in or withdraw from the research. As the research involved young children in school, special care was taken to safeguard their interests and wellbeing. Permission to take part was sought from parents at the beginning of the study and issues of consent were explored with the children themselves, since it has been argued that even young children are able to understand such concepts (David; Edwards and Alldred, 2001; Alderson, 1995). This ensured the research adhered to current best practice concerning ethical standards for social science research, including respect for persons (adults and children), confidentiality, consent and negotiation of data. In particular the research followed the Education and Social Research Council (2012) guidelines and those of the British Educational Research Association (2011).



Eisner (1991:214) argues that informed consent 'implies that the researcher knows before the event to be observed what the event will be and its possible effects'. So, while I had the benefit of prior informed consent, it was important for me to constantly check with my participants. This was in acknowledgement of the changing nature of children's expressions of interest. Thus, the complex terrain of informed consent becomes 'relational, dynamic and always in-negotiation' (Renold et al, 2008:432) throughout the research process rather than a one-off. Renold et al (2008:432) put forward the notion of 'becoming participant' which, they argue, 'foreground the micro-ethical moments of complex and ambivalent engagements and disengagements within the research process'. Therefore, ethical decisions throughout the research process and the subsequent actions are interpersonal as well as circumstantial and contextual (Massumi, 2002). Cannella and Lincoln (2007:316) put forward useful questions that I considered in terms of conducting research ethically;

Whose knowledge is this? Why (as a researcher) do I choose to construct this problem? What assumptions are hidden within my research practices? How could this work produce exclusions? What do I do as I encounter those unexpected exclusions or oppressions that result from the work? What is my privilege (or power position) in this research? How am I subtly reinscribing my own universals and/or discrediting others?

In my PhD proposal I stated:

*This study will involve participant observation within an ethnographic orientation that seeks rich understandings of the school cultures and contexts within which notions of 'belonging' are materialised.*

*Ethnographic studies confirm that young children are 'extremely active in the construction and negotiation of their lives' (Pollard and Filer, 1999: 304-5). Qualitative data will be collected via video and audio recordings of interactions in the classroom and other school locations such as the playground. Implicit within the methodology is the recognition that the researcher does not act as a neutral observer, a passive conduit through which the object of study is to be known. My background as a teacher*

*means that inevitably I am always and indeed already implicated within the context of the research (Denzin, 1994). It will as a consequence be necessary to foreground my researcher subjectivity so as to explore how my own perspective assumes a position of power with regards to the representations of the participants. Reflexive writing in the form of journal entries will both capture how my own predispositions serve to frame the data in certain ways (Lather, 1991; Richardson, 1994; Brown and Jones, 2000) but also interrupt such tendencies.*

My initial plan was to film whole episodes of certain events. However, due to ethical quagmire, filming did not go ahead as originally planned. Head teachers of both schools felt hurdles on the use of videos in their setting were too numerous to clear. However, an observation log was maintained of particular episodes both in the classroom and outside. Interactions between children and the adults (including me) and between children themselves were also audio-recorded and transcribed at the end of every visit. What attracted me to certain episodes were ‘moments that worked at destabilizing my own understandings and assumptions that I inevitably brought to notions such as [belonging] and ‘identity’ (Jones, 2011:135 - 136). In addition to observations, children’s drawings – which happened to be further rich sources of data – were factored in. These together with text provided a multi-layered perspective to belonging. It was from an understanding that there are certain life experiences that individuals go through when language cannot articulate feelings, where drawings can be a useful tool for externalising internal thoughts and emotions (Robertsons, 2000). To this end, MacCormack (2012) notes that art encounter is the opening to the outside since the inner of the self also belongs outside. My decision to use children’s drawings as data in my research was also prompted by Gemma’s (a four year old girl from Bee Primary School, one of the participants of this study) drawing which depicted what she was going through during the period when her parents were undergoing separation. Her detailed narrative is in plateau nine of this study. It was on the basis of its affective capacity and potential to destabilise received

knowledge of belonging and identity that I selected this particular drawing and also because of the awareness of what seemed to be a failure of language to convey Gemma's experiences. This resonates with Tuan's observation that there are experiences, such as what Gemma was going through, which might resist ready communication and in such circumstances individuals 'tend to suppress that which they cannot express' (Tuan, 1977:7). Therefore, the drawing interrupted her silence as it became a conversation point causing the almost unsayable and unrepresentable experiences to be spoken. It opened up a possibility for Gemma to organise her narrative of what seemed to be significant events in her life. The significance of children's drawings was highlighted by researchers, for example, Allen and L'Anson (2004) and MacNaughton, Barnes and Dally (2004) as an invaluable way of understanding children's experiences as well as eliciting their views.

### **The Rhizome**

Deleuze (1995:8) suggests 'plugging in' as a way of engaging with texts, of experimenting with ideas to see what new thoughts it makes it possible to think. This approach to research opened, for me, new possibilities to connect with concepts from other disciplines such as art and theatre in making sense of belonging and identity. As noted by Deleuze (1995:22) 'the only question is how anything works, with its intensities, flows, processes' whatever approach one elects. The present research utilises Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of rhizome situated within poststructuralist insights whereby no one theory can be said to have pre-eminence. It affords a way of considering complexly overlapping layers of theories, philosophical underpinnings, multiple identities, cultures and belongings which continuously evolve and interlink with a variety of concepts and ideologies whilst both complementing and enhancing our understanding of belonging and identity. The notion of the rhizome is illustrated in horticulture where the traditional sequential, logical structure is a tree, fixed from its roots. In contrast the rhizome, is similar to the

structure of an iris plant where growth is lateral and interdependent illustrated in the figure below (Source: Florida Centre for Instructional Technology, 2012) which depicts the non-centrality and non-hierarchical structure of the rhizome.



*Map 4: Rhizome*

My engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of the rhizome is not to provide formulaic ways in which the rhizome *should* be used, but rather to discuss how it worked for me. However, even within such an endeavour, 'bits of advice will inevitably creep in' (Jones, 1999: 217). Having selected the rhizomatic logic, the challenge became how to adapt it to research on belonging and identity. While it became apparent, as the literature review progressed, that the rhizomatic logic would be the most appropriate lens through which to examine identity and belonging among early years children, it was also apparent it needed to be adapted to suit the nature and process of the development of belonging and identity among children of this age.

The rhizome as a metaphor stresses 'that which is moving, fleeing and becoming in the form of multiple deterritorialised flows of energy that transcend fixed relationships of identity' (Baker, 2004: 48). Belonging is a complex, interlinked and interdependent process which cannot be viewed from a linear logic which implies following 'a set of rules or fixed procedures which, if followed through, will yield a desired result' – fixed notions of belonging and identity (McQuillan, 2000:3). Rhizomatic logic enables a shift from the notion that belongingness is fixed and it follows a logical procedure where there is a beginning and an end. Rather 'belonging' is 'ever-changing and always becoming in a never-ending process' (MacNaughton, 2005:121). It is reflective of how individuals experience the world as it mirrors the multiple identities, multiple cultures, multifaceted and fragmented ways of belongingness while allowing unexpected connections to irrupt. Thus, my understanding of belonging takes into consideration the temporality of identity and groupings and how individuals come together merely as 'lines of energies or force coincide' (Battersby, 1998:193). Belonging is about being and becoming – being in one place and yearning for another (Conley, 2007). It is inevitable that one transgresses in order to become. As noted by Deleuze and Parnet (2007:40) 'there is always a betrayal in a line of flight'. Thus, it is within the transgressive blurring of normalised identities/roles that I sought to understand what it means to belong within a group. Applying rhizomatic principle of connection and heterogeneity in making sense of belonging assumes children start with ascribed identity and belonging but will form and re-form new belongings and identities through interaction with others in the setting thereby acknowledging notions of nonfixity and non-bounded subjectivities. As noted by Deleuze and Guattari (1987:7) 'any point of the rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or the root, which plots a point and fixes an order'. For me, making sense of belonging involved mapping the lines of flight, multiple entryways and moments of in-betweenness that generate new possibilities of becoming-different or becoming-other whilst subverting molar constructions of identity where one is either *this* or *that*. Thus, in a

way, it reveals the temporality of belonging. In mapping the movements individuals make, I assumed that there is no single correct entryway that can eventually lead to a singularity of 'truth' or capture 'the reality'. In other words belonging could be viewed in relation to multiple entryways that open up multiplicities of belongings and identity. Thus, no single story could possibly purport to encompass individual children's experiences of 'belonging'. Below is a rhizomatic representation of an observation excerpt which I discuss in plateau five of this study. It also depicts a rhizomatic relationship between me and my participants which is non-hierarchical but that of collaboration. Within the observation excerpt, for example, when Aisha said 'I can't have you as king you're too small Saif', Saif created a line of flight escaping from Aisha's seemingly unpleasant gestures. In the rhizomatic figure below, I utilise an observation excerpt as a way of illustrating how individuals create lines of flight in the quest to belong which is summed up by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:55) observation that 'Lines of flight are everywhere. They constitute the available means of escape from the forces of repression and stratification. Even the most intense strata are riddled with lines of flight'.



Map 5: Rhizomatic illustration of 'data'

Therefore, data cannot be seen in clean and tidy ways. It is rather messy. I am also implicated within the rhizome, my own knowledge and experiences including my childhood memories are also tangled up in the process. This also brings to the fore Deleuze's (2005:199) notion of memory conceived of as a membrane that allows for continuous but also discontinuous correspondence between 'sheets of the past and layers of reality'. Deleuze further elaborates that childhood memories are 'blocks of becoming' that are the 'becoming-child of the present' – a rhizomatic reflection of not the child I once was but rather the child co-existing within the present which allows for the emergence of new possibilities of understanding belongingness. Therefore, my childhood memories, knowledge and experience in a way disrupts and interrupts the general understandings of belonging whilst prompting new 'insights and re-evaluation' (Howell and Taylor, 2003:212). Such texts as observed by Denzin are messy;

Messy texts are many sited, open ended, they refuse theoretical closure, and they do not indulge in abstract, analytic theorizing. They make a writer a part of the writing project. These texts, however, are

just not subjective accounts of experience; they attempt to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space. Hence, they are always multi-voiced, and no given interpretation is privileged (Denzin, 1997: xvii).

## **The Pentimento**

As my study progressed, in a rhizomatic way, a further entryway – the metaphor of pentimento emerged. The notion of pentimento depicts the co-existence of images of the ‘sheets of the past’ and images of the ‘simultaneity of peaks of the present’ (Deleuze, 1989:101) which makes it possible to ‘see’ these images on the same plane. This also highlights the fact that the way I ‘see’ was inevitably affected by my knowledge, experience, values and beliefs. A pentimento is, thus, consistent with the character of a rhizome. To this end, a pentimento is typified by Hellman (1973:3) as ‘old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman’s dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called pentimento because the painter ‘repented,’ changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again’. An interesting aspect of this depiction of a pentimento is that, while the ‘painter’ will have changed their mind, each of these changes is still visible – albeit faintly – and thus enables gazers to retrace the journey the painter makes in getting to the ‘final’ painting; each change telling a unique story and all changes collectively blending bringing up a complex, somewhat undefinable, composite painting – akin to a rhizome. In agreement with Hellman (1973:3), Deleuze (1989:79) adds, ‘the past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was’. From this perspective, within the early years classrooms, belongingness and identity of individuals within them unfolded and existed in overlaying pentimento(esque) layers. Thus, there is no singularity of ‘reality’, but rather an existence of ‘realities’ in layers, each layer representing a different dimension of what belonging is but not existing apart from other



layers. Therefore, 'doing pentimento' as noted by Donald (2004:24) 'does not imply a search for an original and pure beginning hidden underneath the layers. Rather, the idea of *pentimento* operates on the acknowledgement that each layer mixes with the other and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it'. This lends itself to the poststructuralist debate over fixed notions of truth. There is no single truth and the process of discovering is a continual one as the interactions between individuals is perpetual, which means manifestations of belonging will also change. Thus, belonging cannot be understood from a singular perspective apart from the layers that make up the different understandings of the concept. As observed by Massumi (1992:52) 'any object we care to interrogate, however humble, proves to be multilayered formation of staggering complexity' where notions such as 'truth' and 'reality' become problematic. Therefore, there is no end point or conclusion whereby even one theoretical perspective will be accepted as the explanation of 'truth' but exploring what it means to 'belong' from a range of perspectives provided a broader view, richness and complexity of belongingness. Within the notion of pentimento there does not exist 'the' truth and/or 'the' reality but truths and realities. Regarding reality, Woolf notes;

What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech – and then there it is again in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is (Woolf, 1929).

Therefore, through this conceptual lens, I conceived the behaviour of children in the early years classrooms as a window into the past which influenced the present behaviours or the intermingling of the past and present. As noted by Deleuze (2005: 79) 'characters are of the present, but feelings plunge into the past'. The assumption was that the behaviours exhibited by these children and how these behaviours impacted upon their belonging and identity had 'roots'/ 'routes' in their socio-historical

backgrounds – a ‘painting-over’ of ‘lurking’ histories and historicity. The notion of *pentimento* was a useful tool in analysis as it enabled me to take into account children’s socio-historical backgrounds in trying to unpick their development of a sense belonging and identity. The concept of *pentimento*, as stated by Donald (2004:24), ‘operates on the acknowledgment that each layer mixes with the other and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it’. The *pentimento* notion opened up a further complementary lens through which to make sense of the rich data collected from the settings and also influenced the presentation and analysis of this data.

### **The Stage**

The third metaphor that influenced my research was the stage. The two early years settings were viewed as stages where different characters interact and different scenes are played out. This included, among other things, the physical layout, displays, props, routines and other artefacts. It was based on the assumption that individuals take up different roles depending on who they interact with. Deleuze (1994:216) observes that, ‘the world is an egg, but the egg is itself a theatre: a staged theatre in which the roles dominate the actors, the spaces dominate the roles and the ideas dominate the spaces’ (Deleuze, 1994: 216). Thus, the school/classroom can also be viewed as ‘staged theatre’ where performances are scripted. Therefore, the notion of performance (Goffman, 1969) was also useful in exploring how the characters are scripted to perform in certain ways and how discursive practices ‘categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him’ (Foucault, 1983:212). Within the early years, the assumption was that children are conditioned to act in a certain way, for example lining up and following set rules (this does not imply children do not have agency). There are expectations that children should ‘settle in’ and therefore ‘belong’ within

the first few weeks of starting school. During my field work, often teachers would tell me that by three weeks children should have 'settled in' – an assumption that they will have attained belongingness in the setting. These are some of the dominant discourses and associated set of normative expectations that seem to be influenced by developmental theory such as the ages and stages and have become what Foucault (1980) call 'regimes of truth'. They have gained a truth status in the early years against which all children are measured as 'settled/belonging' or 'not settled/not belonging' which privileges those children who fit within the norm. 'Regimes of truth' seem to create feelings of fixity and stability but as further observed by Foucault 'truth' is not fixed, but rather 'games of truth' or 'procedures for truth' are played by individuals in a given setting (Peters, 2004) placing under erasure notions of normalcy. Therefore, focus was also on ways in which various truths about belonging and identity were circulating including how these were (de)constructed and (re)framed in such a way that no one 'truth' simply pass as 'the truth'. Thus, it also brings to prominence knowledge gained by children out-of-school which Foucault (1980:81) refer to as 'subjugated knowledge' 'a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity'. In the process, it facilitates the (re)creation of new forms of 'being-with-one-another' and 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 2000). I also viewed my own researcher role as that of a performance. One, moreover, that is complicated by being both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'.

## **Denouement**

Walking a journey is mammoth, rewalking it takes courage. One has to remember how they walked, when they walked and why they walked and, more importantly, rationalise the walkings so that the rewalking is worthwhile. In this plateau I have attempted to retrace my 'methodological' footsteps; elucidating each turn. Not shying away from the complexity of

linking philosophical and epistemological perspectives influencing the conduct of this study, I have attempted to explain the value and relevance of the *rhizome*, *pentimento* and *stage* in unpacking the process and nature of belonging and identity which phenomena themselves have no single definable character. In doing this, I also showed how the approaches are consistent with the interpretive approaches to gathering data utilised in this study.

## 5 Two stages and the actors

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts  
(Shakespeare, 1968: 41)

But that is not the question.  
Why are we here, that is the question.  
And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer.  
Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear.  
We are waiting for Godot to come.  
(Beckett, 1956: 51)

### Introduction

This plateau sets the scene across three schools, Bee and Willowbrook Primary Schools in the United Kingdom and Chawanda Primary School in Zimbabwe. These are being seen as stages on which different characters interact and different scenes are played out. The stages are discussed in relation to, among other things, the physical layout, displays, props, routines and other artefacts. The notion of performance (Goffman, 1969; Butler, 1999) is also useful in exploring how the characters might be scripted to perform in certain ways including ways in which the desire to connect and be connected to, is expressed. I am also seeing my own role as the researcher as a performance. One, moreover, that is complicated by being both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. Goffman (1969:32) conceives 'performance' as 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by [their] continuous presence'. In this study the roles of the characters and the audience in this unfolding and ongoing drama are constantly swapping in relation to shifting 'scenes' and different spaces. At one point, an individual can be part of the audience and yet, at another, part of the cast. Sometimes they might play both roles simultaneously.

Below, I offer three interwoven accounts that seek to describe my experiences of different primary school classrooms. I draw on field notes

from my research diary constructed recently whilst undertaking my research in the two schools in the UK, infused with memories of my time working as a primary school teacher in Zimbabwe. By drawing on theories including those of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I seek to deconstruct my own descriptions, staging a 'methodological' departure. Following on from this, I offer insights into my own role as the researcher. I intend to use this plateau to explore how the tricky business of trying to understand 'belonging' could be likened to the (in)famous non-appearance of Godot in the play 'Waiting for Godot' (Beckett, 1956/1988), and similarly to the plight of Vladimir and Estragon, this eternal absence does not stop me from looking for or waiting to encounter 'it'.

### **(De) scripting the stage**

Throughout this plateau, belonging is understood as an invisible aura; expected to make appearances when the right conditions prevail and disappear when upset by certain events. Its presence is not for optical observation but something to be discerned and/or experienced by other characters. Certain signs will tell us whether or not belongingness is present although at times it is expected to be difficult to tell if the role of belongingness is catalytic or symptomatic of particular events. For example, if characters exhibit cooperative working, will it be a cause or effect of belonging?

The observations take place across two settings, conceived as stages. First stage, Bee Primary School: an extract from my research journal. After numerous visits to different primary classrooms, they carry sufficient information for them to be recognised as classrooms. The props and artefacts such as tables, chairs, designated playground areas, books and pencils all serve to create spaces, which in my consciousness is stable, deeply familiar and hence deep rooted. But following Percec (1997), what might be the consequences if I choose to see these classrooms as stages? By seeing them as 'not real' I can, as Percec suggests, turn both

spaces into 'a question' where they cease to be 'self-evident'. Each becomes doubtful and unfamiliar spaces. As Goffman (1969:78) notes, 'almost anyone can quickly learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of realness in what is being *contrived* before them (my emphasis)'.

The construction of each stage offers a social script that has to be understood and assimilated so as to alert each player when they should move, sit, stand-up, sing, go to the toilet and eat. Parents/carers and other visitors do occasionally make cameo appearances. As the researcher, I also make an appearance. Whether this is in the guise of a 'guest appearance' will also be subsequently discussed. What does seem evident however is that I come onto the stages where some scenes have already been played out. This means that sometimes I have to second-guess what has been happening whilst I have been off stage which reverberates on how I perform, what I choose to observe and take note of.

### **Watching...**

*What caught my eye as I entered the early years classrooms (both nursery and reception) at Bee Primary School was how space and colour is used to clearly demarcate some of the activities. Some of these separations are gendered; blue toilets for the boys and pink for the girls. There's a blue writing area for the boys and a pink one for girls. A further divide has been used where superheroes (Power Rangers, Bat Man and Spider Man) are on the walls of the boys' writing area, whilst Cinderella adorns the girls' writing area. The rest of the space is arranged so as to accommodate a computer, a home corner and a couple of tables and chairs. (Extract from research diary, Bee Primary School, 02/04/09).*

### **...and 'seeing'**

Whilst it is customary for toilets in English schools to be gender-specific, to separate out the writing area in this way is a surprise act. Following

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) we can see this as an example of a 'procedure' where the binary of boy/ girl is used for particular sets of reasons. They write: 'we are segmented in a binary fashion, following the great major dualist oppositions: social classes, but also men-women, adult-children, and so on'. They continue, '... we are segmented in a linear fashion, along a straight line or a number of straight lines, of which each segment represents an episode or a 'proceeding': as soon as we finish one proceeding we begin another, forever proceduring or procedured, in the family, in school,... School tells us, 'you're not at home anymore...'. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:230).

Preda (1999: 347) argues that 'social order cannot be conceived exclusively as a web of intersubjective relationships' but rather 'we should note the significance of artefacts as active social entities'. This begs the question: what is the significance of the delineated writing areas? What sorts of messages are being conveyed by the inclusion of Superheroes, Lazy town, Power Rangers and Cinderella? *Superheroes* are male characters that are defined against essentialist ideas. Thus, a superhero is (always) male, brave and challenges and fights for the good of (man) kind. Interestingly Power Rangers do have some females within the cast but these are not portrayed along the same hegemonic lines as male Power Rangers. So whilst there might be some surface alteration in terms of character the narrative along which the story is constructed, is never dented. These reinforce the characteristics of man as the 'standard'. By stark contrast, Cinderella is submissive, obedient and dutiful. Moreover whilst it is her beauty that affects her escape from being abused she nevertheless enters what could be perceived as another form of captivity, that of marriage and dependency on a male for happiness. Far from being innocent fairy tales are societal mechanisms for infusing culturally accepted ways of femaleness which 'exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female's cardinal virtues...making female subordination seem romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate' (Rowe, 1986: 209). In addition, domesticity discourses that circulate around the home corner within the setting might further fortify the subservient positioning of



girls. Thus, in some ways perpetuates the dominant forms of subjectivity – the patriarchal status quo where ‘Man is the Standard: the socially established measure of humanity against which individuals are judged and hierarchically valued. ‘Woman’ is the sub-Standard: the side kick necessary to give ‘Man’ something to be superior to...’ (Massumi, 1992: 86). Such positional superiority might further contribute to specific ways in which individuals’ identity and indeed belongingness is shaped. As Walkerdine (1984:182) also pointed out, fairy tales facilitate the production of masculine and feminine behaviour by ‘creating positions to occupy’. In this instance it would seem that the teachers are using the object of Superhero and Cinderella as a means of positioning boys and girls against a set of characteristics which in their view embodies or gestures towards ‘gender performances’ that the children will not only recognize but will attach to. The writing areas thus become a practice of inclusion and exclusion whereby the endeavour to belong becomes highly precarious and intricate and is also caught up with the child’s position of ‘being a boy’ or ‘being a girl’. Blue and pink paint and cultural objects such as superheroes work at creating what Probyn refers to as ‘a maze of club rules’ (1996: 24) and it is these that have to be negotiated so as to gain a semblance of what it might mean to belong.



*Map 6: Bee Primary School early years Writing Areas*

The labels ‘boys writing area’ and ‘girls writing area’ seem to create a gender boundary. It demarcates space and establishes who may or may

not occupy that space. It reifies the idea of the 'Other' through differentiation. You as 'boy' can enter but you, as 'girl' cannot and vice versa. This throws up questions such as what sorts of personal conflicts might a child encounter when he or she is encouraged to write about or draw pictures of a superhero or conversely Cinderella? Do they find or see themselves within these depictions? Tuan (1997) notes that 'place' is security and 'space' is freedom and that we are attached to the one and long to belong to the other. These are interesting set of ideas to contemplate in relation to the writing area. The writing area clearly seems a 'place' (as opposed to a space) where secure but nevertheless highly dubious and contested notions concerning belonging and identity are promulgated. Where on this stage are the spaces where children's longings can be articulated? Malpas (1999) draws attention to the relationship between space and identity. He writes;

The notion that there is an intimate connection between person and place, and so also between self and environing world, is thus neither a peculiar idiosyncrasy to be found in works of literature nor a left over from pre-modern societies—nor does it seem likely to be a merely contingent feature of human psychology. Indeed, there is good reason to suppose that the human relationship to place is a fundamental structure in what makes possible the sort of life that is characteristically human, while also being determining, in some way that requires clarification, of human identity (Malpas, 1999:13).

### **Difference that make a difference**

The use of blue and pink to differentiate between the boys and the girls toilets struck me as a remarkable act. Whilst this practice (of having separate toilets) is quite customary in public it is nevertheless worth stopping for a moment so as to consider what sorts of messages it relays to young children who have only recently made the transition from home to school. At home family members use the same toilet regardless of their gender. Why is gender used as opposed to other social markers such as age? But why does gender matter so much within this context? This goes to show how certain differences make a difference. If both genders shared the same toilets and it became normalized and routine would there

be a problem? What sorts of messages are being internalized about spaces and its relationship to belonging? What sorts of impact do these *separations* have on children's development of a sense of belonging? Thus, the process of negotiating belongingness within the early years contexts is conducted within limits where ideology and surveillance are constantly in the way of 'freedom to belong' (Probyn, 1996).



*Map 7: Bee Primary School early years Boys' and Girls' Toilets*

In returning to Deleuze and Guattari (2004), it becomes possible to understand the writing areas and the toilets as 'episodes' and 'procedures', which are 'following the great major dualist oppositions'. These probably create a boundary line which separate members from non-members whilst simultaneously fostering a sense of collective identity and security. As I spent more time in Bee Primary school, I learned that whilst most girls often abide by the rules by reinforcing the boundary, often some of the boys faced the consequences of pushing the boundary. Yet, Corsaro (2005) notes that over time children 'develop a complex set of access strategies'. In this school, however, my experiences were that the boys were better able to negotiate these access strategies. As such they had more openings in which to negotiate objects, feelings and different experiences. Bauman points out that (1999: 161)'none of the groups to which we enter do we belong 'fully': there are parts of our modular persons which 'stick out' and cannot be absorbed nor accommodated by any single group, but which connect and interact with

other modules'. Rose (1998) follows a similar vein with the notion of 'machinations', which I suggest could be understood as the facial expressions, body movements, use of language, and eye contact in the classroom.

### **...and 'watching'**

*Photographs of the children were displayed depicting the different emotions children show during the course of a school day. During a conversation with Gemma, for instance, she remembered so vividly what had happened to her on the day her photograph was taken, she says 'I was a bit sad because I had messed up my painting. If I paint a nice picture, Miss Douglas [teaching assistant] doesn't like it she always tells me off, I don't like what I do' (Extract from research diary, Bee Primary School, 23/03/2009).*

Here, we can observe Gemma who had not 'worn' the right facial expression on the day the photographs were taken, which caused her to 'stick out'. She had also earned a reprimand from Miss Douglas the teaching assistant because she had not done the 'right' kind of artwork. All of which makes me wonder what facial expression has to be worn or what picture has to be painted so as to comply with Miss Douglas standards? What does Gemma have to do so as to 'fit in' with Miss Douglas's script for her?

### **...and 'seeing'**

At Willowbrook School certain structures like the reward system and registration practices caught my eye.

*There is a placard by the door where each morning the children self-register themselves. Items such as tables and chairs are set out. Nearby there are specific toilets for children to use. At lunch time, whilst the rest of the school eat in the school hall the early years children have their food*

*brought to their classroom. There are four designated areas for group teaching. In these areas there is a carpet for the children to sit on and comfortable chairs for the teacher and teaching assistants. A reward system operates in the classroom where a child who is 'star for the day' has their name on a board. During whole class story times there are comfortable seats reserved for 'chosen' children while others sat on the carpet. I watch some children trying hard during the day to win this right (Extract from research diary, Willowbrook Primary School, 01/04/2009).*

Foucault's (1977) work around disciplinary mechanisms and its relationship to the docile body calls attention to hierarchical surveillance. At Willowbrook chairs and carpets were pitched against one another so as to emphasise both the position of adults and the position of the 'good' children who had earned the right to sit on chairs whilst those who had not been 'good enough' had to occupy the carpet space. Grosz (1995) in following Foucault adds further to the discussion. She writes 'this docility no longer functions primarily by external regulation, supervision, and constraint [...] but rather is the consequence of endlessly more intensified self-regulation, self-management, and self-control. It is no longer a body docile with respect to power, but more a body docile to will, desire, and mind' (p.44). She continues 'bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated' (p. 27). Thus it is not just a matter of adults having more power over the children that will work to produce the docile or good child. Rather, it is also a matter of what each child will be internalising. Perhaps for some children they will regularly feel the joy of being 'star for the day'. For others, however, the board by the door might become a wretched and daily reminder that they are stars that are yet to be born.

Foucault's work around discourse also helps me grapple with and undo the work that is performed by the classification system in the early years at Willowbrook school;

*The class is divided into four groups for both literacy and numeracy. The literacy groups are named after animals – cats, chickens, bears and hippos. While the numeracy groups are identified by colours - yellow, green, orange and purple. The animals are also used to categorise children according to their fluency in English where the 'Cats' are those children who have newly arrived from abroad who struggle with little or no English (Extract from research diary, Willowbrook Primary School, 30/04/2009).*

Foucault describes discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). MacLure adds further reflections when she writes, ... 'subjects are constituted within discourses that establish what it is possible (and impossible) to 'be' – a woman, mother teacher, child, etc – as well as what will count as truth, knowledge, moral values, normal behaviour and intelligible speech for those who are 'summoned' to speak by the discourse in question' (MacLure, 2003: 175). This prompts me to ask what does it mean for a child to be classified as a cat? Or a chicken? Whilst there will be many sound reasons for grouping and teaching all the children who are newly arrived under the umbrella term of 'cat' nevertheless it also differentiates the children. When a child is positioned as a cat what sorts of practices are implemented and what are some of the affects? Can he or she move beyond the category? Will they always be known for the duration of their time in the early years classroom as a 'cat' with all its accompanying assumptions? Butler (2005: 8) notes that 'the 'I' has no story of its own,' the 'I' is always in relation to norms of discourse'.

## **'Watching' and 'seeing'...**

*Willowbrook Primary school has two hundred and fifty-four children. Within the nursery class, there are nineteen boys and eleven girls of whom one girl (Hayley) is of white English heritage and one boy is mixed race. The rest of the children are from Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Cameroon and Kenya. The dominant religion in the classroom is Islam. The class teacher is of white British heritage while the three teaching assistants are British but originally from Jamaica and Somalia. Throughout the school this pattern is repeated where the teaching staff are of white British heritage while minority ethnic adults perform the assistant's role (Extract from research diary, Willowbrook Primary School, 06/05/09).*

## **Colonial encounters: majority/minority**

I am drawn here to the demographic aspects of this school particularly the ethnic make-up and the dynamics at play between the numeric majority and minority. Majority and minority in everyday use refer to the difference in numbers between two groups; the majority being the greater number and minority the smaller number. However, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the constructs of majority and minority are derived from the extent of influence a group has rather than its size (Buchanan and Thoburn, 2008). Deleuze and Guattari (2004) submit that majority/minority cannot be fully understood in simple quantitative exclusive of qualitative aspects. The notion of majority/minority is conceived from a perspective of dominance regardless of numerical representation whereby 'a minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is the model you have to conform to' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 173). Thus, 'majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way round. It assumes the standard measure, not the other way round' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 10). This 'other way round' is the common construction of the concepts as quantity-derived.

Minority in Deleuzian-Guattarian terms does not refer to the common minority ethnic group either, here, I am using the concept to illustrate the dynamics at this school. At Willowbrook Primary School, minority ethnic children outnumbered children of white British heritage but the majority remains white British. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of majority and minority, I understand what it means to be the majority numerically yet positioned as the minority (in Deleuzian-Guattarian terms). Growing up in Zimbabwe during British colonial rule, even though black Zimbabweans outnumbered white British-Zimbabweans, they were less influential. Even the majority vote during the colonial era was based on the white British-Zimbabwean vote in spite of their relative small number. So, yes, it was 'majority rule'! As noted by Owen (2007:206) whiteness is not just racial identity of being white but 'a deeply engrained way of being in the world'. It is 'the racial norm...the exemplar of human being and the unmarked self-same over against the racially marked other(s)' (McWhorter, 2005:534). Therefore, whiteness represents the standard and norm. Colonial encounters in Zimbabwe impacted upon the self-perception of native Zimbabweans in complex and often contradictory ways. In Zimbabwe among other things, being fluent in English, wealth, civility, law & order, morality and being educated is associated with whiteness/Britishness. Therefore whatever is associated with 'whiteness' is normalised. As a black woman back home, being able to speak English in the rural area where I was a teacher led to me being referred to as *murungu chaiye* (typical white) and civilised. My complexion added to the connotation of superiority in a country where light-skinned women are regarded as white-like and therefore believed to be beautiful. In terms of language, even though Shona is the dominant language spoken by the numerical majority in Zimbabwe, English (and the English accent) remain the standard, prestigious status symbol (Mlambo, 2009). It exudes sophistication and elitism. Khalfa (1999) argues that such an inculcation of a standard, correct, proper language, codes English language to a dominant order.



Coming back to the dynamics at Willowbrook, even though Miss Walsh is the only white British person in the classroom, she still wields power, control and influence. Although most of the children at Willowbrook speak Somali, a language of communication within their community, they still have to learn to speak English. This learning means more than just learning English words but rather, learning a language means learning 'a way of doing things' (Khalifa, 1999:117) which will inevitably increase these children's capacity to navigate the terrains of belonging within the setting.

Another aspect of note in the setting at Willowbrook Primary is the presence of the interactive white board. This confounds my previous experience as a teacher in a rural classroom in Zimbabwe where I used a chalkboard. I was mesmerized by the presence of this technology in a nursery classroom. I am nevertheless curious why it was called interactive because I was to learn that it does not suggest much interactivity takes place. Rather, it is a teacher-dominated space caricaturising lopsided power relations which prevail in certain scenes in the classroom. So whilst it is supposed to be the pedagogical hub, it is used by the teacher as a plate – the teacher puts things *on* it and the children take *from* it. This is where key pedagogical transactions are meant to occur, where the spotlight is when *teaching* occurs – a symbol of teacher domination. It is the teacher's space. Children experience and exercise relative freedoms in other spaces of the classroom but here the space is teacher dominated. I present what follows anecdotally.

### **Enter the Researcher**

The moment I enter into the setting, it was quite visible that becoming a member was not a moment of entering into the setting or just joining the group. It takes much more to be a part of the group and 'belong'. I had to perform in a certain way. It involved learning to talk, do, think and feel

which brings to the fore the precariousness of belonging. My own role as a researcher/performer at both stages is complicated by being ‘both not quite insider and not quite an outsider...in other words, [I am] this inappropriate other or same who moves but with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in [my] difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness’ (Minh-ha, 1989: 418). It is both an exciting and uncertain journey in which I explore being within my research as opposed to standing outside it. Being in a situation where I could not divorce myself from my past, I find myself in an entanglement or enmeshment of both my past and present creating feelings of doubling, of multiplicity where I felt constituted by different voices and practices (Palli, 2006). Thus, my narrative will not only start at the moment of entering into the two settings/stages but slightly earlier, as I find myself travelling between different time zones, toing and froing across moments-in-time.

### A Pentimental Narrative

... the idea of *pentimento* operates on the acknowledgment that each layer mixes with the other ... a tree will show through a woman’s dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea... and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it... as a way of seeing and then seeing again... a way to peel back the layers that have obscured or altered our perceptions of an artefact or memory as a way to intimately examine the characters of those layers...(Donald, 2004: 24 and Lillian Hellman, 1973: 5)

#### Map 8: *Pentimento*

What caught my eye...  
 there is a barbed wire fence...  
 as I entered the foundation stage classrooms...  
 ... on each side east, west, north and south...  
 were the large and very low windows providing  
 a panoramic view of the...  
 entrances... spiral-like to keep animals  
 from entering into the school...

‘Data’ as *Pentimento*



*Pentimento* (York, 2010)

As I enter into Willowbrook and Bee Primary schools, making sense of what I see in these settings was influenced by my knowledge, present and past experience as an infant teacher at Chawanda Primary School in Zimbabwe, which enables me to decode various situations as well classroom organisation. This mental processing of making sense of present information in light of past experiences illustrates how interpretations are constantly submerged in prior, and often detached, occurrences. Thus the observed and experienced may never be seen in its 'true' light, but instead in different lights from different life zones, moments in time, eras and dispensations producing 'multiple images and traces of what has been, what could have been, and what now is' (Denzin, 1989). It is a reflexive, somewhat personal perspective, a convergence of what I have been through 'out there' an 'I-witness' while theory helps me name it 'back here' (Geertz, 1988:78). By so doing I acknowledge that my narrative which is also influenced by the past is embedded in the story of the two communities/settings. Geertz (1988:77) indicates that 'it is not a question of going native' but rather 'it is a question of living a multiplex life; of sailing at once in several seas', past and present. Thus to understand an interpretation, it is helpful to gaze at the different contexts the present occurrence is embedded in; where the crossovers are and the extent of these crossovers and how they appear in the context of each other.

As I constantly point out throughout this thesis, my analysis of the different sections of data interweaves across themes as threads in one fabric. The threads making up this fabric may be from different locations with different histories brought together for the convenience of making one fabric. Each thread is not viewed in its own singularity, instead in the plurality and collectivity of others coming up with one fabric, one context embedded in a richness of contexts of the unity of histories and moments-in-time of the constituent threads. Thus a single thread cannot be understood in isolation, apart from other threads it is joined with. The beauty and character of the fabric is therefore defined by these overlaps and 'unity'. Similarly, data gathered is made sense of when contextualised in other

related dispensation, this is a judgement call of the researcher who brings their prior experience and knowledge to help and decode the present. This multi-layeredness and interaction of experiences from different eras, theories and philosophical perspectives is what may be called *pentimento* (Hellman, 1973).

### **Seeing and Then Seeing Again: A Pentimental Narrative**

(Extract from research diary; Willowbrook, Bee and Chawanda Primary Schools, 26/10/09).

There is a wide earth road... sandwiched between four leafy streets... which leads to the school from the main road. On three sides of the school are council terraced houses and to the eastern side stands privately-owned detached houses. Like all rural schools, teachers' residence is in the school yard – a convenience for teachers, parents and school management. Access to teachers at all times is cherished. I pass police warning signs that are displayed on the lampposts including *Beware vehicle thieves operate here!* and *Beware who is robbing here?* I have to watch my steps because there tends to be a lot of snake traffic on the footpath... As long as we do not set eyes on each other, there will be no trouble – a kind of truce arrangement between humans and the wildlife. I also pass close-circuit television cameras... Perhaps we are witnessing a convergence of what were once discrete surveillance systems to the point that we can now speak of an emerging 'surveillant assemblage' (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000:605)... One can visually tell by the amount of dust bellowing into the air that there is a scotch cart heading towards the school. What immediately strikes me when approaching Willowbrook... Primary School, three entrances are spiral-like built... The high barbed wire fence completely rings the play area so that it is ... secure ...which keep animals from entering into the school...a striation of space(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)...a twenty mile per hour school-zone speed restriction along the road on which the school stands, bright yellow tarmac markings restricting parking outside the school gate... It must be

over twelve feet...high and well established and forms a natural boundary around the school Nearby there are specific toilets for children to use...

There are four Blair latrines built on the windward side to avoid smell coming from the toilets to the houses...the original lines.... blue toilets for the boys....and pink for the girls...lines painted over but the original is not lost, old lines are transparent...on the same canvas one sees a unisex Blair toilet, seeing again there are different colours representing gender... molar or rigid segmentation whereby children constantly 'pass from one segment to another' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:208)

*Map 9: 'Seeing' the toilets*



*Blair Latrine / Male-female toilet signs    Blair Latrine / Fountain Duchamp, 1917)*

All classes take turns to clean the toilets every day. Active participation shapes how children view themselves as worthy and valuable members of a community (Bath, 2008). Is participation a sign that children 'belong' or is it because they belong that they participate? Water for cleaning the toilets is fetched from the river using various kinds of containers such as buckets ...outside the security of the perimeter fence and the close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, children were constantly in harm's way ... Younger children from my class often struggle to carry large buckets of water from the river on a steep gradient... the treacherousness of where they live and learn... Can we associate a sense of security both psychological and physical with belonging? (Perkins, 2011). But to whom or to what do children need to belong? As I approach the classrooms, I see designated areas outside each classroom for writing activities. Most

of the written activities are taking place outside on sand... Boys writing area is clearly labelled with blue background, Spiderman and lazy town characters also feature... whilst Cinderella adorns the girls writing area with pink colours and fairies ... exercise books are preserved for 'important' written exercises such as fortnightly tests, creative writing and any other writings worth preserving...an improvisation. Informative wall displays hang neatly around the classroom... One corner at the back of the classroom is set aside for the display of nature artefacts such as snail shells, bird skeletons and bird's nests...the rest of the space is arranged so as to accommodate a computer, a home corner and a couple of tables and chairs...an interactive blackboard...lies to the western side of the reception classroom...which is divided into four core subject areas English, Shona Science and Maths. At the top of the ... whiteboard...there is an alphabet with illustrative pictures. Above the alphabet is a number line and our class motto 'a cut above the rest'...which might serve as a constant reminder to children that they are a special and exclusive group relative to other children in school. On three sides of the classroom there are sections for each subject labelled Shona, Maths, English, Science , geography, drama, art, religious education and physical education. The second floor has a computer suite, music, drama and learning support room for gifted and talented children and children with academic learning difficulties...the under achievers at the end of year of each grade have to repeat. Informative wall displays hang neatly around the classroom...shown below and an illustration of the multilayered process of 'seeing' Bee and Chawanda primary schools.

(Extract from research diary, Willowbrook, Bee and Chawanda Primary Schools 22/10/09).



Map 10: Inside *Bee* Primary School early years (left) and *Chawanda* Primary School infants' right)



Map 11: Inside *Bee* early years classroom and ghost-like images of *Chawanda* infants' classroom: A *Pentimento*(esque)

### **An I-Witness**

Here, my interwoven narrative sweeps across Bee, Willowbrook and Chawanda Primary Schools in an effort to open up a way of presenting the plurality within myself as experienced in multiple and complex situations (Denzin, 2003) within the early years settings whilst taking into consideration the fact that it is almost impossible to rid myself of my past. Probably it is about acknowledging the co-existence of my past and

present experiences whilst learning to inhabit creatively in-between (Deleuze, 1989). For me it was a process of shifting my notion of centre and periphery and coping with the complexity of multiple centres and peripheries in what Alsop call self-reflexivity which entails 'taking a closer look at my own longings and belongings' (2002:1-2). Therefore, the writing process seeks to re-examine, re-consider and re-contextualise the field work experience. Denzin's (2003) notion of 'montage' as 'pentimento' has been evoked here. A pentimento as alteration in a painting, evidenced by traces of previous work showing the artist has changed her mind as to the composition during the process of painting is an idea that has been woven into my narrative. As noted by Foucault (1972:193) 'in analysing a painting, one can reconstitute the latent discourse of the painter; one can try to recapture the murmur of his intentions, which are not transcribed into words, but into lines, surfaces, and colours; one can try to uncover the implicit philosophy that is supposed to form his view of the world'.

My interest is on reflexive points during my stint in the two settings where a complex interplay of points of view and understandings were blending together and overlapping whilst opening up possibilities (Denzin, 2003). Thus, it involves appreciating the 'difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable [my own] a *priori* assumptions' (Conquergood, 1985:9). Being in-between as a consequence of migrating from Zimbabwe to the United Kingdom has enabled me to reflect on the complexities of what it means to belong and enabled me to shift dramatically from a structuralist perspective whereby things exist in binary opposition to a post-structuralist and a more rhizomatic thinking which challenges linearity/tree-like thinking. Auto-ethnography, resonates with what Gadamer (2004) calls co-belonging dialogue whereby he states that the best interpreters of a local culture are the persons who are at the same time both 'inside' and 'outside' their own culture. As an ethnographer I had to go through a process of becoming a member, which one is not by merely joining the school community, it involved moments of rigorous constitution, engaging with the participants, trying to understand



their views and perspectives and gain insights into their thoughts, feelings and emotions, which suits the study of belonging. I had conversations with teachers which helped in clarifying the observations as well as soliciting their views in relation to classroom events. This led to a shift in the way I understood events in the setting when I started my field work and now. Perhaps this resonates with what Shotter (1993) call 'knowing of the third type' a metamorphosis. Thus, belonging can be viewed in light of the give-and-take between conformity and being accepted.

### **I 'see' and 'see' again**

I constantly moved in and out of various thresholds or liminal spaces whereby the boundary between insider/outsider is blurred. Turner conceives this threshold or liminal space as 'an interval , however brief, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance' (1982:44). My role as researcher often shifted throughout my stay in the settings as I was sometimes asked to look after a group of children, supervise children outside the classroom. This for me was a 're-opening or re-staging of a fractured history of identifications' (Ahmed, 1999:93). Thus, my past experiences as an infant teacher which might have been obscured re-appear in juxtaposition with the present.

My experiences, for example, as a child, pupil, and infants teacher back home in Zimbabwe are still with me but have been covered up as I interact with others, objects and events in the two settings forming multiple layers like a strata. In a *pentimento* these former experiences are the 'original lines' (Hellman, 1973:3) which because of the latter experiences, have been painted over where 'perhaps it would be well to say that the old conception, replaced by a latter choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again' (Hellman, 1973:3). This requires me to peel the layers that obscure my perceptions but that does not 'imply a search for

an original and pure beginning hidden underneath the layers' (Donald, 2004:22). It is probably about what Minh-ha, 1991: 218) refer to as 'working right at the limits of several categories and approaches' whilst also 'undoing, redoing, modifying this limit'. In the ensuing section, I present 'data' as pentimento from Willowbrook and Bee Primary Schools infused with layers of memories of Chawanda Primary School in Zimbabwe where I was an 'infants' teacher (EYFS equivalent) for many years before I come to the UK.

(Extracts from research diary, Willowbrook, Bee and Chawanda Primary Schools, 25/11/09).

At lunch time... children bring corn on cob, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and sugar cane... whilst the rest of the school eat in the school hall... some of the children go to the forest to fetch for wild fruits. These children are so poor they cannot afford lunch...and a large number of pupils are on free school meals... Others' school fees are even sponsored by the teachers in return for help with 'minor' chores... two girls, Chipo (five years old) and Nyaradzo (ten years old) volunteer to set fire for me...for cooking during lunch break. The nursery children have their food brought and served in their classroom by the dinner ladies...instilling a sense of togetherness? I prepare my lunch and share some of my food with Chipo and Nyaradzo... Typically, most people living in the area are unemployed and poor... most of the children who come to school barefooted usually come early in order to allow ample time to wash their feet in the river near the school...Mr Kajokoto... calls out names of children who have not paid fees. One by one I watch them leave the school...Almost ninety-seven percent of the children are sent home for not paying their fees in time...

...The day's activities include free-choice, circle time, toast, numeracy activities, lunch time, story tree, singing and reflection... and home time rituals. 'Does it make sense to conceive individuals as choosing their

specific interests; doesn't the [setting] contribute to those choices?' (May, 2005:120). Time is also spent tidying up and 'juicy' plant leaves fetched in the nearby forest are used by children to polish the floor with by scrubbing, giving it a fresh smell and green look...Between the end of one activity and the beginning of another the teacher or one of the assistants uses a tambourine to signal the end of activity and tidying up time... teachers assign children specific work to be carried out during 'general work time', including washing dishes, fetching water from the borehole while others look for grass to sweep the school yard under the 'school prefects' and teachers supervision...Mrs Clooney asks me to read a story to a group of children. She tells me to read 'Elmer the Patchwork Elephant...one of the children's favourite books...Elmer's colourful body put together like a patchwork quilt reminds me of how fragments of experiences that influence my perceptions are complexly stitched together...As I read the book Sean interjects 'Josie, are you a proper teacher?..' 'Let's build the queen's palace using these [wooden blocks] says Aisha. '...and then we can make it huge' says Connor. '...and massive, then we will choose who will be the queen' adds Saif. 'I'll be the queen' I say. No, Josie should be the queen's child adds Connor.... As a teacher and adult figure I am in control. 'Characters are of the present, but feelings plunge into the past.' (Deleuze, 2005:79) During pretend play, as a five year old girl my role was always that of fetching water from the borehole and firewood for cooking while boys' roles were ploughing as well as herding cattle. Our roles were already settled/predetermined... creating a stable sense of identity and belonging...

### **...and 'seeing' again**

Reading a story during circle time, although it was the teacher's preserve, it did not make me one. Sean's question, 'Josie are you a proper teacher?' reminded me of my remit both as infants teacher back in Zimbabwe and researcher. By partaking in these activities, was I using my previous experience of teaching 'infants' in Zimbabwe to 'pass' as teacher? Ahmed (1999) defines passing as 'the literal act of moving

through space (in which there is no moment of departure or arrival) where one does not come to a halt and inhabit that place' (p, 94). Thus, I inhabited an ambiguous position of liminality, an undecidability where I was constantly in-between, either and neither.

The story of *Elmer the Patchwork Elephant*, explores the complexities surrounding 'belonging'. Elmer is an elephant made up of a plurality of colours stitched together like a patchwork quilt. Elmer wanted to be like other elephants because he was different. He discovers that when he tries to change his appearance in order to be accepted by covering himself with grey paint, other elephants no longer recognise him or accept him as one of their own. As I reflect on Elmer's, I realize that performing the teacher's role, reading a story during circle time, poses Sean with a problem. I was no longer *Josie* who plays football with him and other children during lunch time. This change of role meant I was supposed to ensure rules in the setting are adhered to which include 'good looking, sitting nicely and mouth shut'.

On the other hand playing with children at Willowbrook Primary School and being given a role as the 'queen's child' meant I was supposed to perform according to the rules of the role play not as one of the adults in the setting. Tia in no uncertain terms tells Saif that '*Josie is a little child she will not do nothing*'. This situation creates a dilemma. Kristeva (1991:8) posits that 'I do what they want me to, but it is not 'me' – 'me' is elsewhere, 'me' belongs to no one, 'me' does not belong to 'me',...does 'me' exist?'. This also links to the notion of passing which, as observed by Ginsberg (1996:2) is about identities, 'their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing. Finally, passing is about specularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen'.

These notions of adoption or rejection, the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen, my ability to pass and not pass complicates the insider/outsider dichotomies as their boundary consequently blur and wobble (Groves, 2003 and Conquergood, 1991). I constantly move in and out of various thresholds or liminal spaces whereby the boundary between insider/outsider becomes blurred. It might well be possible that in negotiating my own belongingness in the two settings, I consciously or subconsciously adopt certain identities and/or suppress or reject others, a kind of mimesis. MacLure discusses the complex and dualistic meaning of mimesis where an individual is caught between both the imitative and the creative. She notes: 'But now and then we experience Adorno's mimetic shudder, or De Lillo's 'arrested panic' – gripped by our loss of grip on reality, when we find ourselves caught in that place where real and copy endlessly copy one another, and even one's self becomes a *trompe l'oeil*, so that we can't tell the difference that we need to distinguish between real and copy. This does not mean that identity is all fake and pretence, or that there is no reality' (MacLure, 2003:158). It might probably be a matter of performing and acting differently with different people.

In the morning some parents leave their crying children with me which result in my spending some time with the children until they 'settle'. Throughout the day, sometimes due to changes in how children feel, I sometimes have children sitting on my lap who would be upset for one reason or other. I also attend morning and afternoon briefing meetings together with the teaching staff. This ensures I am aware of what had transpired even during days when I would not be in the settings. It is inevitable that, I consciously or subconsciously play up certain identities depending on who I interact with at any given time, a position which as noted by Merton, (1972:11) enable researchers to gain 'privileged access to particular kinds of knowledge'. Perhaps my interaction with others forms part of the peeling of layers where what was obscured becomes visible or transparent. For me it is a matter of pushing from the centre to the margins not the other way round. In the process, multiple selves

emerge and hybrid identities formed as a result of such interactions. Gutwirth (2009:128) citing Serres notes that 'individuals are metissages' they continuously change when they interact with others, with ideas, with things and experiences, with categories and objectifications, with profiles and expectations.

Though we shared the same space/setting, I became like a nomad who constantly moved psychologically in-between the *three stages*. That is, Bee, Chawanda and Willowbrook Primary Schools. As noted by Braidotti (1994:33), 'Being a nomad, living in transition, does not mean that one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community [...] Rather, nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity'. On the one hand, Zimbabwean classrooms though under resourced, looked more organic, free from the trappings of artificial intelligence and sanitised environs of the schools in which I conducted my research. Overhead projector versus chalkboard, hand written presentations versus the polish of PowerPoint and teacher as parent figure versus teacher as distant professional – all too different. I found myself caught between the two worlds (through which I interpret my observations) which often run parallel and sometimes juxtapose and occasionally collide (Craig and Deretchin, 2010). Deleuze's (2006) concept of the folding, unfolding, refolding is useful tool of understand the various discursive complexities in my fieldwork. Conley (2005) notes that to fold means to write, unfolding means becoming, refolding signifies the tracing of new maps and diagrams. Through the interactions I had with my participants, objects and events during my research, my subjectivity was folded both within my participants and within the 'non-human' (St Pierre, 1997; Deleuze, 2006:158) opening up new understandings.

These shifting and multiple positionalities within my act were suggestive of the tensions produced as a result of being an insider and outsider. In this regard, Subreenduth and Rhee (2009) note the sometimes difficult task of coming up with a definitive 'positional' definition of a phenomenon which is constantly shifting, evolving and transmuting. So, how did my role as researcher performer impact on my research? Conquergood (1991:190) troubles notions of performativity and performance ethnography when he asks 'What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding? What are the epistemological and ethical entailments of performing ethnographic texts and field notes? What are the ranges and varieties of performance modes and styles that can enable interpretation and understanding?' These are some of the questions I considered in the research process. Holmes (2008:402) citing Alzibouebi suggests that as researchers we need to 'maintain an informed reflexive consciousness to contextualise our own subjectivity in data interpretation and representation of experiences in the research process...' This way, an interrogation of data is made possible without resorting to binary relations or fixed interpretations.

In order to map this process, a range of analytical tools will be employed in order to tease out the multiple meanings of 'belonging' whilst bearing in mind that sailing at once in several seas is a complex process which calls for;

An approach to writing that is partial and tentative, that transgresses generic boundaries, and allows the inclusion of the researcher's voice. Understanding that discourses operate within a text in rhizomatic ways that is they are not linear, or separate. Any text includes a myriad of discursive systems and these discursive systems are connected to and across each other. A rhizomatic discourse analysis follows the lines of flight that connect these different systems in order to provide accounts of plausible (mis)readings...This kind of analysis allows (im)plausible readings of connections between and across and within various data. (Honan and Sellers, 2007:2).

## **Waiting for belonging to enter the stage**

In the play 'Waiting for Godot' Godot never shows up but that does not mean the character Godot is without significance. So when we talk about 'belonging' we can offer lists of attributes for what it is but can we nail it down? By putting ~~belonging~~ under erasure it means that the concept is still visible but the meaning has been destabilised – a type of slippery concept. Humphrey's (2007) work highlights that in trying to understand any research area including that of 'belonging' I will (inevitably) work with a degree of uncertainty, frustration and confusion because 'no theory or discipline fully provides answers to our existence or experience' (p. 3). Instead, he suggests that we should envisage all theory as 'porous, dynamic and interconnected folds'. He continues, 'These folds need to be porous and pliable, caressing a multitude of realities and inviting us to consider hidden, less visible areas of knowledge' (p. 3). This prompts me to consider how theories including for example postcolonialism, queer theory and poststructuralism will enfold me where as a consequence I might see 'belonging' in multiple and less obvious or as Humphrey puts it 'less visible' ways. Humphrey, following Serres (1991) also considers how leaky and flexible theories might circumvent or even 'challenge' the logic of binary opposition including for instance the crude and simplistic assumption that children who came from minority ethnic communities will not belong and children of white British heritage will. As an antidote he suggests the 'baker's logic' (Serres, 1991:81) whereby 'the binary logic is made to fold in upon itself such that something else becomes involved'. In terms of perfecting the baker's logic we have to knead binary opposition: to make the two terms fold in such that it is shown that both sides implicate each other and that as such they become, as Derrida would say, 'both the neither/nor'. Neither positive nor negative, neither one thing nor the other. What we have here is a state of affairs where something else is involved, where something else is implied, where we continually find ourselves between things. And being between things do we not, once again, find ourselves in the very middle of multiplicity? (Lomax, 2000:94).



Therefore the readings of Bee and Willowbrook cannot be seen in such clean and tidy ways because they are infused with memories, the complexities of which are evoked in the *pentimento* narrative. Still waiting for 'belonging' to enter, the next plateau utilises a Deleuze and Guattari-inspired approach to discuss amongst other things, notions of 'being' and states of power.

## 6 Becoming-Minoritarian

Today belonging constitutes a political and cultural field of global contestation, anywhere between ascriptions of belonging and self-constructed definitions of new spaces of culture, freedom and identity, summoning a range of pertinent issues concerning relations between individuals, groups, and communities. It raises questions about cultural, sociological, and political transformative processes and their impact on imagined and real boundaries, notions of citizenship and cultural hybridization, migration and other forms of mobility, displacements and so-called ethnic cleansing, and of course also on the extent and nature of perceived normalcies of nationals belonging, in a world seemingly turning more fluid [...] (Hedetoft and Hjort, 2002: x).

### Introduction

This plateau takes a piece of data which allows me to explore notions of belonging and identity. It offers a point of departure for imagining 'identity as threshold' (Fortier, 2000:2) whereby belonging is experienced in the interstices between longing and belonging. Deleuze (1998: 15-16) states that 'everything has a story...the story is always there, but what strikes us is why the story is so interesting'. This piece of data was selected for the affective dimension it adds to the belonging narrative whilst mapping notions of identity and belonging using the theoretical and conceptual ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, Butler, and Bhabha to thicken the plot. In the process, the piece of data throws up an alternative re-presentation of belonging and identity. In lieu of the general representation of belonging and identity as stable, what we are presented with here is something which is dynamic, fluid and dependent on a host of contextual factors. I also reflect on my role as the researcher and participant, observer and observed as well as reflexively explore my embodied subjectivity. Below is a brief background to the participants.

## The participants: a brief background

Saif is a four-year old boy of Saudi Arabian heritage who is fluent in both English and Arabic. Ibrahim, like Saif, is also from Saudi Arabia and speaks Arabic and is still learning English. Aisha, is a three year old girl of Somali heritage. She is fluent in both English and Somali. She came into the United Kingdom when she was six months old and attended a private day nursery before coming to Willowbrook Primary School. There is also Connor, aged three years and six months. Connor is a mixed-race monolingual English speaker. His mum is of white British heritage and his dad is from Libya. Abidikarim is from Somalia, with Somali as his first language. He is still learning English.

In my journal I wrote;

*At the construction area is Abidikarim (speaks very little English), Connor, Ibrahim, Saif, Aisha and me. 'Let's build the queen's palace using these' [wooden blocks] says Aisha. '...and then we can make it huge' says Connor. '...and massive, then we will choose who will be the queen' adds Saif. 'I'll be the queen' I say. 'Yes! Josie is going to be the queen' says Ibrahim jumping up and down joyfully. 'No Josie should be the queen's child' adds Connor [they all agree] 'I'm the queen, girls are queen' declares Aisha as she swings to the wooden blocks. 'I am the King' retorts Saif making some steps towards Aisha. 'I can't have you as king, you're too small Saif'. Saif seems like he is put off. He walks to the clothes cupboard and pulls a box of shoes and tries them on. Abidikarim joins Saif at the clothes cupboard. He picks a cap and looks at Saif without saying a word. Saif picks a pink dress, Abidikarim looks puzzled, and he does not say a word. Meanwhile other children continue negotiating their roles. 'You are all going to work for me' says Aisha looking perturbed. 'We are all children...' declares Connor. '...But we need a queen for the palace', Saif interjects who has now dressed in a tight pink fairy dress and oversized black high heels. 'You look pretty nice in that dress' Aisha*

remarks. 'Can we go partying Aisha?' Saif hesitantly made the request not too sure whether Aisha would agree. 'Yes, first, my baby needs a hijab' (head scarf) and off we go says Aisha putting a 'hijab' around my head and neck. (Recorded transcript 06/05/09).

## **Majoritarian/Minoritarian**

As outlined in the previous plateau, Deleuze and Guattari use the concept of 'majoritarian' and 'minoritarian' in order to discuss, amongst other things, notions of 'being' and states of power. To elaborate on these two concepts, I consider the data above as well as the classroom in which this data is situated.

In the classroom, there are 'codes of power' and rules that govern what can and cannot be done (Delpit, 2005). These are majoritarian discourses and ideologies which determine normalised ways of behaving, perceiving and experiencing the world, which adds to the complexities of children's engagement and participation in the culture of the school. A key majoritarian figure within the classroom is the teacher, Miss Walsh. As teacher, Miss Walsh is just one individual. However, her power and domination renders her the 'majoritarian'. So, whilst less numerous than the children in that there is only one of her, she nevertheless is representative of the 'standard' or the 'model', or, put a little differently 'the norm' - in terms of morals, values and so on - to which the children must aspire to (Patton, 2010). As a 'significant other'; one to whom children look up, what Miss Walsh does and says and how she does and says it reverberates across the cultural fibres of the class. It becomes the standard or, to a lesser effect, it affects the standard in the setting whilst shaping children's subjectivities in multiple and complex ways. This gives her the majoritarian influence. From the perspective that Miss Walsh is representative of the 'standard', belongingness might therefore be viewed as derivative from mimicking perceived and imagined acceptable behaviour.

Whilst as an adult, I may be seen as one and the same as the teacher; my role is that of relative power, lesser insofar as influence on proceedings is concerned. Thus, my ways of being and speaking within the setting have to reflect Miss Walsh's expectations. Yet, Ghandi (1998) proposes that speaking in a desired way is also to 'learn to speak against oneself', which implies entering into a becoming-other as a way of negotiating my own belongingness in the setting. Therefore, becoming-minoritarian as noted by Tormey (2006:143) is posited as an '... essential passivity between that which represents and that which is represented which signals for Deleuze the denial of difference....'.

In the pretend play, my own identity gridlock between child, researcher, adult figure, and woman is a complex one. To begin with, the child/adult binary is already complicated by my own adult/ researcher/child position(s) and the children themselves, who not only take on adult roles, but also direct the play, which perhaps unsettles their minoritarian status whilst destabilising any predispositions of a sense of 'shared understandings'. Though an adult figure, at the construction area, I assume a 'minority' status. The children's level of significant influence in decisions and processes in this particular 'micro-context' shore up their standard-bearer-ness. Our roles are reversed and I begin to look up to them for direction and 'approval'. Thus, playing with children becomes a form of resisting being the majoritarian or the molar identities of adult/child, reversing the trend and yet confirming the synchrony of majoritarian/ minoritarian status with influence and power rather than numeric symbolism – how numbers without influence cannot be deterministic of the balance of power, neither can influence-less age. That I am an adult has little bearing on my level of influence in the construction area. Tormey (2006:142) points out that 'as opposed to the 'majoritarian' logic of ontology, an ontology of becoming involves *resisting* the superior codes and meanings of the social field, rather than allowing them to subordinate difference to the Same, as in the case of analogy and

associations....'. Therefore, an ontology of becoming increases the affective capacity of individual bodies in ways that open it up to a process of becoming-other.

Turning now to the children as seen within the data, I think it becomes possible to see how the children move between 'the majoritarian' and 'becoming-minoritarian'. Becoming-minoritarian is 'a political affair' and 'an active micro-politics' (Deleuze, 2004:322). Let us begin with Aisha and her invitation to the group, '*Let's build the queen's palace using these [wooden blocks]*'. In some ways we can see her actions as a form of support for Miss Walsh where she is emulating the values and modes of conduct that circulate within early years settings and which are given further credence in curriculum documents. She is being 'fair' and she is 'sharing' as she invites the children (and me) into her plans for a building. On the other hand, the fact that it is Aisha who takes the lead within the construction area becomes an interesting departure from the 'majoritarian' construct where in general it is often boys who dominate the construction area. Her assertiveness seems to be signalling a majoritarian positioning. This suggests that gender is not always a determinant of the majoritarian/minoritarian outlook.

The boys' response also gestures to the two concepts in interesting ways. Connor, for instance, seems happy to follow Aisha. His response '*...and then we can make it huge*' is also suggestive of cooperation where by building together, there is a possibility for creating something beyond what is 'normally' produced. Similarly, Saif also seems to think that a group effort will surpass the children's routine constructions in that they could evolve something '*massive*'. Saif then also says: '*we will choose who will be the queen*'. I find it interesting that Saif is a boy who is suggesting that 'we will choose who will be the queen'. It is also important to note that traditionally the position of queen is not assigned but rather a function of inheritance traditions. That in the present pretend play this position is being put to a kind of election is a reminder that this is only play not 'the

real thing'. Or is it that Saif is inadvertently expressing what he wishes would happen in every-day life?

Despite Saif's insinuation that the choosing of the queen will be a group choice, I position myself as a 'natural' contender for the title due to my being the only adult. There may of course be a host of other subliminal reasons as to why I put myself forward for the role. Perhaps being queen would have allowed me to stay put as adult where I could have maintained the status quo and assumed 'majoritarian' rule and in some ways become a mirror image of Miss Walsh but within the scope or context of the pretend palace. Being queen would have allowed me possibilities for majoritarian rule. Besides, changing my status would be a considerable challenge as I would be out of my 'comfort zone'. I would not confidently perform a different role to the ones I already had. Any other role would upend my confidence and sense of autonomy. The likelihood of me needing to be constantly told and reminded how to play my role would be considerable; being reminded how to behave and talk like a child. To me this would be a culture shock, a reversal of 'how things should be'; being deposed from majoritarian to minoritarian. There is already a conflict in me, a struggle between to let go and to keep hold of my status as adult. This brings me to a realisation of something about me I was not aware of at the time. My previous experience as a teacher is evoked. There is still an insatiable affinity to control and I find it hard to let go albeit fleetingly. The thought of having less power than children is a source of considerable discomfort and therefore I would rather perpetuate the status quo even in transient set-ups like pretend play. Children seem to realise this and sometimes wittingly set out to upset the applecart.

Momentarily Ibrahim is my sole supporter. '*Yes! Josie is going to be the queen*' Ibrahim says jumping up and down joyfully. This support is short lived when Connor alternatively suggests, '*No, Josie should be the queen's child*' – a position which the whole group agrees with and takes. This episode provides key insights into the children's involvement into

collective decision-making processes. It is also insightful to observe that they do not always agree and yet allow themselves to disagree. This instance shows that children with opposing views are free to express themselves without fear of being excluded for holding a contrary opinion. Also of interest is the fact that they do not involve me in the final decision although it concerns my position. In this respect my participation is limited. It is the children's space. It is their time and they are in charge. They are the majority and they know it. I do not contest this state of affairs. I accept my new status with a realisation that I am a minoritarian and even if I want to object, my voice would not be heard. This is another illustration that majoritarian/minoritarian statuses are not fixed. They are sensitive to context, time and interpersonal dynamics. Majoritarian status, it seems, resides with people with power at any point in time and this power constantly changes hands and with it majoritarian status. So, whilst I get to be related to the queen, an indirect connection to royalty, my new status as 'child' is interesting. As Spiegel (2005:iii) suggests, becoming-minoritarian 'acts as the entryway into a nomadic theatre insofar as it indicates a willingness to inhabit positions and perspectives other than those delineated as normatively powerful and to develop according to these alternative desires...'. It is not so much about being the child in this role play as I am still an adult but *becoming-child* as an adult opens up new emotions, sensations and perspectives. Therefore, becoming-minoritarian is about the process of transformation. As noted by Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 320) 'all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian'. My cross-movement between identities serves to remind me of the temporariness of identities and how, consequently, as individuals we are constantly moving across spaces between identities and positions of power, nomads without being rooted in one position – all-too-familiar with liminality; constantly stepping on the hyphen bridging yet separating these identities and positions. With performance and conformity becoming a necessary constant for 'fitting-in', sometimes guised as sanitised *adaptability*, which is a Deleuzian nomadic theatre of performance and performativity, Or as MacCormack (2004:28) posits, '...becoming-



minoritarian implies two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which the term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority' – a cross-movement of the children and me between minoritarian and majoritarian positions; whereby I am transferred (withdrawn) from the 'majority' position and to the minoritarian state while the children 'rise up' from the minoritarian state to take up the majoritarian status.

The pretend play momentarily evokes in me nostalgic memories of childhood play where my peers and I used to play-act roles within our pastoral community in which boys would always play the male roles such as herding cattle and ploughing while other girls, including me, would play female roles such as fetching firewood and water from a nearby river. These were traditional gender roles that engaged with the shenanigans of daily life whilst providing a rudimentary notion of what it means to belong within that pastoral community. The play has some resemblances with my memories of fixed roles and again something I cannot recall. It is difficult to recall any other way, other than the majoritarian fixed and stable identities where play flowed 'seamlessly' each time roles are fixed. Let me leave this for a moment and discuss the palaces and queens.

It is possible to see that, in speaking of palaces and queens, the children are echoing narratives that are deeply familiar in UK childhood culture and which find particular resonance in canonised texts such as fairy tales. It is also possible to see how certain narratives become globalised through huge corporations like Disney and become a majoritarian discourse. Thus, in some respects, it does not matter whether you are a Libyan child or a child of English heritage your imaginative aspirations are going to get entangled in homogenised and ubiquitous narratives that follow predictable and prescribed scripts (Zipes, 2006; Pisters, 2003; Giroux, 1999; Stephens, 2002 and Stone, 2009). Deleuze suggests that when a minoritarian (which in this instance are the children) take on a model (i.e.

fairy tale) it's a form of 'survival' or it is done so as to 'prosper', and to be 'recognised' (1995:173).

### **'I can't have you as king, you're too small'**

Turning now to Aisha, Aisha declares '*I am the queen, girls are queen*'. She is the architect and ensuring her subject position within the play. She is in a way positioning herself within dominant gender discourses where '*girls are queen*'. Saif offers himself to be king with profound enthusiasm, '*I am the king*', whilst *making some steps towards Aisha*. Saif's movement towards Aisha demonstrates his assertiveness. Probably, as already proposed by Aisha that *girls are queen*, then to him, 'boys are king'. This seems to be fracturing the negotiations.

Aisha has now become the queen. She is rejecting Saif's proposal to be king. Being 'too small' for Aisha is good enough reason for not wanting Saif to be king. Whilst it is possible to surmise as to why Aisha thinks Saif is 'too small' and probably deficient in culturally acclaimed physical characteristics to be king, one interpretation could be that Aisha might be making reference to Saif's body stature which is the 'smallest' amongst this group of children. Probably size in the role of king matters to Aisha. It perhaps equates to masculinity and authority associated with being king, which negates other important 'size-neutral' attributes of an influential king such as charisma. Saif is most of the time in the company of girls in class. During lunch break when other boys in his class engages in rough and tumble play, Saif hangs around his elder sister who is in year one. His seemingly 'soft' personality might have been perceived by Aisha as 'not tough enough'. In this particular instance, language is used by Aisha to position herself as well as Saif whilst also illustrating ways in which the body is socially inscribed; 'discursively constructed and 'written' on by innumerable forms of social discipline' (Braun, 2000:513). Additionally, MacLure et al (2011:5) note 'people do not simply 'belong' to such identity categories; rather, identity is built and ratified in and through the talk itself'.

Deleuze (2004:100) articulates that 'every word is physical and it immediately affects the body'. Being portrayed as 'too small' affects the body and perhaps structures the way Saif might see himself. It is injurious, derogating and demeaning (Butler, 1997 and Jay, 2009). Butler further explains that:

To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control...to be addressed injuriously is not only open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer the disorientation of one's situation as the effect of such speech. Exposed at the moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one's place within the community of speakers; one can be 'put in one's place' by such speech, but such a place may be no place (1997:362).

Such an address, as further observed by Butler (1997:2) 'may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response'. There is some resonance with the ways in which the events are unfolding. Saif for example could have gone to Miss Walsh to complain that, 'Aisha is not letting me play' which is common practice in such circumstances. Rather, he asserts himself as a legitimate contender for the role. Walking to the clothes cupboard Saif creates a line of flight, an alternative possibility to Aisha's contestation; a resolve not to succumb to a barrier to his desired role. In Deleuzian terms, it is possible to map the line of flight Saif creates and to consider ways in which boundaries are constantly being destabilised and contested.

### **The unstable and relationality of space**

Certain spaces such as the construction area and home corner tend to be coded, which means these spaces are understood by the children in a particular way. Even the clothes cupboard is also coded with gender-specific markers. That is, fairy dresses are for girls and Spiderman costumes for boys. These structures/segments portray dominant discourses of respective gender norms and particular ways of being which attempt to influence the children's experiences in these different spaces

within the classroom. Massumi (1992:87) argues that 'a body does not *have* a gender' rather 'it is gendered'. Of interest also is Grosz's (1995:92) observation that 'the subject's relation to space and time is not passive; space is not simply an empty receptacle, independent of its contents; rather, the ways in which space is perceived and represented depend on the kind of objects 'positioned' within it, and more particularly, the kinds of relations the subject has to those objects'. Thus, while the practices and processes of classifying, controlling and organising children's bodies in the classroom are a teacher's perspective, 'from the children's point of view, the classroom is a negotiable terrain' (Nespor, 1997:131). Thus, children slip in and out of striated (rule-intensive) and smooth spaces (somewhat fluid facilitating the creation of something new). Striated space and smooth space is likened to a game of Chess and Go where the identity of the pieces in the former is fixed and hierarchical and with an ordered movement 'a knight remains a knight, a pawn a pawn, a bishop a bishop' (Deleuze, 1987:353), consequently 'belonging' is regulated whilst 'becoming' is made invisible (Knowles et al, 2010). Thus, it facilitates disciplinary mechanisms such as surveillance and normalising judgements in the classroom (Foucault, 1977). Belongingness might imply individuals adopting certain survival strategies. On the other hand, in the latter, Deleuze (1987:353) notes, 'Go pieces, in contrast, are pellets, disks, simple arithmetic units, and have only an anonymous, collective, or third-person function: 'It' makes a move. 'It' could be a man, a woman, a louse, an elephant'. Thus, Go creates a smooth space where identity is fluid and transient. In making sense of this, I now turn to Saif and Abidikarim's movements.

### **A line of flight**

Abidikarim joins Saif at the clothes cupboard. Saif and Abidikarim might have thought, 'let's create a line of flight together, away from Aisha's seemingly injurious speech'. At the clothes cupboard, Saif has the potential to follow predetermined ways of being or form a new line of flight, opening up smooth space. He does not choose a hat or a Spiderman

costume. Instead, he chooses a pink fairy dress and black high heeled shoes and thus putting under erasure normative gender expectations by not embracing what is perceived as normal. Normal, as observed by Picoult (2008:11) 'is like a blanket too short for a bed sometimes it covers you just fine, and other times it leaves you cold and shaking; and worst of all, you never know which of the two it's going to be.' In a way, this is a 'molecular movement away from molar rigidity which disturbs linearity and normalcy' (Best and Kellner, 1991:100). That is, those that are perceived as 'true' and 'authentic' ways of being male or female whilst at the same time extending his capacity to connect and be connected to. Saif's adopted dressing disrupts the gender norms whereby fairy dresses are known to be for girls not boys. By doing this, Saif resists the structuring effects of dominant gender discourses, the seemingly rigid, over-coded segments and bounded subjectivities which dictate what it means to be a boy or girl (Yelland and Grieshaber, 1998; Foucault, 1982). So, becoming-minoritarian in this instance is an active resistance of the possibility of representation, categorisation and pigeonholing (Tormey, 2006). Dressing in a fairy dress, Saif resists being trapped in the normative ontological gender identity by taking steps that 'encourage gender to flip' (Masumi, 2013) by moving 'between and adopting different gender positions to further [his] interests' within the play (Hyun and Choi, 2004:51). It is the line of flight or 'creativity that go beyond what is' (Masny and Waterhouse, 2011: 287) when the 'sense of that-which-is' (*being*, which presupposes a sense of belonging and identity as fixed and unified) becomes 'a sense of what-can-be' (*becoming*) (Reynolds and Weber, 2004:5). Thinking 'AND' instead of thinking 'IS' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007:57), affords a way of imagining gender performance as precarious, fluid and ambiguous whilst challenging gender binaries. Here, 'AND' denotes the existence of further possibilities whereas 'IS' is inferential of fixity to the *here* and *now*. In this respect, Saif adopts an 'AND' attitude to notions of gender fixity; not accepting the 'IS' state of gender representation by Aisha. Put another way, Saif rethinks gender-role associations.

AND is neither one thing or nor the other, it's always in-between, between two things; it's the borderline, there's always

a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don't see it, because it's the least perceptible of things. And yet it's along this line of flight that things come to pass, becoming evolve, revolutions take shape (Deleuze, 1995:45).

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) note that individuals are composed of three different lines the 'line of segmentarity' or 'molar line', line of molecularity and lines of flight that determine how groups and individuals function as well as what they are capable to do. The molar line is a representation of identity as binary oppositions and rigid segments such as big/small and boy/girl. Dressed up in a tight pink fairy dress and black high heels, Saif becomes tall and 'feminine' to 'comply' with Aisha's rigid expectations of what a queen *is*. It intimates that 'even in a person, are the lines that make them up, or they make up, or take, or create' (Deleuze, 1995:33) as part of their longing to belong. This transgressive line of flight creates a line of belonging for Saif. It appears Saif's trans-dressing is an exploration or creation of other possibilities, other spaces he could occupy in spite of his gender –an attempt to transgress socio-cultural normative gender roles and positions. In the process, Saif engages in an occasional process of 'invading' culturally gendered spaces – a process of identity nomadism (Deleuze, 1977). In becoming-other than one was, Flieger (2000:61) notes that 'every 'one' loses face and identity, and finds creative solutions, ways to gain pleasure. Paradoxically, one finds 'survival' at the expense of 'identity' by becoming-other...but this loss is enabling, and energising'. In relation to Saif, it is another instance of hybridising himself in a gender 'in-betweenness' (Bhabha, 1994) – between coded and ascribed 'male' space and 'female' space (whilst creating something new) regardless of imminent opposition from girls who may consider the position of queen their portion. There seem to be an intertwining of gender dynamics with issues of culture, status, stature and belonging (Gallas, 1998). Deleuze and Guattari (2004:323) propose that becoming is 'neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight'. Thus gesturing towards the fluidity of becoming which is a 'free play of lines or flows whose intersections define unstable points of transitory identity' (Deleuze, 1995:186). It is in this in-betweenness or a state of

*being* between multiple assemblages that Saif might be shaping and re-shaping his identity through nonconforming to the socio-cultural gender codes. This temporary shift of gender is a 'complex process of translations, de- and re-coding, creation and invention' of the normative arrangements of gender-appropriate dressing, and what it means to be a boy (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010:116 and Whittle, 1996). Belonging might, therefore, entail 'negotiating the discursive constitution of bodily limitations seen in the stratified signified body' (MacCormack, 2004: Online). Likewise, Grosz (1994:19) suggests that it is possible to view the body as a 'site of contestation' riddled with ambiguity and constant struggles between cultural inscriptions and agency.

It is a matter of conjecture whether Saif's choice of 'girly' shoes to match with the pink fairy dress is a deliberate act to 'pass' as girl so that he can contend for the role of queen or just making the most of 'fun' time. Now, dressed in tight pink fairy dress and high heels Saif comes back to the construction area. His remark , '*but we need a queen for the palace*' is an insinuation that even though Aisha has declared that she is the queen because '*girls are queen*' Saif still feels there is still no consensus on the role of queen and a possibility, however remote, still exists for him to be queen elect.

### **'We are all children'**

Meanwhile, Aisha takes the lead and suggests, *you're all going to work for me*. In objecting to Aisha's remark that 'you're all going to work for me' Connor protests, '*We are all children*' which implies belongingness to a peer group called 'children'. Perhaps, Connor wants children to remain children even in pretend play rather than have one person assume control and influence over everyone else. Probably, to Connor, equality is more important than replicating the adult-dominated world in the children's world. If this is anything to go by, there might be resonances with George Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm* where in the first stages of independence,

any resemblance of humanness is a symbol of oppression and, therefore, frowned on hence *all animals are equal*. No one should be left behind – *we are all children*. When everyone ‘belongs’, power should be equitably distributed without being concentrated in one centre. Where there is equitable distribution of power, at least to Connor, everyone is majoritarian. There is also a dichotomy of work/play. Work here is portrayed as the other of play where Aisha seems to be privileging work ‘*you’re all going to work for me*’ and Connor thinks ‘*we are all children*’ and therefore playing.

### **Coda**

In this plateau, the object was to unpick an observation of children in the construction area during the class’s traditional ‘choosing time’ where the children get to share their own ideas with minimal direction from the teacher. On this particular day, children choose to engage in pretend play around the theme of a royal household. The conversation becomes so much about which roles are to be adopted and by whom as it is about what actually happens in a royal setting. This process becomes a window into children’s ideas about adult power and influence. It also brings to light the negotiation skills and processes embedded in getting one’s views adopted by a group. More importantly, disagreement, it seems, is as much a part of the children’s world as it is in the adult world. What interests me is that even though the children have divergent views on who should be queen, they still maintain cordiality in reaching their final decision and, once it is reached, at least in this instance, all children go along with the agreed on position. Thus, in relation to this particular observation, it becomes a plausible inference that negotiation, respectful debate, freedom to express oneself within a group without fear or trepidation and to hear and to be heard by others are all important ingredients to a sense of accepting and being accepted. That one eventually agrees with all shows homogeneity of purpose, a collective identity, a sense of one with others. On the other hand, having an opportunity to make one’s voice heard and using it is resonant of individuation, those elements which



make individuals maintain their unique identity (hence remaining identifiable) within a group with common interests. The key thing here becomes the importance of respecting individuality while at the same time upholding homogeneity, those aspects which still make individuals connect and relate to others within the same group realising that as much as there are unique individual views, there still remain the common goals which enable a group to function as such. Within this group, ideas evolve with dialogue and debate. Perhaps, as put forward by Palli (2006:Online) 'we belong because we inhabit each other's hospitality; because we participate of each other, we take part of (we become a part of) partial entanglements'.

Going back to Hedetoft and Hjort (2002:X), cited in the epigraph at the beginning, the observation highlights how belonging is as much cultural as it is political and these at times mark out battle lines across which divergent views are traded. Saif wants to be king, Aisha wants everyone to work for her and Connor detests the idea of power centralised in one individual, preferring, instead, to have equitable distribution of power or at least a symbolism of it. Cultural, as well as personal, issues are also raised within the contestation. Should a small person be king? If I wear high heels, am I now 'big' enough to occupy this role? Or, if I wear a pink fairy dress, can I be considered for the role of queen? Here, the wearing of high heels raises the possibility that perhaps Saif would do anything to play the powerful role. Here emerge notions of self-constructed identities which, however slight, hint at expressions of freedom to construct one's own identity while still retaining one's membership to the group. As noted earlier, debate aids evolution of ideas and direction without disintegrating the core fabric of the group, that which holds it together even in the wake of an increasing fluidity of what is deemed 'normal'.

## **7 (Be)longing: Sean's Narrative**

Our hunger to belong is the longing to bridge the gulf that exists between isolation and intimacy. Distance awakens longing; closeness is belonging. Everyone longs for intimacy and dreams of a nest of belonging in which one is embraced, seen and loved. Something within each of us cries out for belonging (O'Donohue, 1998: xvi).

### **Introduction**

In this plateau I explore the narrative of Sean, a three year old boy in nursery at Bee Primary School. The aim is to examine 'belongingness' in instances of contravention of community rules. By bracketing (be)longing in the title of this plateau, I wish to emphasise the affective dimension of belonging which is seen in the 'longing' for acceptance, or desire to belong to the classroom community which is bound by rules (Probyn, 1996). These rules can either be written or unwritten – most however, are unwritten though recognised and adhered to by all members. Depending on group dynamics, setting and age, contravention attracts penalties. These penalties include ostensible membership withdrawal, suspension or complete excommunication. The purpose of rules is primarily to protect members from each other, especially from those within the group who may threaten others' membership and enjoyment of their affiliation. I will open by giving a brief biographic description of Sean after which I move to the analysis of my observations of this young, self-assured and, at times, controversial boy.

### **A brief background**

Sean is a three year old boy and is of white British heritage. He lives with his mum and dad and he is the only child in the family. At home, Sean often plays with Niall, who is also aged three and in the same nursery

class as him at Bee Primary School. Sean likes dinosaurs. In nursery, Sean and Niall spend most of their choosing time in the 'small world area' playing with dinosaurs. Sean has been in nursery for three months. Initially, I thought that Sean would be of little interest to my research because he already 'belongs'. But the following extract from my field notes entry makes me think again.

*Sean: [tapping Mrs Clooney gently] Mrs Clooney, I don't like to be in this school anymore.*

*Mrs Clooney: Why?*

*Sean: I like to go to the blue school near our house [the school where blue uniforms are worn] because the children there are very nice to me.*

*Mrs Clooney: Sean, what did you do yesterday that made other children sad?*

*Niall: [interjects] He was spitting on....*

*Mrs Clooney: [interjects] I'm talking to Sean and I want him to tell me what happened. Sean, I said what did you do yesterday? Talk to me.*

*Sean: I didn't do it. I want to go to the blue school tomorrow. Children at the blue school are very nice to me.*

*Mrs Clooney: Listen Sean, if Mrs Clooney spit on your face, will you like it?*

*Sean: No*

*Mrs Clooney: Even if you go to another school, if you spit on other children, do you think they will like you?*

*Sean: No [hangs his head for few moments]. Can I go and play now?*

*Mrs Clooney: Of course, you can. But do you understand what I said? If you are good to other children, they will also be good to you.*

*Sean: No one wants to play with me.*

*Mrs Clooney: Just do the right thing Sean.*

Afterwards I had a conversation with Mrs Clooney;

*Mrs Clooney: [turning to me] I think Sean is struggling with himself.*

*Yesterday he refused that he was spitting on other children and on Friday he did something wrong in the toilet and when other children reported him I called him and I asked him, what he had done in the toilet. I was with Mr Murdoch. We were both stunned by his response. He said, 'It wasn't me'. And I asked, 'Who did it?' His answer was: 'It was someone, the one who looks like Sean ... the bad Sean. But it wasn't me.'*

*Me: [quizzically] Umm...*

*Mrs Clooney: [interjects] I think Sean tries to distance himself from the wrong he does. The mischievous Sean is not him, it is the 'bad' Sean. And he is the good one. Maybe he thinks if he goes to a different school then he will be fine. What he doesn't realise is that transferring does not solve the problem. We have parents who think like that too – they transfer their children whenever problems with their children's behaviour surface. It doesn't get them to think that maybe there is something about their child that needs changing. (13/05/09)*

### **'Seeing' the story**

What is it about narrative that makes it such a pervasive and fascinating phenomenon? And how can one begin to answer such a searching question without entering into a narrative of one's own? (Toolan, 1988: xiii). In an empirical sense, the intrinsic value of narrative lies in its ability to access 'the best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people's experience' (Polkinghorne, 2007:9). From my naive realist view, Sean being of white British heritage by default already 'belonged' due to sharing the same demographic profiles as the numerical majority in the class. At the beginning of the research, I had, to a large extent, presupposed that the development of a sense of belonging could only be observable in ethnic minority children. This assumption inadvertently raised the majority/minority question. Prior to this, I had rather simplistically thought of this question in a numerical sense where the question of who is majority or minority is settled quantitatively (by

number). While, as I have since grasped, the majority/ minority issue is not that simple, we still cannot deny the existence of the 'majoritarian' question in every society which is the existence of the standard or normative values against which all performances are measured. That Sean is a member within the early years setting does not imply belonging 'fully' to the group. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) view the majority/ minority as an inductive rather than deductive sense. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:106) becoming-minoritarian refers to the possibilities of individuals or groups to deviate from the standard which expresses, as Patton (2005:407) puts it, 'the sense in which individuals and society never entirely conform to the majoritarian standard'. Behaviours perceived as antisocial (or is it unsocial) such as spitting marks an individual as 'other' as someone who does not adhere to moral values.

### **The body as surface of inscription**

There are multiple other ways in which we can read or attempt to comprehend the above excerpt. Perhaps the question is 'can we read bodies as 'geographically' marked?' and 'how does the representation of the body become the site of conflicting projected identities?' (Rogoff, 2000:144). While it is not clear what leads Sean to spit at other children, it is apparent this is repulsive. Obviously, Sean finds himself beaming dim light through his behaviour, negating – at least in the eyes of the rest of the class – classroom decorum such as being sensible, kind and helpful. His identity is native but his behaviour is foreign thereby becoming a 'site of conflicting projected identities'. There is no doubt it has caused a stir within the classroom. Even Niall, who used to play with Sean in the 'small world area', no longer wants to play with him. Spitting is almost a 'universal sign of contempt or disgust' (Abrams, 2012), a deviation from the norm and is not acceptable. Sean does not want to be reminded of it, instead, he is choosing to focus on the 'wrong' others have done to him so he does not like it either, hence his attempt to ignore it or even distance himself from it.

Once saliva comes out of one's body, customarily it has a whole new meaning. Spitting is symbolic of ridding one's body of bad feeling towards others. Thus, spitting is an undesirable act which neither the offender nor the offended wants to be associated with. In this context, spitting at other people is an abomination, a condescending act. It is considered a 'self-exposure, a scandal...the mess it makes cannot be tolerated' (Trotter, 2003:24). Spitting attracts unsavoury labels for example stereotypical 'hoody' boys derided by society. So, is Sean by spitting declaring his belongingness to a certain group or is he trying to emulate older boys he sees on the streets of his neighbourhood? Or, is he just being a child – one who mistimes a move?

I will now revisit Grosz's (1993) discussion of the body as surface of inscription which I briefly touched on in the previous plateau. Grosz (1993) notes that 'bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated' (p,199). The body is further stratified and 'arranged into grid-like categories' (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007:5) such as gender (*boy*), age (*three years and two months old*) and ethnicity (*white British*) which 'create a stable sense of self'. But, as noted by Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007:5) these categories 'reduce the body to particular modes of being and interacting; affecting not only how the body is understood but its potentiality; its future capacity to affect and be affected'. Thus, can be thought of as a 'kind of hinge or threshold; it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more socio-political exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body's outer surface' (Grosz, 1993:199). This surface then becomes a site where prevailing cultural, social and ideological practices interact and where meanings are conveyed (O'Loughlin, 2001 and Mama, 1995). Perhaps by looking at the meanings of these inscriptions on the body's outer surface and the 'social codes' being conveyed, we begin to see the impact of

Sean's spitting since the body, as noted by Grosz (1994) is the object and subject of attitudes and judgements. It is important to note that the inscription of bodies is not in any way final and does not fix the way it is read (Davies, 2000).

## **The Event**

Deleuze's (1990) notion of event as a 'surface effect' which separates past and present offers ways of thinking about the intricacies surrounding the spitting incident and its impact upon group dynamics. Deleuzian (2005) concept of event holds that an event is a momentous, dynamic point usually in the present which hyphenates the past and the future. Events play an important role in the development of belonging. Chains of events, as well as a single significant event can have an impact on the membership of an individual to the group. Events do not occur on their own accord; they are likely to have antecedents situated in the past which are suddenly impacted on by the event in such a way that the status quo changes and things will not continue as they used to be. In Sean's case, as it emerges from the teacher's intervention, there is a prior pattern of behaviour preceding the spitting event which influences how other group members – the teacher included – make a judgment call on which their reaction is based. It is clear Sean has not conducted himself well, at least in the eyes of the group, in the past. Therefore, while spitting is the present offense, it consolidates others' views of Sean which were formed in the past on account of past behavioural incongruities. While previously the group may have let Sean off, on caution perhaps, this time the group decides he has gone a step too far and new sanctions must be imposed. Thus the spitting event has a two-prong role; first to link the present with the past to demonstrate spitting is not an odd event, but rather an integral part of a developing pattern and, second, to make a break from leniency where stiffer penalties are beginning to be instituted to 'convince' Sean that he must reform if he wants to enjoy perpetual membership of the group. The event therefore acts as a bridge, a separation, a cut-off point

of the status quo and a beginning of a new order. An event is like a hyphen which separates before and after where according to (Hulse, 2011) 'a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past are all implicated'. Thus Sean's belongingness in the setting might be experienced in-between, longing and belonging (be-longing). This hyphenated state is what Derrida (1997:65) call *LaBrisure* or the hinge symbolised by joint break – broken, cracked part...breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment...hinged articulation of two parts. Deleuze (1990:8) describes 'event(s)' as 'coextensive with becoming' and constituted as 'always in between one thing and another.... moments of dynamic change – like a 'becoming' – and events pass through other events'.

Thus, instead of understanding the *event* as a static object or a coherent whole that refers to what has happened in a fixed moment in time (Lundborg, 2008), the *event* following Deleuze has to be understood in terms of an on-going and continuous process of becoming. This becoming, as noted by Khalifa (1999:71) is not 'part of history; history lays out merely the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become', that is, to create something new'. When event is conceived this way, 'it is never the beginning or the end which are interesting; the beginning and the end are points between which other interventions are occurring. What is interesting is the middle' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007:39). In relation to Sean's observation above, the *event* here is thus not the 'spitting' itself but the change of state; the threat of withdrawal of membership privileges. Events either in the past or present tend to move with the child and these are rarely disengageable. This explains why the spitting incident is not taken in isolation but in the context of past behaviours which Sean may not want to be reminded of. It is conceivable that Sean and the group may have talked over previous misbehaviours and decided 'to move on'. Yet the present event presents the problem of others turning the clock back on Sean's behaviour perhaps to justify their reaction to Sean's spitting. Because Sean has previously



misbehaved, he is finding out that one's history is a part of him; it is undisengageable. How prior events affect different children differs from one child to the other. These *events* are 'singularities' (Deleuze, 1990:52) 'not what occurs' but are 'rather inside what occurs' (Deleuze, 1990: 149) as explained below;

Individuals are constituted in the vicinity of singularities which they envelop; they express worlds as circles of converging series which depend upon singularities. To the extent that what is expressed does not exist outside of its expressions, that is, outside of the individuals which express it, the world is really the 'appurtenance' of the subject and the event has really become the analytic predicate of the subject. 'To green' indicates a singularity-event in the vicinity of which the tree is constituted. 'To sin' indicates a singularity-event in the vicinity of which Adam is constituted. But 'to be green' or 'to be sinner' are now the analytic predicates of constituted subjects – namely, the tree and Adam (Deleuze, 1990:112 cited in Khalfa, 1999:74).

Sean is finding out that his act of spitting is becoming a turning point to his membership and will likely influence his future engagement with the group. On the other hand, Deleuze conceives *event* as rupture 'a transformation of collective perception' (Zourabichvili, 2002). A rupture evokes images of chaos, disorderliness, breaking of rules and norms which in the classroom instil feelings of vulnerability. Rules and regulations in the setting in a way exist to govern the conduct of members whilst at the same time enhancing a sense of togetherness and shared values. But when ruptures occur, they threaten individuals' sense of security and connectedness. It is probably a point-in-time in which Sean is torn out of the web of connectedness (Rogoff, 2000) within the setting. That might also be an instance which hyphenates Sean's be-longing (being and longing) and insider-outsider positioning whilst creating inbetweenness. In the midst of this chaos he strives to separate good from bad (Widder, 2008). To him it is his behaviour which is bad but he *is* a good person – a prism through which others refuse to view the situation. It is probably a moment when other children in the setting seem to reconsider their and others' actions and attitudes – an introspective

moment through which recalibration of individuals' reflections of 'self' occurs.

How then can we make sense of Sean's spitting? Can we see Sean from Piaget's perspective who concluded that children at Sean's age are still in a pre-moral period of development? This is a stage when a child has little understanding of rules and their purpose (Schaffer, 1999). Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development is closely linked to Piaget's and believes that children at Sean's age are at a stage of *pre-conventional morality* where morality is matter of what others tell the child to do (Schaffer, 1999). Evangelou et al (2009: 4) point out that current research is dismissing the concept of children developing in linear fashion and instead focusing on theory that suggests development in a 'web of multiple strands' due to interactions and influences of the child's environment. As the evidence suggests, probably the existence of rules – though unwritten, codes of conduct – among the group might be suggestive that these children are past pre-moral. The fact that everyone, including Sean, realises spitting is inappropriate negates any suggestion that Sean's behaviour is underpinned by innocence. Probably he may just have miscalculated the extent of offence this would cause others not its actual wrongness.

Within the early years foundation stage (EYFS, 2008), Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) is one of the specified six areas of child development. The core principle of this section is the issue of behaviour and self-control. It could be suggested that the inclusion of these requirements indicates that the development of such behavioural attributes is considered imperative to normative development for children of Sean's age. However, one of the complex requirements of the EYFS is that by the end of the early years, children should understand what is right, what is wrong and why. Such an understanding of right and wrong might be a complex and complicated endeavour (Gert, 2005). There is a possibility that one of the issues that might have been overlooked by the

EYFS is the lack of distinction between controlling behaviour and morality. Skorupski (1993:121) notes that morality is undefinable. A possible limitation of the EYFS could be the simplistic nature in which expectations of child behaviour are represented such as, the notion that children behave in a certain way because they are *made* to rather than having the agency to act independently. Which means 'the child becomes more like a receiver of moral messages imposed by grown-ups than the individual who creates meaning' (Johansson, 2002:218). This gives practitioners within the EYFS a mandate to teach children moral codes. Expectations of children understanding right and wrong even outside the education context, are weaved into the fabric of the society's perceptions of children (Wells, 2009). This can be illustrated by the puritanical discourse of childhood where different forms of punishment are intended to drive out 'evil' or 'wildness' in a child. James and Prout (1997) highlight the antithesis and the flux of childhood, comparing the *tabula rasa* concept, where children are seen as 'empty vessels into which appropriate behaviours are poured' (Wells, 2009:39) to the puritanical discourse of children being inherently evil from birth – born guilt-ridden with the Adamic sin. This demonstration of stark contrasts in perspectives may indicate society's uncomfortable struggle to understand the roles and responsibilities of adults in children's lives in so far as behaviour is concerned. For example, if we are to go by the 'empty vessel' discourse, then are we saying adults are responsible for the behaviours a child exhibits both good and bad? Or, if we are to go with the puritanical discourse, are adults in a persistent battle against the inherent evil of children whereby constantly they are fighting to instil moral values? It could be argued that this demonstrates the moral panic in society to ensure that children become 'good' (Berkowitz and Grych, 1998) and then be able to do the 'right thing' as emphasised by Mrs Clooney. One of the limitations of this is the fact that it does not explain who defines what is 'good' and 'bad' and whether these notions are universal or context-specific. The difficulty of adopting this binary lens is that the 'grey' area of morality is ignored. Expanding on this, Brown and Toadvine (2007:98)

propose that ‘the focus shifts to in/out, black/white, right/wrong; boundary maintenance becomes critical, boundary defence even more critical; differences gain central importance and relations become de-emphasised’. It is evident that there is a struggle to police behavioural and moral boundaries within the setting, although there is a collective agreement that Sean has crossed the boundary.

### **Collectivity in action and emotion**

There seems to be an agreement among the rest of the group, at least on this occasion, that Sean is the perpetrator and the group are the offended. This can be looked at from two prisms, first how Sean’s spitting affects other children and, second, how these children’s response impacts on Sean. Alongside this examination, the teacher’s intervention on both sides is considered; how it affects and is affected by the bidirectional interactions between Sean and his peers.

The spitting incident exudes a state of collective anger among the group of children Sean has offended. There is collective reaction – almost synchronised – that Sean has fallen out of line and, resultantly, punishment should be meted. This spontaneous reaction gives us insights into the ‘belongingness’ that exists among the children – not only among the ‘offended’, but also the connectedness between Sean and the rest of the group. It can be argued that this anger towards Sean shows that he is part of the group. If he was not part of the group, other children’s exclusion of him, albeit temporary, would not have impacted on Sean. The punishment can only affect, and be instituted on, someone on whom they have jurisdiction – a member; one who belongs to them. Perhaps this is also the source of the group’s anger; *he is one of them and how could he do this to his own community of learners?* There is no denying that Sean’s spitting has profoundly shaken the tethers of this particular community. Observational evidence suggests that these learners are aware of their and Sean’s membership to the group and the rights and responsibilities that come with this membership. There is a sense that they have a right

not to be exposed to such undesirable conduct as Sean's and it is perhaps poignant that such treatment has come from one of their own and, as a consequence the sense of collective shock and anger simmers. Thus one of the key insights emerging from the group's reaction is that children with a sense of belonging perhaps draw on their 'oneness' to fortify their defences against perceived adversarial conduct from both within and outside. This collectivity of emotion and action most likely makes more impact than would one member on their own and, judging by his attempt to negotiate himself out of this quagmire, Sean is feeling the impact.

(Re)visiting Bauman's (1999:161) ideas cited in plateau five, we begin to understand that individuals belong to a range of groups and that 'none of the groups to which [they] enter do [they] belong 'fully': there are parts of [their] modular persons which 'stick out' and cannot be absorbed nor accommodated by any single group, but which connect and interact with other modules'. Perhaps this act of spitting reveals Sean's modular identity 'sticking out' and hard to either accommodate or belongs to other children? One wonders whether such behaviour might potentially earn Sean a label or a reputation where he becomes 'a problem in the eyes of others (teachers, school staff, classmates and other parents)' (MacLure et al, 2008:1) because others do not see Sean as modular; they just see Sean as Sean without modular sub-identities:

We all know that children who don't conform are problems in pre-schools or day-care centres. They bring in, or carry with them, aspects or fragments of identity that are unacceptable for the institution, which will then make use of different therapeutic, psychological or moral devices to try and get rid of what is then thought of as annoying, or even in some cases considered as deviant behaviours. (Mozere cited in Borgnon, 2007: 268).

Alternatively, a cynical view to Sean's excuse for his behaviour might be that he knows what he has done is wrong and he is trying to explain himself from trouble by constructing lines of escape. There is a school of thought which proposes that children's explanations after misbehaviour

are well calculated to prevent punishment that might be meted at them consequentially. To this end, Subbotsky (2008) observes that children sometimes use narrative deceptively, especially with adults.

Regardless of ethical issues arising from this strategy, threatening deviant behaviour with ostracisation appears to be a tool Mrs Clooney readily accepts and condones. She does not challenge the group's negative attitude towards Sean but, instead, reinforces it by trying to present Sean to other children as someone different whom they should re-educate to the more acceptable ways of the setting. As noted by Erikson (1966:11) 'members of a community inform one another about the placement of their boundaries by participating in the confrontations which occur when persons who venture out to the edges of the met by policing agents'. Any action does not go unnoticed in the psycho of reciprocity between the group and its members. It is as much proactive as it is reactive but not inactive. It is something that one has to participate in. One can understand why the class and Mrs Clooney react the way they do.

Sean's scene also raises other important considerations about how belonging plays out. It is worth noting that, at this stage, Sean's membership to the class has not been physically withdrawn as he is still in the same class as the rest of the children. What seems to have happened is, while he is a part of the class, his participation in certain aspects of the group has been restricted. Therefore, we come to an understanding that enlistment membership on its own does not constitute or lead to a sense of belonging. One needs to be both a part of and participant in group activities. Mrs Clooney present Sean with an ethical obligation to choose *If you are good to other children, they will also be good to you* which imply 'do the right thing' and be accepted or choose the wrong thing and be rejected. This highlights the point that Sean is not a free agent, autonomous in decision making. As put by Graham (2007:206) the concept of autonomy becomes objectionable 'when the rhetoric of the autonomous individual with an ability to choose is used to construct a

binary of *good/bad choices* and thus, *good/bad choosers*.' However, giving Sean choices (*If you are good to other children, they will also be good to you*) means responsibility lies with him. It is interesting to observe how binaries are embedded in our understandings and discourses of life phenomena where one end of the binary opposition is privileged as compared to the other. The prominence of light is more enhanced in pitch darkness, the goodness of character more appreciated where evil prevails and sweetness sweeter in the presence of competition from sourness. Thus, Sean's seemingly 'bad behaviour' is more understandable in the context of others' good behaviour. Hayden, 1998:9) notes that 'one becomes 'good' only by repeating what has already been determined as the good itself –...the memorable – while that which is 'bad' is in principle unrepeatable, it is not to be repeated or acquired as a habit'. This also highlights the significance of rules and routines in the nursery where children have to adhere to particular rituals and rules on daily basis. The existence of rules and routines in the setting is to ensure a repetition of what has already been determined as 'good'. Rules both explicit and implicit are an important aspect of community functioning. They provide an understanding of what counts as appropriate and inappropriate conduct within the setting (Cobb-Moore, Danby and Farrell, 2009:1477 and Burden, 2006). Routines in the setting are aimed at fostering a sense of togetherness, security, order, consistency and 'interpersonal closeness' (Lee and Robbins, 1995) where children engage in common tasks. Whether this is an attempt at homogenising feelings is matter of conjecture. As noted by Butler (1993a:2) the repetition of norms 'is a sign that materialisation is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled'. Butler further comments that 'this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition of the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism...' (p.95). Within the early years expressions of

appropriate emotions are necessitated without taking cognisance of the point that like Sean, children might sometimes exhibit undesirable acts such as spitting which are normally stifled and repressed (Drummond, 2000). An argument put forward by Fernandez (2009:34) is that belonging is 'schooled and developed through an arsenal of rites, rituals, prohibitions and taboos, which initiate our immersion into and sustains our entrenchment within a social unit' and in this case, the early years setting.

### **'Conclusion'**

In this instalment another re-presentation has been made of belonging as a process, not in itself an event, but nonetheless influenced by key events; turning points which at times impose a change in course as to the membership of an individual to a group or groups of people. It has emerged that where compliance has been breached, rules are used to institute correctional measures which may include restriction of one's membership privileges. In trying to explain his misbehaviour, in the process absolving or exonerating himself from responsibility over his actions, Sean shows that he cares about his membership and is concerned that his peers are beginning to institute some kind of exclusion to penalise him. This is perhaps an indirect dialogue between Sean and the group. The group feels it has been betrayed by Sean's behaviour. On the other hand, although Sean shows that he understands he has done something wrong, he does not want to show this contrition to the group. Sean's incident puts the teacher in a difficult position. She wants to right the wrong that Sean has done to his peers while at the same time not counter-wronging Sean. The way in which she handles this case appears to be partial achievement of this difficult task. She only addresses Sean's action and seems to overlook the group's reaction. Whether or not this is an implicit condoning of the group's passive retaliation where they exclude another pupil for not conforming to expectations is debatable. If children interpret the teacher's handling of this incident as a signal that when a



child does not comply it is acceptable to ostracise them, then the value of tolerance and allowing others to make mistakes may be undermined. This further cements one of the arguments I have put forward in this research that belonging is complex and continually negotiated between parties.

## 8 Hyphenated belonging: Khalid's Narrative

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986:19)

But tolerance remains a scrutinised hospitality, always under surveillance, parsimonious and protective of its sovereignty...We offer hospitality only on the condition that the other follow our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture and so on (Derrida, 2003:128).

### Introduction

In this plateau I focus on Khalid, a three-year-old boy so as to provide insights into his experiences of navigating 'belonging' in the nursery classroom at Bee Primary School. Khalid has recently migrated from Libya to the United Kingdom. It is complex enough to be new to a school, but to be new to the country as well means that Khalid's negotiations are even more complicated. Khalid has to penetrate the two layers of complexity – the country and the school. So, how can Khalid's narrative be interpreted so that it broadens our understanding of the intricacies of belonging particularly as he is caught between languages, cultures and practices? Blumenrich (2004) cautions against an objective tale, a textual laryngitis, one where as a researcher, I remain invisible. Denzin (1994:507) in a more strident fashion states that even 'the so-called objective interpretations are impossible'. Therefore, by including my interpretations and descriptions, as well as contextual and background information (information that Khalid may not have knowledge of) I seek to provide a 'thick description', which captures the multi-layeredness of meaning and interpretation, for the reader (Geertz, 1973). However, this is not to claim that the account I provide is 'final or complete' but rather it 'aspires to provide a complex representation' (Blumenreich, 2004:80) so as to broaden our understanding of belongingness and identity.

Accordingly, by drawing on notes from my research journal I will introduce the character of Khalid and in so doing I draw attention to notions of 'belonging' and its relationship to language. The plateau also argues that in examining 'belonging' it is not a question 'of starting or finishing', but 'rather what happens in between' (Deleuze, 1995: 121) where 'uprootings and regroundings' (Ahmed et al, 2003) deny the possibility of a seamless narrative of 'belonging'.

### **A character called Khalid**

*Khalid is a three year old boy who was born in Libya and came into the country a month ago. He speaks Arabic only. When he joined the nursery at Bee Primary school, it is apparent that he has difficulties communicating with other children because of the language barrier. Khalid also exhibits 'undesirable' behaviour. During play time children bring their concerns to Mrs Clooney's (class teacher) attention about Khalid's misdemeanours. These include punching and aggressively pushing other children, snatching toys and using the girls' toilets in addition to speaking in a language other children do not understand. In a conversation with me, Mrs Clooney, the class teacher, notes that 'other children are beginning to fear him and are beginning to desert him because whenever he wants something from his peers he just snatches it. If that fails he resorts to punching'. Mrs Clooney explains the impact this has to him and the rest of the class, 'We are not immune to this kind of behaviour, he just doesn't care who you are; when you try to resolve a dispute by taking a toy from him (Khalid) he would fight you, we have to keep an eye on him for the safety of other children. Khalid doesn't have social skills; maybe it's because of language barrier. I don't think he knows what he should be doing in nursery. He just doesn't have the time to listen which isn't good for him when he wants to develop his English. He needs English to express himself. He can only learn through interacting with other children. At the moment he is behaving like a baby who just goes everywhere and doesn't know what he should or should not*

*do. My fear is, if he continues like this he is going to be classed as an SEN child, which he is not. While it takes time for children to settle, he is going to take longer because at the moment he is miles away'. I then ask, 'how do you balance the situation; trying to ensure Khalid settles in the setting when at the same time other children are running away from him?'. Mrs Clooney responds, 'I always tell other children during carpet time not to fear him but to tell him in no uncertain terms to stop being aggressive. I tell them to be vigilant. It's all about helping them to be resilient. I always remind them when it's choosing time that 'Khalid doesn't speak English and may not understand or know what to say when he wants something, so do be gentle and help him. Teach him the right words, the golden words 'can I have that, please and thank you'. We just have to continue instilling those values until he is flowing with others'. (29/ 09/09).*

### **A thick description**

When Khalid moved from Libya to the United Kingdom, his cultural scripts also moved with him. These scripts 'become a major source of continuity in the transition. Whether they are in conflict or harmony with the scripts of the new sociocultural environment, the ... scripts influence the nature of adaptation to it - the balance of assimilation and accommodation' (Greenfield and Cocking, 1994:8). Sarup (1996) notes that 'the past always marks the present but often the past consists of a selectively appropriated set of memories and discourses' (p, 40). Because of migration, Khalid's identity and belonging is 'no longer that of a rooted tree but that of a rivulet, spreading out where it could, making other connections, seeking sustenance from other sources' (Nandan, 2000:43).

Being uprooted from his country of origin will undoubtedly have unsettled routines, values and expectations that will have been ingrained in him. It is probable that the conflict Khalid exhibits on the outside is a spill over of a more serious conflict on the inside; a conflict between the old and the new. In trying to accommodate new values and expectations, Khalid finds

himself caught – torn even – between the two. Some, if not all, of the old script has to be given up for the new. Moreover, the stage where he has to perform both as ‘child’ and as ‘school boy’ is different; the dimensions are different; the co-actors are different and so is the audience. In concert, different expectations also arise and for a three-year old like Khalid, this is proving to be demanding. It is little wonder that he is out of kilter.

Children come to school with cultural scripts embedded in their language, which shape their interaction (Salehi, 2012 and Lewycka, 2006). Their language connects and is connected to them. As Derrida remarks, ‘Doesn’t it figure the home that never leaves us? Wouldn’t this mother tongue be a sort of second skin you wear on yourself, a mobile home? But also an immobile home since it moves about with us?’ (Derrida, 2000:89). Khalid’s Arabic values and language that are embedded in him are his *comfort zone*; a mobile home in transit. Speaking Arabic at home enables him to keep ‘the mother tongue alive in the family, as a link to the homeland and its culture’ (Bak and Brömssen, 2010:126). While Khalid’s first language was a bond between him and his community back in Libya, in this English school it has transmuted into a barrier. No one understands it. Like a foreign currency valued in its country, but irrelevant elsewhere; incapable of purchasing what it would in its country of origin; so is a language transferred to a different setting where it is not normally spoken. Like any other language, Arabic is an essential tool with which Khalid is meant to connect to those around him but in an English classroom he finds himself disconnected and alienated. No one in his class shares his language, which, in a way, disturbs the order of the divide between outsider and insider and the gap of not belonging, opens up. In theatrical terms, it is akin to using unscripted language. In other performances the language might be useable due to its consistence with the script language and the target audience. However, in this particular instance, no other player on the stage uses the language. The audience (mis)understands him. Sometimes to be understood is to be accepted. Without being understood, Khalid cannot get the reassurance that his new environment

has accepted him. The language, which united him with his community in Libya, has become a source of disunity. At three, he is probably too young to fully fathom his new situation but it is likely that he probably assumed Arabic was a 'universal' language. I say this from the perspective of one who does not have English as her first language. As a child, I assumed my first language was everyone's; that all people were black and that Zimbabwe was the world. So my perspective, influenced by my own *baggage*, is going to be different from that of Mrs Clooney. Deleuze's (1993) notion of the 'fold' is useful here in understanding subjectivity. In his discussion of subjectification, Deleuze (2006) notes that 'everything is folded, and folds in and out of everything else'. He goes on to say that 'our subjectivity is Leibnizian because we are always folding, unfolding, refolding' (2006:137). The fold disrupts the binary notion as it 'defines the inside as the operation of the outside' by 'treating the outside as an exact reversion, or membrane, of the inside...' (St Pierre, 1997:178).

The experiences of coming from abroad might intensify feelings of strangeness where Khalid finds himself in a marginal, secondary position, an outsider—the 'other' who, at the same time, is an insider, the one who simultaneously belongs and does not belong—a stranger' within the setting (Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder, 2001: 484 – 485). When language becomes a salient marker of belonging, whereby Khalid has to learn the 'golden words' so that he 'flows' with others, then he may have to face linguistic adaptations for him to feel a part of his new micro-community. Khalid has to learn another language, English, an 'invisible prosthesis for moving between the shifting terrain of self and other' (Ng-A-Fook, 2009:12). As observed by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2002:73) 'social interactions are culturally structured', it might not only be about learning a language, but also a culture. On the other hand, Aoki, (2005) notes that being a bilingual means constantly dwelling in the margin, belonging to two worlds at once yet not fully belonging to either.

Whether a giving-in of his mother tongue is an erosion of his culture and identity (Crane, 2000), for many people the process of moving between

languages results in dilemma. It is as if one is giving up their identity for the Other's which breeds a sense of surrender, vulnerability and betrayal. Giving a sense of what it means to learn a new language, Wa Thiong'o walks us through the mind of an immigrant caught in a deadlock between languages and cultures, 'Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it' (Wa Thiong'o, 2006:263). On the hand, Derrida troubles the notion of language and 'possession' when he asks, 'But who exactly possesses it? And whom does it possess? Is language in possession, ever possessing or possessed possession? Possessed or possessing in exclusive possession, like a piece of property?' But he also emphasises the comfort or familiarity rooted in language, 'What of this being-at-home [*être-chez-soi*] in language toward which we never cease returning?' (Derrida, 1998:17).

Back in Libya, Arabic was a vehicle through which Khalid re-presented reality and a window through which he both saw and created the world. In this classroom he is suddenly disarmed and has to resort to using gestures. In these situations, human experience and instinct drive the individual to defensiveness. Mrs Clooney and the other children decode this defensive instinct as aggression; a lack of civility. Barron (2008:118) observes that 'Lack of language competence can thus lead to a lack of participation that could ultimately result in marginalisation and perceptions of children as badly behaved'. Khalid knows he can speak a language. To him it is *the* language. To compound the complexity, he has not been assigned a language support worker. Since language support workers tend to have a background of the first language of the child they will be supporting, they provide a sense of continuity in the learner. Without this sense of continuity, Khalid finds it hard to adapt and blend in with the rest of the cast. Hall (1997:34) notes that 'we are born into language, its codes and its meanings. Language is therefore...a social phenomenon. It cannot be an individual matter because we cannot make-up the rules of

languages individually for ourselves. Their source lies in society, in the culture, in our shared cultural codes, in the language system – not in nature or individual subject.’ Bakhtin’s thoughts travel along similar lines when he writes, ‘The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with their own intention, their own accent, when they appropriate the words, adapting it to their own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not after all from a dictionary that the speaker gets their words), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own.’ (Bakhtin, 1931, 1981:342)

There is an inextricable bond between linguistic and sociocultural practices (Nicolson and Adams, 2008). Since culture is a phenomenon embedded in language-in-use, not an abstract and transcendental object, it can be viewed as an assemblage ‘which can be recovered from the daily, routines, and mundane ways people talk and act in settings’ (Roth and Harama, 2010:773). Having moved from my country of birth into a totally different culture and language, I understand to a certain extent the precariousness of navigating this terrain. I can recollect the way I learned English as second language in primary school as a six-year-old child in Zimbabwe. We all spoke our first language, *Shona*, (also referred to as *L1*) and we were taught by teachers who also spoke English as a second language, they understood from their own experiences the challenges we were encountering in trying to learn the language. Teachers empathised with us and would sometimes explain the meaning of certain English words in Shona for us to understand. During English lessons we were expected to communicate in English. Although nearly everyone in my class struggled and would sometimes speak ‘broken’ English and we corrected one another’s grammar and at times finish off each other’s sentences, I did not feel isolated. There were moments when one would be stuck in the middle of a sentence and would revert to our mother



tongue. Teachers emphasised more on written than spoken English. Since English was not the mode of instruction and of our daily communication both at home and school, our written English progressed relatively quicker than our spoken English. When we had difficulties with certain English words, we often found pleasure and joy in ‘fabricating’ new words. That was in a way a deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of the standard, English language, whilst localising and nativising it into our own Zimbabwean English which, suggests Deleuze (1998:111), ‘makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium...’

### **The hyphen: an in-betweenness**

When no one understands you, you feel disconnected as if you are sitting on a hyphen between words, one, which you can speak, and the other, which you cannot speak. At the moment Khalid sits on a place of ‘passage and crossing’ (Lyotard and Gruber, 1999) the hyphen between the two identities, Arabic – English, a space of paradox and ambiguity. This is what Bhabha (1994) refer to as ‘in-betweenness’, which is a site of both negotiation and translation a ‘straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference,’ (Hoogvelt 1997: 158). For Khalid a sense of identity and belonging might be involving the toing and froing between individuality and collectivity, between individual thrust and the categories he matches with or adheres to in relation to where he comes from and where he is at present (Gutwirth, 2008). Nothing is static or fixed; but continuously in flux. Sellers (2010:563) following Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming’ considers children as embodied be(com)ings where children and childhood become subjective systems; ‘characterised by continuous change and alteration so that they are no longer (in)complete bodies, but perceivable as alternative epistemologies, in which dynamic processes are ongoing, being both subject and object of perpetual change between territorialising and deterritorialising – where

systems are in flux, recursively changing'. Thus, belonging as becoming is open-ended as opposed to coded (Massumi, 1997). The importance of belonging to particular groups changes over time. Khalid is faced with the need to reposition himself in relation to others, developing new connections and discarding others in a continuous process of fitting in. This relates to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizome that sees belonging as transient challenging the traditional foci of a rooted belonging 'a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines' (1987:9).

Derrida (2002:21) notes the complexities of operating in a space between where 'a hyphen is never enough to conceal protests, anger or suffering ...' Such a state of being in-between, an interstitial space, a crack or crevice between things, marks the intricacies of belonging. Probyn, (1996:40) notes that belonging is marked by in-betweenness, while to belong may make one think of arriving; 'it also marks the often fearsome interstices of being and going, of longing, of not arriving'. 'Between things', notes Deleuze, 'does not designate a localisable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle' (1987:25). It is through this movement in the middle that enables a myriad of possibilities produced by interconnection and alignment to emerge (Rutherford, 1990 and Manning 2003). Thus, while Khalid will eventually learn English, that will not make him English like other children in the class, neither will he be the *original* Arabic boy. Rather, he will form a new identity; combining some of the old and some of the new to form a new identity, in-between identities – a hybrid. Let me return again to my journal:

*At the sand area, there are two girls, Holly and Gemma. Holly is in reception and Gemma is in nursery. Gemma has taken four toy cars from the construction area and Holly has two dinosaurs. Gemma arranges the*

four toys in a line 'look, Holly look I've parked my cars nicely.' Holly looks at the toys and smiles 'I'm going to get my dinosaurs to fight. Khalid joins them. He speaks a few words in Arabic to the two girls. Holly does not respond. Gemma takes umbrage at Khalid although it seems she does not understand his words. She retorts 'what have you just said to me? If you continue I will tell Mrs Clooney that you're being nasty'. Khalid anxiously watches Gemma move the four toy cars one after another in a line. He constantly looks at the cars and at Gemma. Meanwhile, Holly is fighting the two dinosaurs in the sand. Khalid's attention is drawn to Holly who is talking to the dinosaurs as she fights them. Holly looks at him and frowns. Immediately Khalid turns his back at Holly and watches Gemma again. Gemma continues to move her cars occupying the space in such a way that Khalid is having to lean over Gemma's shoulders in order to see. He squeezes his way through, utters a few words in Arabic and takes one car when Gemma is about to move it. Gemma in a loud voice says 'give it [car] to me, it's my car' [trying to get her car back, but Khalid holds it tightly]. 'No! That's Gemma's car. 'Give it back to her now! [attempting to snatch the car from Khalid]. You should learn to say, can I have your car, please?' says Holly. Khalid says, 'no' to Holly and finishes the rest of his conversation in Arabic but does not let go of the toy car. It's slowly becoming unsettling for me. What a relief to hear Gemma say, 'If you refuse to give me my car, I'll tell Mrs Clooney'. Khalid refuses to budge to the threat, he clings to the car tightly whilst repeatedly saying 'no'. Gemma leaves and returns with Mrs Clooney who asks, 'Is it you again Khalid? What is the 'golden' word when you want something?' Khalid just nods and gives Gemma the toy car. 'Right,' says Mrs Clooney. Again, Khalid nods. [By nodding, I'm not quite sure whether he understands what Mrs Clooney is saying. Is nodding a sign of agreement or meaning lost in translation?] Mrs Clooney leaves. Khalid comes to me sobbing and clasps my hand speaks in Arabic while constantly pointing at Gemma (05/02/09).

The conversation between Khalid and the girls highlights what Derrida refers to as 'the silence of the hyphen' which is the 'gap between what is

said and what is thought, what is stated and what is implied' (Murphy and Sim, 2008:106). By saying a few words in Arabic, Khalid has obviously communicated something to Holly and Gemma. Gemma responds but whilst this might be described as a 'joint action for the production of determinate speech act' (Davies and Harre, 2011), can we therefore describe it as a conversation where 'to say something is to do something or in saying something we do something'? (Austin, 1975:109). Butler suggests that there is always 'the gap between saying and doing' because 'there is always a story to tell about how and why speech does the harm it does' (Butler 1997:102). By speaking to Holly and Gemma in Arabic, a language they do not understand, could Khalid be causing what Haviland (2003:771) calls 'linguistic paranoia' which is a 'presumption that when co-present persons use a language you cannot understand, it can only be because [...] whatever is being said is against you'. Perhaps when Khalid speaks in Arabic upon his arrival at the sand area, Gemma may have perceived it to be offensive hence her response '*what have you just said to me? If you continue I will tell Mrs Clooney that you're being nasty*'. Code-switching in classroom interaction can be unsettling; it is seen as a deviation from the norm/standard which in this case are aspects of classroom discourse which regulate and govern action and interaction. It just leads to further isolation. It seems, as noted by Duran (2005:73) that 'where code-switching is the norm', as was the case when I was still learning English as a young child in Zimbabwe, 'it is perceived as fluid, unmarked, and uneventful, and where it is the exception it will be perceived as marked, purposeful, emphasis-oriented, and strange'. When Khalid speaks to Holly he manages to say 'no' and finishes the sentence in Arabic. The process of learning to speak English, a language shared by the rest of class, involves a holding on to and letting go of, a 'dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding' (Antze and Lambek 1996: xxix). We see here what Fortier (1999) calls memory and forgetting working together in the construction of identity and I would also add 'belonging'. It is a process in which the past becomes the subject of present reflection and reconstruction. It

foregrounds not just the past, but how the past is built into the present (Brockmeier, 2002). Code-switching constructs an identity which is different from one that can exist in either language. Being caught between languages and cultures resonates with Derrida's statement; 'inside languages, there is a terror, soft, discreet or glaring; that is our subject' (1998:23). Perhaps this terror emanates from this failure of languages.

Holly and Gemma seem to have what Bourdieu (1986) call 'embodied cultural capital', which consists of consciously acquired and passively inherited cultural tools which aid in their interaction with the rest of class and accords them a certain kind of power. Even Mrs Clooney acknowledges this by telling other children to *teach him [Khalid] the right words, the golden words 'can I have that, please and thank you*. Delpit notes how 'a culture of power' that regulates controls and mediates interaction among participants is embedded in educational institutions;

There are codes of rules for participating in power, that is, there is a 'culture of power'. The codes or rules I am speaking of relate to linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self; that is, ways of talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing, and ways of interacting (Delpit, 1995:25).

As noted by Failler (2001:51), recognition by others through verbal address legitimates an individual's participation in discourse as an agent of speech 'we are not, however, 'free agents' so to speak, because we are vulnerable in another sense to regulatory norms and conventions of language or speech as a prior condition of becoming social, speaking subjects'. Holly and Gemma seem to have established rules that regulate the space, the materials and interaction. These include establishing that props in the setting like cars and the dinosaurs can be moved from the construction and small world areas and that when they take them they can claim ownership. Once claimed, these are effectively not accessible to anyone other than by the one claiming ownership. Thus, rules relating to ownership are established (Cobb-Moore, Danby and Farrell, 2009). Khalid's act of taking the car is perhaps propelled by the knowledge that

toys in the setting belong to everyone having observed other children taking them. Or, probably when he utters words in Arabic he is politely asking for a turn. He realises after bumping into a somewhat invisible boundary that objects can be captured and held and, as a consequence, become another child's privileged possession. By claiming ownership, Gemma defends her right to ownership and association (Cobb-Moore, Danby and Farrell, 2009). Free choice time gives children an opportunity to identify certain places within the setting they own and these too become inaccessible to other players. It is like spaces within a stage, where each actor is allocated a portion to occupy during certain scenes of the play. It is all scripted. Daily interactions among children in the setting typically involve the protagonists invoking and monitoring rules to manage each other's actions thereby ensuring everyone adheres to the script. Thus, in the process children develop their own 'culture' defined by Corsaro, 2005: 110) as 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers'.

### **'Concluding' remarks**

Khalid's story represents a space between spaces; a hyphen of in-betweenness which people on both sides do not understand. Thus in this productive in-betweenness Deleuze and Guattari (2004:313) states 'chaos becomes rhythm'. People not sitting on this hyphen can be oblivious to the fact that the space is occupied and the occupant draws from both sides, values, practices and even language. Coming into this space(ing), Khalid carries with him baggage from Libya; the language, the values and belief systems and perhaps nostalgia. These probably form the basis for his assumptions; that the *world* is the same and Arabic is *the* language. Unbeknown to him, his new community's expectations of him are at variance with his assumptions. Without adapting, he cannot be accepted and hence cannot fit in. He cannot go back either. Thus he is left with possibilities created by being in-between. He cannot get into, neither can

he go back to; he stays in-between. Those in his new class see him through their own lens; one with a Eurocentric shade; viewing Libyan *baggage*. Khalid cannot help, but feel misunderstood and misrepresented. This process of uprootings and regroundings beget frustration within him. Like one disarmed, defensive instincts take root and this does not help him – he is construed as aggressive. It is not in the script. With differences in script go the synchronised performance. Education institutions, as noted by Bullough (2005), prefer and support the creation of certain kinds of identities over others, they both limit and enable identity formation. Not having language as a cultural tool weakens Khalid's connection with the community he wishes to associate with. His classmates may want to involve him but the language barrier stands in the way. They do not seem to have viable alternatives to using language to connect with Khalid. Thus, the chasm between the two parties is void in the absence of a common language. The complexities of this story in part explain the inconclusivity of the state of affairs. Derrida's notion of the *hyphen* and Deleuzian *folding, unfolding and refolding* will be explored further in the ensuing plateaus.

## 9 Fragmented becoming: Gemma's narrative

The self is no match for all this

It's a dreamy, hovering, not-quite-there thing

A fabulation that enfolds the intensities it finds itself in. It fashions itself out of movements and situations that are surprising, compelled by something new, or buried in layers of habit (Kathleen Stewart, 2007:58).

To go unnoticed is by no means easy. To be a stranger, even to one's doorman or neighbours. If it so difficult to be 'like' everybody else, it is because it is an affair of becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:308).

### Introduction

This plateau focuses on Gemma, a three year old girl at Bee Primary School. Gemma is white British and has been in nursery for a month. The first aim of the plateau is to give an account of what drew me to Gemma at the beginning of this research – her enduring fascination with abiding by rules of the setting. The second aim is to explore what 'belongingness' might mean for a child whose parents are estranged. In Gemma's narrative, I explore the dynamics of identity and belonging between discourses that inhabit everyday life including those that persuade us that there is unity, coherence and fixity as well as those that trouble these very notions. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:9) describe a researcher as an 'interpretive bricoleur and maker of quilts' who 'understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting' whereby what is produced is a 'quilt like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage'. Thus, I acknowledge a reflexive criss-cross between my experiences and Emma's experiences. In this narrative I will be using 'quilting' as a metaphor. This will involve bringing together a range of theoretical and philosophical underpinnings in what Denzin and Lincoln (2003) call 'theoretical bricolage' whilst allowing a fluid movement between them in order to engage with the complex issues surrounding



'belonging'. In quilting no thread is either strong or significant on its own but what strengthens a quilt is the multiple overlapping connections and intertwining's of various threads (Crossely, 1996). This narrative will not be viewed as linear, unified and complete but rather as a patchwork quilt where various fragments are stitched together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). 'Fragmented becoming', a term coined by Prévost (2006:3), refers to the positivity of differences and the respect of children's singularity and in this plateau Gemma, is useful in exploring the relationship between belonging and Deleuzo-Guattarian (2004) conceptualisation of becoming.

### **Law-abiding citizen**

In one of my research supervision meetings I recall describing Gemma as *that kind of girl who is always particular with order in the classroom*. Here, perhaps my use of the word *that* is by no means *othering*, but rather an attempt to 'capture' or fix a salient identity. My attention was drawn to Gemma because of her enduring fascination with abiding by the rules of the setting. She would often remind other children to tidy up after every activity, or to sit nicely during carpet times and to say 'please' (which is the golden word in the setting when one wants something). Gemma would report other children who did not follow rules, for example, boys who use the girls' pink toilets. Therefore, probably Gemma's abiding by the rules might mean that she is participating in an institution and adopting or conforming to a custom or convention (Bloor, 2002 and Bourdieu, 1990). Perhaps as noted by Burman (2008:222), children 'require some awareness of the rules by which social relationships are regulated'. These rules are an attempt at ensuring orderliness in the setting whilst curtailing undesirable forms of expression or out of kilter performances.

However, Wittgenstein (2009:44) poses the following questions; 'Is there not also the case where we play, and make-up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along?' This highlights Danby and Thorpe's (2005) view that children have active agency in the construction their social worlds. In my journal I wrote;

*At snack time the nursery children sat on the carpet while the three adults, Mrs Clooney, Mr Murdoch and I, sat on chairs. Mrs Clooney and Mr Murdoch are both sitting in the front while I am at the back, behind the children. 'Who are our helpers today?' says Mrs Clooney. Most children raise their hands. 'Mrs Clooney will only pick children who are sitting nicely' says Mr Murdoch. Most children fold their legs and put a finger on their mouths. After few minutes Mrs Clooney ask Kim and Ewan to come in front and give out milk. 'Look at the pictures [each packet of milk has got a picture of the child tied with a rubber band] and give your friends milk' says Mrs Clooney. As they give out milk, Mr Murdoch reminds the children to say 'thank you' to Ewan and Kim when they receive their milk. Keane, Jack, Austin and Kyle – all boys – sat next to each other squirting milk on other children and, in the process, messing the carpet. This continues until there is commotion and shouting. 'Mr Murdoch, Keane is being nasty!', Gemma agitatedly complains to the teacher. The teacher intervenes, isolating Keane, Austin, Jack and Kyle to sit away from the rest of the children albeit in the same classroom. Later when snack time finishes, other children play outside. Mr Murdoch asks me to keep an eye on the four boys – Kyle, Jack, Keane and Austin – in the nursery class whom he say: 'I have no choice but tell them off for not being sensible'(05/03/09).*

Turning to the incident, it is 'clear' that the four boys' behaviour presents a problem to Gemma. They are being 'nasty'. Duranti (1997:80) posits that 'the relationship between words and context of their use is a much more complex and dynamic as words do not simply reflect a taken-for-granted world out there they also help constitute such a world by defining relations between speaker, hearer, referents and social activities'. We do not know why Gemma has chosen the word 'nasty' but it carries with it a sense that the boys are being vicious, mean and spiteful which is in transgression with the canonised practices, routines and habits that are enacted on a daily basis in this particular space. In the early years settings,

performance is scripted and standardised and, therefore, transgression is frowned upon (Jenks, 2003 and Foust, 2010). By ensuring children adhere to the script, perhaps, facilitates the predictability of the flow of events in the setting. By emphasising that *Mrs Clooney will only pick children who are sitting nicely*, Mr Murdoch instils self-regulation and peer-policing within the group.

Youdell (2006) reflects on how children are constituted through constellations of categorisations, in this case those who are 'sitting nicely' are 'good' and 'acceptable' while others are 'bad' and 'unacceptable'. This reinforces dualities of normality and deviance. Therefore, survival stratagems for 'belonging' include adhering to 'carpet time' etiquette. By reporting the boys' misconduct to Mrs Clooney, is Gemma positioning herself as an obedient rule-follower who has a sense of fragility? (Davies, 1989). Walkerdine (1990:77) suggests that 'girls who are nice, kind and helpful are guardians of moral order, keepers of the rules' who avoid 'being told off'. This observation resonates with the positioning Gemma takes up.

It is interesting to also note that Gemma reports the boys to Mr Murdoch and not Mrs Clooney. One would think that Mrs Clooney as both teacher and Gemma's key worker, she could have reported to her. Although it is not clear why Gemma chooses Mr Murdoch, it might be inferred that this has to do with the association of males with assertiveness. Studies about masculinity, particularly 'hegemonic masculinity' enable us to understand these dynamics in classroom life (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is defined by Connell as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (2005:77).

In my journal I noted;

*Gemma's parents are undergoing divorce. The school was made aware by Gemma's mother. Because her mum and dad were living separately Gemma's parents take turns to pick her up from school. This means she has to move back and forth between the two houses. Since mum and dad no longer live together, they are having to share her time although this is not the same as shared parenting as Gemma stays mostly with her mum. Her dad has moved from the family home. I am troubled in determining how this experience impacts on Gemma. I am troubled asking her questions. I will rely on observations to gain insights into her 'frame' of mind. Gemma most often re-presents her thoughts through drawing. Does drawing allow her the possibilities of recording and narrating the interwoven layers of her experiences both at home and in school?*

Later I wrote:

*It is choosing time; Gemma Holly and Amie-Lee are at the girls' writing area. Gemma sits on a small chair – (to me at least – in terms of proportions and perspectives it might be a big chair to her). I have seen her on this chair several times before but today there is a resonance about it; not so much that she is sitting but what she is doing while she sits on the chair. Pencil in hand and paper underneath the hand; one stroke at a time she is drawing something. A dot, a line, a curve, a scribble – things are coming into place. I am interested in what she is doing and I start a conversation (29/01/09).*



Map 12: Gemma's Drawing

Josie: Wow! That's a nice picture Gemma.

Gemma: Yep, this is mum [pointing to the right] and I am in the middle and this is dad, my dad is big.

Josie: Tell me more...

Gemma: I have long hair [she explains whilst colouring the hair brown] yesterday at home time when mum and dad came to pick me up, I was crying [pointing at the tears she had coloured in blue].

Josie: Why were you crying?

Gemma: I...I...[silence]

Josie: That's ok, what is this?

Gemma: This is mum's house and this is dad's house and my school. My school is big. This is girls writing area [dad's house is on the left and mum's house is on the right, the girls' writing area is in the middle of the picture]. (29/01/09)

## **Intimate immensity**

Whilst Malchiodi (1998); Cohen and Ronen (1999) and Hopperstad (2010) note the therapeutic benefits that come through the process of drawing, my own interrogations are less to do with making something better. Interrogating the drawing, I explore these various threads or elements even though I am not privy to Gemma's inner meaning-making processes. She positions herself in the middle, evoking feelings of in-betweenness, of standing in a threshold, inhabiting an ambiguous position where 'individuality and relationality intertwine, collide, and interact' (Wang, 2004:131). She is torn between her parents, perhaps having several unanswered questions. The gigantic size of the school in Gemma's picture signals its relative significance. As described by Gemma, the school is 'big'. For Gemma to be able to engage in drawing to represent her experiences and perceptions, perhaps the school – particularly the 'girls writing area' – is giving her some sense of security (Pahl, 1999). Therefore, place and space become important factors. The significance of space as noted by Hooks (1990:209) is in the potentiality to 'tell stories and unfold histories'. Anderson and Taylor (2007) note how certain rules, norms and codes govern what children follow in different spaces in the classroom.

Within the classroom are spaces designated for teacher initiated activities. These are subjected to constant surveillance and children's creative meaning-making processes are limited to what teachers expect and approve (Anning and Ring, 2004 and Kress, 1997). Whilst it is plausible that the teacher directs children's learning, it limits and sanitises children from real life experiences such as Gemma's. Teachers do not always monitor what children do whilst at the 'girls/boys writing' area. These are often spaces where the repressed unconscious articulates itself, where children 'create the space they live in rather than just fit in with the set rules' (Stanton, 1983:88). Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concepts of smooth and striated spaces affords us a way of thinking about space

within the setting. Striated spaces are rule-intensive and limit movement and relations between bodies (Hickey-Moody and Malin, 2007). Within these strictly bounded and confining spaces, 'belonging is regulated and becoming is made invisible' (Knowles et al, 2010) whereas in smooth spaces there is less regulation of movement between bodies. However, within these striated spaces 'bodies tend to create particular habitual relations with the spaces they encounter; creating for example a place that is 'home' (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007:11). Bachelard (1994) perceives human spaces as phenomena rather than objects, stating that they gain their identity when they become intermingled with human consciousness. He focuses on how people relate to spaces in buildings and why in certain spaces and postures such as standing on top of the tower makes people feel powerful. Bachelard (1994) also considers space 'intimate' and in terms of the dialectics of inside and outside: 'outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a boarder-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides...intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being' (1994:217-218). The blurring of the boundary between 'inside and outside' is illuminated perhaps by the domestication of nursery classroom spaces with some of the 'imagery and trappings' of household artefacts (Haynes, 2005). Perhaps for Gemma it opens a space where she grapples with raw issues of her life which are normally *sanitised* within the Early Years Foundation Stage. These are often spaces of transition, tension and emplacement (Tamboukou, 2004) where individuals struggle against what is perceived as normalisation which consequently create possibilities of inhabiting in a liminal or in-between space – another dimension of belonging. Caught between two contrasting settings, Gemma finds herself occasionally lodged in what Bhabha (1994) call 'third space' not quite coming to a closure.

### **Precarious Belonging**

Children, like Gemma, bring to school experiential knowledge constructed from their everyday bruises and recoveries, tears and laughter, frustrations and breakthroughs. How this knowledge is represented within the early years setting might raise some challenges where children come from diverse backgrounds. Gemma's parents are estranged pending divorce. For a child her age, one can only surmise what might be going through her mind and the extent to which this impacts on her experience in school both individually and collectively as part of a group. She might well have believed that marriage and the unity of family was infallible. So if the family is no longer a stable entity what are the consequences? Is anything constant anymore? Or, is she like a ball, where she is thrown back and forth between mum and dad, where each of them want a piece of her? Does this objectify Gemma? Is she like a shared possession whose owners will not let go of their prized possession? Is she learning that certain things, including her family, are not so sturdy...? Her story opens a space within which, as a researcher and narrator, I find my own voice, to articulate my childhood memories of experiences of loss when my mother passed away. These are moments when my own subjectivity folds in Gemma's (St Pierre, 1997). Zembylas and Ferreira (2009:9) following Butler, draw our attention to how relationality forces us to appreciate how far our ties with others constitute who we are and that 'recognition to our own vulnerability to loss may indeed open up the potential for recognition of all humanity as vulnerable'. Butler (2004a) further notes the significance of inter-subjectivity in human relations;

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence (p27).

My own memories of interdependence are invoked. At the age of five, I remember, I considered a family a fortified unit and marriage unbreakable. This all changed when I lost my mother. Before her death, I somehow



naively assumed we would all stay together eternally and where nothing would threaten our close-knit family. Before she died I had never fully comprehended what it meant to die or to lose a loved one to death. I sincerely hoped for the return of my mother one day. But she was no longer there – forever. Day one, day two and soon it was a year and mother never showed up again...My subjectivity, folded in Gemma's, evokes images of a *pentimento* where 'something painted out of a picture (an image the painter 'repented' or denied) now becomes re-visible creating something new' whereby 'what is new is what has been obscured by a previous image' (Denzin, 2001:29) affording me a way of 'seeing and seeing again'. As I listened to Gemma and studied her drawing, I wondered what was going through her mind. Of course, both parents are still alive and accessible, but does she understand why they no longer live together? Or is she hoping that one day dad will come back? In the following paragraphs, I attempt to unravel this mystery and explore how Gemma's domestic situation may be impacting on her school experience.

Acknowledging the convolution of mainstream discourses of the experience of divorce, Fiske (2010:25) makes the following observation: '[Children] believe that their world is safe and decent. When that world is disrupted by parental divorce, children rebuild their general view of the world as benevolent...the potential damage caused by betrayal, exploitation and hostility certainly makes [them] sensitive to signs of negative behaviour by others...' Although, at this stage, it might be too early to generalise the notion of betrayal and hostility to Gemma's circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that her acquired sense of family and connectedness has been destabilised. Gemma notes '*this is mum [pointing to the right] and I am in the middle and this is dad, my dad is big*'. Gemma's 'being in the middle' could be understood as being in the middle of trying to comprehend who she is now as she has begun living mostly with mum. Her tears might be part of this and of being in the middle or in-between where she is muddling her way into some sort of understanding about the *who* about her. She is no longer Gemma who

lives in a house with mum and a 'big' dad who probably provided a sense of security within the family. Thus, out of the shadows of dad, mum's role and stature grow in significance. This 'being in the middle' implies a state of being in-between locations (*mum's house* and *dad's house*) and events. Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) point us to the emancipatory benefits of being in-between whereby Gemma's situation might open up multiple perspectives for her. Her movement between two houses might enable her to think in terms of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' which allows her to think all possibilities. Perhaps, we could look at being in the 'middle' or 'in-between' in everyday use as a space that separates, bridges or connects two points. It is an intermediary space, juxtaposition, a dialectic interaction between different points in time and space. This could be explained by how Gemma, like everyone else, is constantly in-between, going through transitions as she interacts with others and objects in her daily comings and goings in different settings (Luz, 2003).

Deleuze's (1995) concept of subjectivation, individuation or becoming-other as a process of folding and unfolding of various experiences into ourselves offers ways of understanding Gemma's subjective experience. This process of folding might relate to Gemma's interactions with others, objects, rules and events in different spaces in the setting which shapes her experiences in particular spaces differently. Malins (2007:157-158) observes that 'the relationship between bodies and spaces is that of folding. The world around us folds into our bodies; shaping not only our movements, postures, emotions and subjectivity, but also the very matter which composes us. We are folded by...our relationships with others, and our interaction with the spaces around us. At the same time, bodies continually fold out into the world: shaping – and transforming – the spaces and places around them'. Explaining the process of folding and unfolding, Gale (2007: 475) following Deleuze notes;

I share a memory of my mother with her mixing bowl, her sleeves rolled up and her arms bare, gradually adding flour, butter, water and other ingredients in a growing and sweet smelling cake mixture; I remember that she used to talk about 'folding in the butter' and it is this image of folding in that begins to allow the idea of the fold to

unfold for me. As the butter is folded in, from the outside so to speak, some richness, some new quality begins to emerge in the mix, something is unfolding...the fold relates to processes of individuation, of literal becoming; the endogamous 'folding in' adds richness, multiple layers and intensification, the exogamous unfolding opens out, reveals and makes the familiar strange. In this respect the unfolding can be seen not only as an emergence but also as a synthesis or a synthetical moment, part of a process, where, as new elements are added or folded in new relationships and connections are made or folded out.

Gemma might be experiencing belongingness as neither here nor there but constantly in a state of becoming. A line of becoming is described by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:323) as 'not defined by points it connects, or by points that compose it, on the contrary it passes between points...has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination'. Deleuze (2002:94) further explains that we are made up of lines *segmented* (rigidly organised, binary segments that define and confine people such as child/adult, teacher/pupil whilst creating a sense of identity as stable), the rhizomatic line of *molecularity* opens a range of possibilities and *line of flight*. The line of flight or becoming is that which carries us away, 'across our segments, but also across our thresholds, towards a destination which is unknown not foreseeable, not pre-existent'. It is 'the transversal communications between different lines' (Deleuze, 1987:10-11; Semetsky, 2009) or between discourses that inhabit everyday life including those that persuade us that there is unity, coherence and fixity as well as those that trouble these very notions. A line of flight is about experimentation, difference-in-itself and creativity.

To understand this 'intra-activity' (Barad, 2003), the concept of *machinic assemblage*, which is the intermingling or interconnection of bodies, and 'assemblage of enunciation', that is, the metamorphosis or transformation of bodies, enable us to understand process of becoming. Elaborating on the notion of becoming, Grosz (2004:4) cited in Cohen and Kratz (2009) points out that 'we need to understand the body's open-ended connections with space and time, its place in dynamic natural and cultural systems and its mutating, self-changing relations with natural and social

networks'. Thus, belonging and identity are situated within the existent connections and transactions between the individual and their ecology primarily made up of human beings and non-human occupying spaces between which the individual transposes. Colebrook (2002:56) provides an analogy of the connections and the relationships which are possible in classroom;

A machine is nothing more than its connections; it is not made by anything, is not for anything and has no closed identity. Think of a bicycle, which obviously has no end or intention. It only works when it is connected with another machine such as the human body; and the production of these two machines can only be achieved through connection. The human body becomes a cyclist in connection with the machine; the cycle becomes a vehicle. But we could imagine different connections producing different machines. The cycle becomes an art object when placed in a gallery; the human body becomes an artist when connected with a paintbrush. There is no aspect of life that is not machinic; all life only works and is insofar as it connects with some other machine.

Gemma's experiences of 'belonging', might be dependent on the intensity of her interaction with others and objects in the setting which will enable her to 'perceive, move, think and feel in new ways' (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007:6). Illuminating this is Gatens' (1996:169) assertion that 'bodies of all sorts are in constant relation with other bodies; some of these relations are compatible and give rise to joyful affects which may, in turn, increase the intensive capacity of a body; others are incompatible relations and which give rise to sad or debilitating affects which, at their worst, may entirely create a body's integrity'. In keeping with the analogy, we begin to see the complex nature of belonging and the unpredictability of certain assemblages Gemma interacts with. Gemma might be intermittently moving in the threshold between past and present experiences, old and new routines.

To shed light on what Gemma might be experiencing in this major transition (divorce), Derrida describes this dynamic state of in-betweeness using terms such as indeterminacy, undecidability and ambiguity, as a position that opens up new possibilities of becoming. Thus, identity can be viewed as a 'site of difference – an ontology of becoming' (Linstead and

Pullen, 2006:1295), a multiplicity of fragments made from a plurality of experiences; disintegrating and reintegrating; collapsing and relapsing taking up different forms and shapes in the process. This being in-between, transitional or becoming resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of rhizome which comprises connections between fragments as a depiction which attempts to represent the ever-changing nature of identity and belonging: 'a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on a new lines' (p9). Thus identity and belonging are concerned with transitions as much as it is concerned with connections. In other words, belonging does not end at the point of connection, but rather continues through post-connection.

### **I...I... [silence]**

The limits of a language to express loss becomes visible when I ask Gemma to explain why she has been crying and she says I...I... followed by silence. Deleuze (1997:109) notes that language reaches a point where it approaches its own outside and it creates silence: 'when a language is so strained that it starts to stutter, or it murmur or stammer...then language in its entirety reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence'. This stuttering could be an expression of in-betweenness as 'something letting language slip through and making itself heard' (Deleuze, 1995:41). Drawing on Deleuze's concept of 'image' and the speech act in cinema, Mazzei (2010:511) urges us to consider 'silent films' as a way of viewing voice in research and how such viewing might make it possible to read the 'image' of voice from a multidimensional perspective. Given this, is it possible to understand Gemma's tears as compensation for and/or a substitution for the lack that always lies within language? Mazzei (2010:521) notes that as researchers 'we expect conversations to fill all the gaps'. Can we see Gemma's stuttering of *I...I... [silence]* as an inability to fill the gap or maybe even an attempt at an obligation to fill the gap but where words currently fail to capture or to be useful in terms of trying to explain her

tears? Butler (2006) affords us a further way of understanding Gemma's tears and her stutter of *I...I... [silence]*;

What grief displays, in contrast, is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very 'I' who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling; the very 'I' is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechless, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing (Butler, 2006: 23).

Loss and the departure of her dad from the family home, exposes Gemma to what Butler (2006) refers to as the 'precariousness of life', She continues;

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes who 'I' am. If I lose you under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who 'am' I without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well. On another level, perhaps what I have lost 'in' you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is relationality... (Butler, 2006:22).

As I decipher my conversation with Gemma, I begin to understand the burden of issues which Gemma might be processing and trying to make sense of. Gemma uses drawing and speech to re-present her struggles and quandary. Her claim that, *My school is big* reminds us of her positioning at 'school' where she is Gemma, 'the pupil' yet she is pondering on other points (dad's house, and mum's house) in time which move with, in and around her and nag her. She is moving in and between worlds simultaneously, school, dad's house, mum's house and a metamorphous of 'family'. School, thoughts and emotions are untidy and

tenuous threads within the quilt(ing). This evokes in me words of an anonymous African poet, 'no one can hide from their feelings because they are a part of them'. By not shielding Gemma from the shenanigans of the adult world, the conflict, the estrangement, is Gemma not being robbed of her innocence? I shudder. But in part my shudders remind me that it is me as the researcher who wants to position her as 'innocent', who wants to align her loss with my own loss of mother where - in my terms - something stable and sacred has gone. So whilst I perceive Gemma as being tossed like a ball between the two adults I also have to recognise that this 'tossing' is also a declaration of them needing, wanting and claiming Gemma. Neither wants to give up on the game. However it does appear that establishing the ground rules of the game is flummoxing particularly from Gemma's perspective. Lewis and Sammons (1999) discuss the emotionally unsettling and gruesome experiences children go through during the transition such as the inability to adapt which creates 'anxiety that no parental reassurance will assuage' which often results in outbursts of tears. Her identification with familial position takes on different meanings in the face of estrangement and a displacement of security exposing her to 'a crisis of not knowing who one is' (Helm, 2010:43) consequently her sense of 'belongingness' is jeopardised. Caught in a struggle between continuity and fragmentation it would seem that her tears point to 'the disorientation of grief' (Butler, 2006:30) where questions including perhaps 'who have I become?' or, indeed, 'what is left of me?' 'What is it in the Other that I have lost?' (Butler, 2006) become further threads in the quilt. This 'I' as used by Butler comes to being through encounters with others for there is nothing such as 'the individuality of the individual' (Thiem, 2008:34). Parents, home, school, the girls' writing area are therefore all threads that pull, tremble, tug, jerk, at Gemma's sense of belonging. One notion of the 'family' is disintegrating and Gemma waits whilst another morphs into being.

## **Home away from home**

Brown and England (2004:72) following Lacan, state that 'the human subject is caught in a never-ending attempt to capture an understanding of him/herself in relation to the world in which he/she lives'. Gemma's own relation with her 'home' and her familiarity with it as a space and place is now curious, ambivalent and uncertain. So what? The poet Michael Rosen (1992) captures why homes are of comfort or 'homely'. He writes;

Home is like what you take away each time you leave the house.  
Like a wristwatch, it ticks besides the ticking that is your heart.  
Whether or not you hear it, look at its face, or feel its hold. We're with  
you is what the minute, hour, and second hands of home have to tell.  
Home is the place that goes where you go, yet it welcomes you upon  
your return.

He also notes, 'Home is all the things you know by name: a family of dishes, books, and clothes that waits for you to choose among them every day. We're ready for you is what the chorus in your house sings. Your fingerprints are grinning on their faces' (1992:3) And whilst we might argue that Rosen's view is both romantic and sentimental he does nevertheless mark out why 'home' goes beyond the conventional marked geographical space. Home is personal space. Have the arrangements between the two homes (mum and dad's) fractured the homeliness of home? Can, and importantly, will Gemma learn a sense of 'self-satisfaction' in these arrangements? Will she learn to be 'at home' with them?

## **Becoming-imperceptible**

Colebrook (2006:100) notes that when 'life is no longer folded around a specific point of view' the need for transformations of the self arises. In light of this, an individual's identity is constantly consumed by circumstances, enveloped even, such that what is perceived are the circumstances – the envelope – not the identity. Thus the circumstances become the perceptible identity while the 'actual' identity is hidden. Individuals then begin to be identified for what they are experiencing



rather than 'who' they are. The self becomes imperceptible as becoming is about becoming-imperceptible whereby 'one has to lose his [or her] identity...one has to disappear, to become unknown' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007:45). The question then is, are we able to 'see' Gemma or do we simply see her circumstances? The quagmire that is of her parents' making? Braidotti (2006: 154-155) describes becoming-imperceptible as the 'the point of fusion between the self and his or her habitat, the cosmos as a whole... It is like a floodgate of creative forces that make it possible to be actually fully inserted into the *hic et nunc* defined as the present unfolding of potentials, but also the enfolding of qualitative shifts within the subject' Thus, belonging and identity can be viewed as constantly a process; an eternal work-in-progress simultaneously influenced by the setting and influencing the setting. By the same token, home resides and is resided in and around the habitat. And what of school? What might it signify that within Gemma's terms *My school is big*? Is it a source of respite from the tangled threads of home life? Is it a home away from home?

### **'Conclusion'**

The sensitivity and interdependence of belonging with other dynamics central to human interconnectedness continues to underline the elusiveness of the belonging construct. Gemma's narrative has added another dimension to an already complex subject. What this continues to illustrate is the transmutational nature of what it means to 'belong'. Pre-parental separation, Gemma's notion of what it meant to belong would expectedly be at variance with her perception now. When an institution she thought was stable destabilised, her established sense of connectedness was almost definitely upended. It is reasonable to assume that the picture she drew on the day I observed her would have been different if I had observed her prior to the turbulence of her parent's marriage. It would probably have been a picture of a happy family with her smiling in between mum and dad. Thus, evocative of Butler's (2006) observation, who Gemma is whilst living in the company of both mum and

dad is different to who Gemma is during the estrangement of this significant others. Probably she is asking mum and dad the same question posed by Butler (2006:22): who am I without you?

## 10 Connecting the Dots: The Pursuit of Belongingness

What are the terms for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds, who have applied to occupy the same social space...to live with one another without either one group having to become the imitative version of the dominant one i.e. an assimilationism...In other words, how can people live together in difference? (Hall cited in Yural-Davis, 2006)

### Introduction

This plateau focuses on Aisha a three year old girl at Willowbrook Primary School. Aisha is of Somali heritage, a bilingual fluent in both Somali and English. Whilst I focus on Aisha, other children she interacts with are also incorporated in the discussion and how through interaction, children 'create and recreate' (Ahn, 2011:295) the world around them which enhances our understanding of what 'belongingness' might mean to them. The decision of what should and should not be recorded during my time in this setting is based on those moments-in-time or events that trouble the assumptions of what it mean to belong for children in the early years setting. As argued by Hall in the above quotation, children's development of sense of membership is a complex, multi-faceted process, state of being and becoming. Various interrelated dots are connected, woven even, in trying to understand what it means to 'belong'. That it is characterised by an enduring fluidity does not make this inherently elusive concept any easier to fathom. In my research diary I note:

*Twenty-eight children are sitting on the carpet. I also sit on the carpet next to Khamis. Aisha is the only child sitting on a chair she is 'star of the day'. Miss Walsh (the teacher) is sitting on a chair while Amina (the teaching assistant) is sitting on a stool next to a relatively small white board. The white board is divided into two sections, sad and happy, this is where the teaching assistant writes the names of children who either have made the teacher happy by behaving appropriately or sad by misbehaving.*

*Misbehaving includes not sitting nicely, mouth shut, and listening to what the teacher is saying basically having 'good listening ears'. Amina reminds children that she will be keeping an eye on them and children whose names appear on the sad side will miss break time, 'if you see your name on this side [pointing at the sad side] think carefully what you are doing otherwise you will miss break time and you are not going to like it'. There are packets of milk and some pears beside the teacher's chair. After some housekeeping announcements Miss Walsh says, 'put your hand up if you like milk and another hand on your head if you like fruit'. Aisha who is sitting next to Nadia stood up and tells Miss Walsh that she also wants milk. The teacher says, 'I told you to raise your hand if you like milk and have not done so, now sit down on your bottoms'. She hesitantly sits down and whilst looking at the teacher with an unhappy expression. Amina writes her name on the sad side. Khamis (speaks very little English) whispers to Aisha in Somali and she responds in Somali. Few minutes later Aisha shouts 'Miss Walsh we do not want milk thrown to us...' Khamis interjects 'I want milk in my hands (demonstrating). 'My mother always tells us that food and drink should not be thrown' says Aisha. Amina adds Khamis's name to the sad side. Meanwhile, Miss Walsh responds, 'Look Aisha, there are many children here, how long is it going to take to give all you milk in your hands?', throwing the milk packets she says 'Nadia catch the milk and give it to Khamis and Aisha'. Nadia manages to catch one packet of milk and misses two, some of the children giggle. Miss Walsh tells children that, 'make sure you don't squeeze your milk, if you spill the milk next time you'll not have one. We do not want children who waste'. [Observation recorded 06/05/09]*

The sitting arrangements during snack time whereby children sit on the floor and adults sit on chairs seem to be a reaffirmation of classroom tradition at early years. This could be understood to mirror societal structure, suggestive of power relations between children and adults (Devine, 2002 and Foucault, 1979). The emphasis on children to 'sit nicely', 'mouth shut' and have 'good listening ears' seem to position Miss

Walsh, at the centre of attention. She is the source of guidance and therefore needs to be easily visible and prominent in the classroom. This, however, challenges the child-centred assumption that children are always at the centre (Lee and Recchia, 2008).

Miss Walsh's sitting position also makes it easy for her to monitor children as a custodian of their welfare. Three adults are presently in the setting all with distinct roles; teacher, assistant teacher and researcher and their roles affect how these adults relate to and interact with children (Robinson and Díaz, 2006). My choice of sitting on the carpet with children and mimicking their posture is not a conscious decision. But, on reflection, it seems to be a way of affiliating with these children, a silent dialogue of saying 'I am one of you'. As noted by Chartrand and Bargh (1999) nonconscious mimicry evokes feelings of togetherness. This also affords me an opportunity to experience the intensity of the dynamics during snack time.

The assumption that the teacher's sitting position is to make observation of children easy also comes with its challenges insofar as the characterisation of children is concerned as it creates a distinct boundary between children and adults. The need, and requirement, for the teacher to be positioned in such a way as to make observation of children easy has two contrasting connotations. First, it denotes observation for the purpose of enhancing child welfare during children's stay in the school. On the other hand, it evokes feelings of surveillance whereby children are constantly aware they are being watched and need to be vigilant. A sense of being watched suggests the adult in the setting overtly promote performance at the expense of independence, thought and action. If one is constantly 'watched' to see if they are obeying/disobeying 'rules', do they obey rules because they want to or because they are being watched? Butler's (1991) notion of identity as an effect of performance and performativity is important here in terms of understanding how 'belongingness' is being played out. Perhaps by 'sitting nicely' with 'mouth

shut' children might be putting on a performance which might potentially earn them an identity as the 'good' and well-behaved children. This is not to overlook MacLure's (2003:158) observation's that not all identity is 'fake and pretence, or that there is no reality'. The 'ritualistic repetition' (Bell, 1999:3) of normalised ways of behaving during, for example, snack time, seem to be an attempt to instil a sense of belongingness in children or is it a performance of unity? The word repetition in its general usage denotes the act of repeating the same thing over and over again. However, following a Deleuzian (2004) perspective, repetition is not the repetition of the same. In other words, Deleuzian repetition as explained by Caputo (1978:301) is the 'not the recurrence of the same but the occurrence of the new, always repeating with a difference'. Thus, 'repetition' should not necessarily be viewed as resemblance. Perhaps what we see here in repetition is the production of difference, multiplicity and the unpredictability of how children in the setting express themselves (following a line of flight/becoming) even after going through the rituals and routines of snack/circle times. These snack time rituals are to ensure that there is 'order, continuity, and predictability' whereby 'new events are connected to preceding ones, incorporated into a stream of precedents so that they are recognized as growing out of tradition and experience' (Myerhoff, 1984:306).

### **Sub-community**

Most children in this class are from non-English speaking background predominately of Somali extraction. Aisha is one of a handful of fluent English-speaking children. Language then becomes a signifier of difference (Scourfield; Dicks; Drakeford and Davies, 2006) between Aisha and other children in the setting who are still learning to speak English. From the observation, we see Aisha conversing in Somali with Khamis who is still learning to speak English. She obviously stands at an advantageous position over other children who might be willing to express their opinions but language fails them. An observation by Ignatieff

(1984:142), sheds some light on the significance of language in that 'our needs are made of words; they come to us in speech and can die for lack of expression'.

From the excerpt it also emerges as noted, Aisha and Khamis converse with each other in Somali which gives a hint on the existence of a sub-community or sub-communities within this class. A child's membership of (or even exclusion from) any particular or across sub-communities can be determined in many ways by different characteristics which might include, for example, language, gender or interests. If individual children can identify with particular sub-communities, it may enhance his/her integration into the setting. For example, for children from backgrounds where English is a second language, for instance Somali background, it would be helpful to their sense of membership if they found someone with a similar background to theirs in the school. It is likely to give them an idea that school is an extension of home. However, membership within these sub-communities is not fixed; it is rather fluid and children negotiate and renegotiate their entries and exits of the sub-groups. The fluidity is affected by characteristics such as language, gender and interests.

With a focus on the role of the teaching assistant in this classroom, it seems more by design than by chance that Amina is also Somali – a bilingual speaker of English and Somali assisting a monolingual teacher. Thus, Amina relates both to the teacher and the children – perhaps mediating between the teacher's English background and the children's Somali backgrounds. In this respect, she provides the link connecting members from very different origins and traditions. In spite of the plethora of opportunities offered by her unique medial position the teaching assistant's emphasis, however, seems to be providing the language link more than anything else. She therefore has the in-between experience. Whether or not members of this miniature community fully appreciate Amina's role is difficult to fathom. The children seem to view her as an extension of the teacher – one and the same as the teacher. Most of the

time she is executing the teacher's plans in a singular-directional way. This is also highlighted by Donnelly (2009:14) who observes that 'Bilingual staff who share children's languages are using children's abilities in their home language to help them transfer skills and knowledge from their first language to English. Some feel that their language and culture are not sufficiently recognised and that the curriculum does not take enough account of their cultural background'. Perhaps this has to do with power relations between the teaching assistant and the teacher. The teaching assistant is in a less powerful position to influence the teacher's transactions with the children.

From the sitting arrangement to the utilisation of the teaching assistant, the classroom dynamics appear to be modelled to give the teacher the upper hand of the power equation. Miss Walsh is the instructor. Perhaps if Amina would provide more than just the language bridge, her roles would assist in narrowing the divide between the teacher and the children. As it stands, she is there to translate to children how and why it is important to make Miss Walsh happy. This implies that those children who make Miss Walsh happy are good members while those who do not are bad citizens of this community. This approach is likely to create a vacuum of understanding among children, it fails to explain to children why pleasing Miss Walsh is good for them as individuals and, perhaps more importantly, as a community of learners. It is not obvious to the children whether this arrangement benefits them also, neither is it apparent that Miss Walsh is not the only important member of the group. Only her emotions are portrayed by the happy/sad faces drawn on the white board. It would appear that there are only expectations of children and none of the teacher or other adults in the setting. When I see the teacher throw milk and fruit at the children, I am curious as to how the teacher would respond to objects thrown at her. This practice not only raises health and safety concerns within the classroom but also the decorum with which adults, and indeed children, are expected to conduct themselves. It is not clear whether this reaffirms the notion that adults, particularly Miss Walsh,



are more important in this setting than the children. Or is it that the distinction between being responsible for and in charge of a group of children and being accountable for one's actions is blurred? It would be expected that the authority of the teacher within the classroom functions better with accountability and exemplary behaviour – doing something the teacher would be happy to see children emulate and imitate. It is obvious Miss Walsh would not be happy to see children throw milk to other children, let alone at her. This demonstrates the tension, and indeed the conflict between expectations and actions. It also provides hints as to the contrasting position of children to that of the teacher albeit occupying the same space.

Still on milk-throwing – at the behest of Amina the teaching assistant, there emerge two distinct views on the subject. On the one hand, there are children who do not mind milk thrown at them because they consider it *fun*. '*It's a game*', they explain, '*and we enjoy it*'. This viewpoint seems to be positioning Miss Walsh as an engaged adult who does not fixedly hang on to the ascribed teacher role; one who is willing to sometimes blur the hierarchical boundary or to narrow the supposed gap between the teacher role and child role. In this respect, the teacher comes out as one with the children and these children's mutual, or spontaneous, response is positive. To these children, milk-throwing by their teacher is not alienating. Instead, it makes the teacher relationally accessible – an adult whom they can relate to. Miss Walsh, at least in this instance, shares the same 'passion' for playfulness as they do which seems to be bridging the teacher-pupil inter-role connection. Research (e.g. Pianta; Steinberg and Rollins, 2009) has established that the teacher's relationship with children is important because of the multiple roles she plays such as 'a potential attachment figure, as a pedagogue, as a disciplinarian, and as the final arbiter of a student's level of performance' (Furrer and Skinner, 2003:150). This privileged position the teacher occupies makes the teacher's role significant in pupils' positive experience of the setting.

However, as far as milk-throwing is concerned, the 'fun' allegory is not shared by all pupils. There is a group of children but especially Aisha, who appear to hold the view that milk-throwing is disrespectful and that they would rather have milk and fruit 'respectfully' handed to them than thrown at them. To back their argument, they assert that even at home, food and drink is not thrown at them by their parents. On account of this, it can be inferred that the complementarity of home and school and teacher and parent is important for children's integration within a school. Thus, instead of school being distinct from home and the teacher role being distinct from the parent role, these entities should – as far as possible be extensions of each other. This, however, presents its own problems for the school and the family. The relationship between home and school is a complex one. Yes, it would be ideal if the child would not need to drastically adjust to school atmosphere to fit in. However, it needs to be borne in mind that the school exists for a specific set of goals – presumably shared by the families as well – whose accomplishment depends on maintaining a certain level of distinctness. Timetables, desks and chairs, assemblies and addressing adults by their honorific titles – among other things – are traditions confined to the school. What this incident seem to be also highlighting is one of those 'abject' classroom moments, where the established adult/child power dynamics, as well as perhaps dominant cultural and religious silos are momentarily punctured. Of course milk-throwing, notwithstanding its unsafe nature, is to me – unique to this class.

In my journal I noted:

*Miss Walsh is attending a training session with an early years strategist from the Local Authority. This leaves Amina with the class responsibility of twenty-six children who are present today. She tells me how Miss Walsh*

*has planned the day's activities for her and explains how she intends to manage snack time; 'You know when it's snack time, Miss Walsh has her own way of giving children milk and fruits. She throws milk and fruit to children', 'I know, may be some of the children enjoy the fun of it' I remark. Amina sighs and responds 'But I wouldn't do that if it was me. Neither do I throw food to my children at home. It just doesn't look right. I definitely want to know what all the children think and I'll ask them now before giving them their milk. I'm sure they will be able to talk. With children like Aisha and Nadia you know they always tell you what they think. Of course I know it's because they have an advantage over others because they speak very good English'*

*It is snack time, children are sitting on the carpet and Al-abgari is sitting on a chair at the back he is the 'star of the day'. I pull a chair and sit at the back near Al-abgari. Amina is sitting on a chair in front of the children who sit eagerly waiting for milk and fruit. 'Right children listen carefully' says Amina, 'when we have our milk and fruit, sometimes the star person will give out the milk and when it's Miss Walsh she throws milk and fruit to you. I want you to tell me what you prefer' There is silence and Amina asks the children again 'put your hand up if you prefer milk to be handed to you like this' [demonstrating]. Fifteen children raise their hands including Aisha and Khamis. 'Put your hand up if you like milk and fruit to be thrown to you'. Amina asks. Seven children raise their hands 'Why do you like milk and fruit thrown to you?' says Amina eagerly awaiting for a response. Saif responds 'Because I like it so much, it's fun'. 'I will see if I can catch it' Ridwan adds. Khamis echoes his views in Somali and Amina interprets 'My mum gives me food in my hands. I like it in my own hands' [demonstrating by pointing at the palm of his right hand] [Observation recorded 13/05/09]*

Another important point from the milk-throwing proclivity is that we learn that children have different opinions on this. This shows how complex and varied children's integration needs are sometimes. It significantly demonstrates complexities of belonging and identity. According to

Deleuze (1994:51), 'There is a crucial experience of difference...every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences'. Nutbrown and Clough (2010:192) submit that these differences in opinion expand, if they are appreciated then 'everyone feels included and understood, whatever their personality, abilities, ethnic background or culture'.

The children's engagement in the discussion solicited by the teaching assistant also provides clues about how they feel about their membership. It also tells us something about the extent to which adults invite children to express their views. To this end, Nutbrown and Clough (2010) highlight the significant value of inviting children to express their views on issues that are important to them as a way of promoting a sense of belonging in them. As alluded to earlier, very little can be made of the fact that the children's discussion with the teaching assistant occurs in the absence of Miss Walsh. Whether this is a chance occurrence or a tactical decision by the teaching assistant is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps it opens up another conversation about her role and sense of belonging. She is perhaps (re)negotiating her role in the classroom finding her voice, which seem to show the resurgence of voice in expressing and exhibiting membership.

Nevertheless, the children seem happy to participate in the conversation. Regardless of their positions on this matter, both factions are enthusiastic in the conversation. As part of the community, both sides show that they need to be heard and the fact that they do participate is an indicator that they have some confidence their views will be considered. In general, it is suggested that having one's views invited and valued enhances self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy and enhances a sense of membership; connectedness (Flook, Repetti, and Ullman, 2005; Goodenow, 1993; Leary, Cottrell, Phillips, 2001; Stipek, 2002 and

Osterman, 2000) and belonging (Nutbrown and Clough, 2010). As such, we might assume that, having the confidence to participate is both an indicator and enabler of membership.

During lesson time, for example, the gap between the adults and the children seems considerably bigger. This is consistent with Davies's (1989:90) observation that 'teachers at preschool have some forms of power which generally remain unchallenged. Part of these powers is the power to dictate when certain episodes or activities have come to an end and others are to begin'. This adult-child gap is a product of necessity within the discursive practices of schooling. The teacher is the primary source of information and guidance when lessons are in progress and children are the intended recipients. Although some two-way interactions are observable during lessons, information flow is principally one-way. Thus, in this instance, the teacher seems to be informationally more active. This appears to be contractual gap – *the teacher being the teacher and the children being the children*. This appears to be at variance with the previous suggestions of belonging as underpinned by participation, although it can be argued that even though the teacher directs and guides learning during lessons, the children are still participating. What this data gestures towards is perhaps a broadening of our understanding of what it means to participate in a classroom setting. Whereas traditionally classroom participation has hitherto been viewed as verbal and active, in this instance we see another kind of taking part – listening and internalising learnt information. This challenge previously held parochial epistemes of classroom participation. The data seems to connote at least, another kind of participation – 'passive' participation – not obviously discernible. In this respect, we might say that auditory learning is legitimate participation. That children are able to accurately answer questions on aspects of their lesson they grasped through listening is evidence that they have taken part in the lesson or lessons. Thus, to this end, the gap between the children and the adults could be understood as sometimes necessary to meet aspects of the objects of the early years

community. This gap is further seen through the difference in, for example, personality, participation and engagement between members in this community. In this regard, Frisby (2002:187) argues that differentiation and individuation can be viewed in positive light in that 'differentiation and individuation loosen the tie with the next person in order to weave a new – real deal – tie with those more distant'. Further to enhancing the meeting of some objectives, the fluid gap which sometimes appears between the adults and children is important in socialising children into understanding of separation of roles in their community. It reinforces distinct identities – student, teacher, teaching assistant or head teacher that is an awareness of oneself as a unique entity, might seem to put an individual's sense of membership in perspective (Edminston, 2008). Perhaps, it is reasonable to infer that separation of roles 'harmonises' the functioning of a community whereby individual members know who and what they are and what they can and cannot do. Although it is unlikely that the teaching assistant could have asked the children about milk throwing had the teacher been present. This reinforcement of identities, and hence roles is helpful in the development of a sense of self in a community context.

Within the setting, children and adults can be said to be constantly moving in and out of different spaces and their identities change depending on their relationship and how they interact with each other within these spaces. These spaces and the identities individuals take up in particular spaces, are likened to a game of Chess and Go (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). The Chess game is coded or *striated*, this might be where children are expected to behave in a certain way within a particular space, for example, circle time/snack time where they sit whilst maintaining an upright posture with legs crossed, mouth shut, and somehow demonstrate they have 'good listening ears' – and, within the *smooth* game of Go is an acknowledgement that identity is continuously 'becoming' dependant on the transactions with others and objects within a given space and time. For example, Aisha's identity changes when she fearlessly tells Miss

Walsh her preferences in terms of how milk and fruit should be served. It is clear by voicing her concerns she stands out from the rest of the children. The process of 'becoming' is about following a line flight and 'negotiating the discursive constitution of bodily limitations seen in the stratified signified body; the values attached to these significations and the sources of the constituting discourses' (MacCormack, 2004:Online). The quandary embroiling migrant children like Aisha who are living in-between languages and cultures is explained by Fernandez (2009:36) who notes that 'we remain open and fluid like a river that retains its essence even as it changes: flowing, connecting and refreshing'.

This is not to say the gap between adults and children does not exist. However, the gaps – if they persist – may end up reversing the gains they create. Enduring gaps between adults and children in early years can alienate members (Birch and Ladd, 1997). For example, some children will prefer mutual rather than one-way respect between them and the teacher – Aisha comes to mind. Aisha is uncomfortable with Miss Walsh exerting excessive power on her. She prefers gentler treatment, mutual respect similar to that extended to her by her mother at home – again, this is a function of individual appraisal of the situation. Bearing in mind the fluidity of adult-child gap, the existence or emergence, of this gap has fluctuating influence on membership and connectedness within the community dynamics depending on circumstance and individuals, it has both positive and negative ramifications when Miss Walsh quips 'back to these horrible children' as she enters into the classroom after her lunch break. It seems to illustrate how the gap can be discomforting. It is worth noting that during my ethnographic stay in this setting, this is the only time I hear the teacher describe these children in such unflattering terms. Notwithstanding its inappropriateness for both setting and young age of members, this remark demonstrates the significance of mood in dynamics of the early years community which impacts on belongingness. Incidentally, the happy-sad faces on the whiteboard are permanent fixtures of this classroom and that these faces represent the teacher's

emotions is ironic considering the 'horrible children' utterance. It is obvious that the children are displeased with the remark.

### **Conversation as a tool for belonging**

Aisha seems to stand out in the way she puts her arguments and views across. She is also assertive in her questioning of the teacher's throwing of milk and fruit to her and other children in her class. She seems to have a notion of engagement by consent whereby members of the community are expected, at least in Aisha's eyes, to treat others the way they want to be treated, for example, because Aisha does not expect herself to have milk thrown to her, the teacher should not do it. Miss Walsh should comply with children's expectations of food and drink distribution. This opens up a new prism with which to view the concept of belonging. It is reasonable to infer that Aisha's confidence to express herself emanates from her awareness of her right to express her opinions as a member of the group. Perhaps not only her objection to the milk and fruit-throwing but also the right and expectation that she can and should express her thoughts and feelings renders her always (re)negotiating her position and belongingness. By engaging in this direct conversation, Aisha is co-constructing or 'authoring' (Holland; Lachicotte; Skinner and Cain, 1998) what constitutes belonging within the setting which opens up new modes of belonging. It is a participation in the broader non-verbal dialogue of what group membership entails – rights and responsibilities.

Being in school means Aisha is part of a 'specific peer-culture' (Corsaro, 2003:37), that of early years children. This peer-culture is defined by Corsaro (2003:37) as 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that kids produce and share in interaction with each other'. Aisha also, as noted by Frisby (2002:187) 'stands at the cross point of countless social threads' – a view also echoed by Lee, in Prout (2005:115 –116) that 'humans find themselves in an open-ended swirl of extensions and supplementations, changing their powers and characteristics as they pass through different assemblages'. Thus,



belonging and identity are an open-ended swell of extensions and supplementations. These twin concepts are not a definitive, fixed event. There is neither a distinct discernible start nor a realisable end when 'at last' one can say that they have attained a fixed belonging and identity. Rather belonging and identity is a continuous and continual process, ever-changing and ever-changed by a range of agents. The ever-changing terrain of belonging and identity is influenced by episodes or a series of events which are appraised by the individual either positively or negatively. As the observation evidence above suggests, not all the children view the throwing of milk and fruit negatively.

### **The binary machine**

The use of a white board to document children's actions into either happy or sad during circle time highlights the significance of rules in 'communities' such as this one. This has resonance with what Deleuze and Guattari (2004:250) refer to as molar line or binary machines 'that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into the system of over coding that dominates us...' Thus, such rigid codification might explain how Miss Walsh's circle time/snack time functions whereby children's behaviour is divided into a binarised perspective, happy/sad, child/adult polarisation. This molar line also further works at stratifying and segmenting these children whilst organising them into rigidly codified identities. Children who misbehave make the teacher sad while those who behave appropriately by *sitting nicely, mouth shut, and listening to what the teacher is saying basically having 'good listening ears'* make the teacher happy. Writing children's names on the dichotomised white board and reminding them to keep an eye on their behaviour '*if you see your name on this side [pointing at the sad side] think carefully what you are doing otherwise you will miss break time and you are not going to like it'* might be a way of instilling 'self-regulation, self-management, and self-control' (Grosz, 1995). The teacher's attempt to get children to behave in a uniform way during snack time might also be a way to homogenise

feelings and emotions thereby instilling a sense of togetherness and consequently belongingness. Bauman makes an interesting reading in terms of what 'togetherness' might mean within this classroom setting which is a;

Togetherness on purpose, though the purposes that prompted people to come together may not be at one with the purpose of coming together. Whatever the purpose of this togetherness, staying together is the condition of reaching it; as there is no other reason for its perpetuation, the purpose of togetherness determines the form the togetherness needs to assume, while other purposes – notably those which motivate the gathered [...] need to be either enlisted to serve and support that form or be forced into irrelevance. Such togetherness is a matrix of (and for) structured [desired] encounters – normatively regulated, rule-governed, pre-emptively circumscribed [...] and disabling the unstructured [undesirable] ones (Bauman, 1995:46).

Also important to note within this miniature citizenry, is the impact of this practice of writing children's names on happy/sad. This might, on the one hand, motivate children into good citizens and on the other hand embarrass those who do not comply. Here we see a punishment/ reward system.

### **'Concluding' remarks**

In this plateau, the complexity of the belonging and identity construct continue to emerge as intricate and having no fixed state. It is constantly changing, influenced by the different dynamics in the group, occasion, mood and interest. The intriguing nature of power and how it is used within the setting is also on display in this classroom, constantly circulating, being wrestled between adults and children.

## 11 Melancholy: Khadija's Narrative

The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily – perhaps not possibly – chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories [...] follow (Eudora Welty, 1984:68-69).

### Introduction

In this plateau I share Khadija's story, a narrative which reveals the multi-layeredness of meaning and the intricacies of entering into the participant's subjective space, including the ways in which exchanges between the participant and researcher opens up an affective space. As well as revealing another layer to the intricacy that belonging and identity is, it also throws up ethical and moral dilemmas. It demonstrates that sometimes unanticipated ethical dilemmas show up and the researcher wonders what to do next. This plateau is probably the most ethically and, perhaps, morally challenging undertaking I have engaged in during the write-up of this work. It typifies the pulling-apart, the inward tension which I, as researcher, experienced. Due to this innate conflict, I almost omitted this part from the thesis. But then, I reasoned, not to tell the whole story would paint a significantly different picture. Going into the settings, I had probably taken the advice on keeping the distance between me and my participants and data too literally, sometimes to the point of being mechanical – devoid of emotion and empathy. But then, I was walking into settings with real people, real children whose real lives they were giving me access to – privileged personal space, some of which was too privileged to contemplate. Surely, no matter how emotionally detached or balanced I wanted to be, there were times when to be detached was to lack empathy which – to the children – would be flirting with betrayal. This makes the business of trying to 'mind the gap' between the researcher and the participant a tough ask. As Guillemin and Heggen (2009: 291) propose, research of this nature 'is largely dependent on interpersonal relations between researcher and participant'. As I mix with the

participants and earn their trust, this 'gap' inevitably narrows or, at worst, blurs. This, perhaps, is symptomatic of the non-fixity of belonging. Even my own sense of belonging and identity is not spared the shifts and movements in relationships, events and identities around me which seem to interact with, impact on and bounce off my sense of who I am and my connectedness to the community I am embedding myself in. Probably, that explains in part why ethnographic research can sometimes be a delicate exercise characterised by self-introspection where 'the researcher begins with her feelings and memories, and uses reflexive writing practices to move back and forth between personal narratives, wider contexts, and social forms' (Tsalach, 2013:71-72). This plateau begins by providing background information in order to situate the discussion.

### **A brief background**

Khadija is a three years and two months old girl from Somalia who started nursery at Willowbrook Primary School four weeks ago. At home she stays with her mum, her elder brother Mohammed who has cerebral palsy and her younger brother who is six months old. Khadija's home language is Somali. Recently, Khadija's mum was informed by the UK Border Agency that she and her family were going to be deported back to Somalia since her asylum application had been unsuccessful. When their asylum application failed three months ago, Khadija's father deserted the family. It appears the family are now *de facto* stateless which means, though legally Somali nationals, the lack of basic security in their homeland and failure of their asylum application in the UK leaves them with a sense of rejection on both sides – a juxtaposition in the space 'in between' – a weakening of a sense of connectedness. As noted by Butler and Spivak (2007:15-16), 'the stateless are not just stripped of status but accorded a status and prepared for their dispossession and displacement; they become stateless precisely through complying with certain normative categories. As such they are produced as the stateless at the same time they are jettisoned from juridical modes of belonging'. Statelessness

insofar as the process of seeking asylum is concerned is more a sense that people in this circumstance feel about who they are in relation to the world around them. Governments of countries of origin, particularly African governments, take a dim view of their citizens seeking asylum in other countries. This is considered parading weaknesses in governance to foreign sovereignties and whoever seeks asylum elsewhere implicitly secedes their nationality in an ultimate act of perfidy. Thus when one's asylum application is turned down, they by default become non-aligned. They are stateless – rejected by their host country, one which they yearn to be a part of, and disowned by their birth country, one from which they are running away from due to persecution. Stateless.

During one of droppings-off, Khadija's mother confides in me that she is finding it difficult to meet the needs of both Khadija and her younger brother due to demanding responsibilities of taking care of Mohammed who needs her support most of time. In addition, Khadija still needs to be reminded to go to the toilet all the time as she is always soiling her clothes. Comparing Khadija to children of her age in Somalia, Khadija's mother says 'other children of her age in Somalia are more grown up. They take on household chores on a daily basis'. Before Khadija's mum leaves the nursery, she asks me, as she always does, if I can constantly remind Khadija to visit the toilet so that she will not soil her pants. Everyday in school Khadija is having accidents (soiling her clothes) throughout the day. Teachers are concerned about Khadija's emotional wellbeing due to the fact that in addition to constantly soiling her clothes, she is at times withdrawn and does not often interact with other children. They constantly encourage other children to take care of Khadija and make sure she is included and happy during play time.

In my journal I wrote:

*It is 'choosing time'; Khadija and I are at the home corner. Khadija is talking to a doll as she dresses it up. 'You are a good girl, Dora. Mummy is going to buy you milk' says Khadija kissing Dora the doll on the cheek.*

*She sets the table using the home corner plastic plates and cutlery. Khadija then asks me to look after Dora while she goes to buy milk. I sit on the floor with Dora on my lap. Khadija leaves the home corner. After few minutes she returns. She feeds Dora and gently lays her in a small cot in the home corner. Khadija pretends to serve food, jovially she shouts 'Josie, dinner is ready!'. 'Wow, thank you Khadija.' I retort pulling a chair. Khadija picks up a toy handset, she says;*

*Khadija: hello!*

*Pause*

*Khadija: mum! Can you hear me?*

*Pause*

*Khadija: Yes, me Khadija*

*Pause [She accidentally drops a plastic plate from the table]*

*Khadija: Oh...my...god [picking up the plate]*

*Pause*

*Khadija: Yes mum*

*Pause*

*Khadija: But why did you do that to me? Why?*

*Pause*

*Khadija: I said, why did you do that me? Mummy why? [Khadija becomes visibly emotional, tears welling in her eyes. She walks slowly to me and sit on my lap].*

*Josie: [Gently wiping her tears] Are you ok?*

*Khadija: [Still sobbing and crying] Mummy beat me.*

*Josie: Oh, why did mummy beat Khadija?*

*Khadija: Mummy beat me for weeing my pants. [The bell which marks the end of choosing time and beginning of another activity rings. I spend few minutes consoling Khadija before joining the rest of the class for circle time. While all the other children are sitting on the carpet, I sit on a chair with Khadija (who still looks upset, but not crying anymore) on my lap as she has refused to sit with other children on the carpet] (Observation recorded 17/06/09).*

*Afterwards I discuss with Miss Walsh the class teacher and the teaching assistant my observation and conversation with Khadija. A while later Miss Walsh says she has had a conversation with the head teacher about my observation. She informs me that Khadija is under observation for suspicion of abuse and that I should discuss my observations with the school's child protection officer which would aid their on-going investigation. I got counsel from my supervisor before sharing the observation with the school's child protection officer. (17/06/09)*

### **At home in the home corner**

I would like to begin the discussion by focusing on the significance of 'home' and the home corner in relation to ways in which belonging and identity seems to be constructed. Home as a concept and term is complex and multi-layered (Hart and Ben-Yoseph, 2005 & Bowlby; Gregory and McKie, 1997). It is imbued with connotations of hospitality, warmth, intimacy, nurturing, friendliness, refuge and security all of which further complicates what constitutes home, belonging and identity and what it means to feel at home and belong within the early years setting. Quinn (2010:87) argues that 'home' cannot be reproduced because it is a state of mind, a symbolic space both painful and joyful'. Therefore, the romantic characterisation of 'home' as a site of refuge, warmth and security might not be a reflection of all children's lived experiences as individual experience of 'home' differs across individual children and it can range from positive to negative.

The home corner as a place within the classroom seems to represent a divide between two dominant identities (Brooker, 2006), not only in this classroom, but also in the whole school. Thus, it represents and re-presents femininity as viewed by the children in the social environment of this classroom. Probably these re-enactments are also a replication or reliving of what they experience at home and their communities – confirming the long-held cliché of school as an extension of home. This

brings a sense of familiarity in a quasi 'controlled' environment which, in itself probably is an aid to belonging as children are likely feel they are doing familiar things in familiar surroundings. The familiarity within the home corner set up as noted by Perel (2007), creates routine which in turn fosters a sense of security and predictability and consequently belongingness and identity. As they make the everyday switches from home to school and back, familiarity might be helpful in the multiple transitions (which also include cultural and linguistic) a child goes through in a typical school day – from home mode to school, to classroom, to playground, back to classroom and out of the school gate back to their homes. Thus, the school gate and high fence at Willowbrook Primary School creates a physical boundary between home and school. But, as noted by Clark (2000:756) boundaries are to some extent characterised by their permeability where there can be a 'spill over of negative of emotions' which emotions are discernible in Khadija.

Over time, a few fascinating facts about Khadija's home corner experience become apparent to me. First, it would seem that Khadija feels at home in the home corner where she shows that she feels comfortable with the rituals and positions involved (Rosman; Rubel and Weisgrau, 2009). One such ritual which most girls visiting this part of the classroom engage in, is pretend-playing mummy role – a nurturing performance might be reinforcing as well as demonstrating their 'membership of femininity practice' (Paetcher, 2007:70). Davies (2002:280) proposes that, 'in order to become recognisable and acceptable as members of the society they are born into, children must learn to think and act in terms of the accepted, known linguistic forms'. Davies (1989a:4) further notes that children are not consciously taught acceptable ways of being but rather these are 'embedded in language, in the discursive practices and the social and narrative structures through which the child is constituted as a person'. Therefore, belongingness within the early years context might mean children have to consciously or subconsciously align themselves within 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' ways of being boy or girl. The main



allure for girls in the classroom is the home corner. Like Khadija, other girls also perform the mummy role and pretend to talk to a doll when they are in the home corner.

Khadija seems to have created a space where she is in control and determines the direction of her chores in the pretend play. It would seem she is re-enacting what goes on in her home. Assuming this premise is 'true', the pretend play Khadija engages in is thus anecdotal. It is an opening into her home life which, of late, has been made up of a single mother and three children of whom Khadija is the second eldest. Perhaps the eldest child having cerebral palsy forces Khadija to take on more adult responsibilities. This places additional demands on Khadija's coping resources. It appears this may have been the source of tension which Khadija shows on this day. Khadija's attempt to 'dialogue' with her doll, *'You're a good girl, Dora. Mummy is going to buy you milk'*, is suggestive of the significance of praise to her. She demonstrates hospitality, inviting me for dinner. As already mentioned Khadija appears to prefer the company of adults to children of her age group. Related to this is the fact that she does not shy away from drifting into monologue.

From Khadija's monologue, nuances of a sense of injustice can be detected simmering underneath her emotion. She cuts an image of a child distracted from the present by dwelling in her outside-school entanglements, showing the relevance of those distant experiences in her home life to the present emotion. Momentarily, she ruptures herself from her immediate surroundings and its shenanigans to ponder on what seems imponderable. Whatever it is that is happening in her home life, it has apparently unsettled her. In her soliloquy, there are traces of disenchantment with the treatment she is getting from home. She asks *But why did you do that to me? Why?*, which appears to be something to do with her mother but she may not have had the chance or confidence to confront her. Whatever it is that is happening at home, it seems to be

distressing her. She seems not to like it as it appears to be a deviation from the 'normal'.

It is not out of character for Khadija to withdraw from the rest of the children. When she is not alone she is either with me or other staff members. On this day, I had inadvertently been fortunate to tap into some of Khadija's worries. Such is a researcher's tension sometimes; when a misfortune is considered an opportunity or a moment of insight. Even so, this, in a way, gives me a sense I might be on the verge of establishing the possible reasons behind Khadija's withdrawn personality. There are hints something is not right in her home life. She is not happy, upset even, with what her mother had done or said to her. I just hope that once I draw closer to her, she will open up. As I suspected, when I inquire, Khadija reveals to me that her mother had beaten her as punishment for soiling her clothes. As stated earlier, she seems not to have had an opportunity to approach her mother. Therefore, this is perhaps a chance to 'let off' pent-up negative emotion. One thing that cannot be second-guessed is that she is clearly upset. By repeating; *I said, why did you do that me? Mummy why?*, whilst visibly exuding signs of distress, Khadija seems to be emphasising her displeasure in the way she has been treated by her mother. Regardless of cultural values, when someone does not like the way they are treated, surely their views should be listened to. This is especially so when the individual concerned is a child. Khadija's crying creates, for me, a dilemma of not knowing whether I should respond and how. First and foremost, I am a researcher. But I am a human researcher, touched by a child's emotion that would affect any other empathetic human. In my social life I am a parent. Yes, I try to compartmentalise my activities and emotions by contextual roles, but at times lines between these compartments shift and overlap. The boundary between 'pretend' and 'real' has been blurred. Khadija's predicament has touched a nerve in my 'parent' compartment and I am not sure how to respond anymore. Khadija wants some answers as to why she had been treated the way she had by her mother. Unfortunately, her mother is not present to listen,

which in itself sustains an information gap between mother and daughter and me. On my part as researcher and as someone who has been entrusted with the care of Khadija in school, I am caught between a rock and a hard place. At this stage, it is not yet clear whether Khadija's words warrant raising a child protection alarm or just an everyday occurrence which Khadija had taken too seriously. Research by Thompson (2009:15) found that children in Khadija's situation where a sibling has a chronic illness often have unfulfilled 'demands and needs for parental attention and affection' and resultantly they 'display an increased sensitivity and seem to experience a greater sense of distance from their parents'. In addition, Foster et al (2001:361) notes that parents often unintentionally provide preferential treatment to a child with a chronic illness and are less tolerant of 'misbehaviour' from the other children perceived as healthy. Thus, the 'healthy' child becomes vulnerable (Eiser, 1997). This might lead to a shaken sense of security and belongingness and identity. But, without talking to Khadija there is no way I could ascertain how she is feeling unless she opens up to me. Khadija walks slowly to me and sit on my lap. I begin a conversation with her with the purpose to establish the seriousness and significance of her demeanour. *Gently wiping her tears, I ask 'are you ok?'* *Still sobbing and crying, she responds 'mummy beat me'*. It becomes clear to me that Khadija has suffered corporal punishment at the hands of her mother – an act which potentially could be understood to threaten her sense of home and family as secure and nurturing (Cunningham and Baker, 2007).

In my conversation with Khadija's mother, I gained a few significant insights into their family. This provides valuable background information to connect with what is happening during school time. Up to a point, it helps me unpick Khadija's behavioural patterns in school. As a result of her father's recent departure, it is conceivable to assume that the family will have been at a transition stage; from a 'full nest' to a lone parent family. This might mean that as well as fending for the family, Khadija's mother is left to look after the children among whom one had cerebral palsy. The

family will have been going through a relatively stressful phase. There are a range of potential explanations to this. Possibly, this significant life event could have precipitated a somewhat strained relationship between Khadija and her mother – pent-up force weakening the mother-and-daughter bond and contributing to Khadija’s anxiety symptoms. Alternatively, Khadija’s fears maybe a sign of her own expectations of her mother being under-met. In addition Khadija’s mother might be expecting her to assume responsibilities within the household and to care for her younger sibling. In most parts of Africa, and Somalia included, it is not unusual for children the age of Khadija to start helping with looking after younger siblings especially in instances where a family member has a chronic illness. The adult role in such circumstances would be to generate income for the family’s livelihood. Thus children are considered trainee or mini adults – deputising the adults whenever necessary. Children who deviate from this norm often incur the wrath of the adult and tend to be on the receiving end of some stringent forms of punishment – some of which would be considered ‘abusive’ in western communities. This is reminiscent of my own upbringing whereby at a very young age I began to take up ‘adult-like/ adult-centric’ chores in preparation for [future] adulthood. The cultural principle was that getting this ‘training’ early on would be much easier for me and those responsible for ‘training’ me than to wait until I became an adult when I would be less receptive of cultural instruction. It is not clear if this is what is happening in Khadija’s home although her soliloquy is suggestive of some degree of distress and disquiet within her. It is also important to consider that Khadija, due to her age, might not be as grounded in her ethnic origin culture as her mother. She is probably in a position of hybridity leaning towards the English culture while her mother is likely to be heavily leaning towards her Somali culture. Drawing on my own cultural experience, I have a sense this tends to be a legitimate source of tension among ethnic minority families where children more readily embrace the cultures of their host countries whereas the adults are more cautious and selective about what and what not to embrace due to an ingrained obduracy and sense of pride in their ‘roots’. Invariably, this

patriotism is often not shared with their children. They neither understand it nor value it. To them, perhaps culture is what finds them friends and what makes them fit in. It is a matter of survivability; survival within the ranks of their peers and getting established. Sticking to their ethnic cultures cannot buy them that. It is that simple. What is not simple, though, is the tension these variations in culture lead to in a family setting where two very contrasting cultures which would not ordinarily sit side by side are focused to blend. Yes, these cases adults would be expected to compromise and accept that their children are developing into completely different selves than them. However, on the basis of my personal experience, the pressures of cultural preservation among ethnic communities sometimes come in the way of reason. Children are expected to be 'made' in the image of their parents. This might be the state in which we find Khadija trying to wrestle herself out of the situation which is undesirable to her.

### **Ethical entanglements**

Khadija's disclosure is an 'ethically important moment' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004:262) which creates a dilemma. I wrestle with myself whether I should follow the script written by others (e.g. Anderson-Levitt, 2006) who emphasise stepping back as a way of being objective or alternatively devise my own script which suits the situation at hand where the question is not, 'What must I do? (which is the question of morality)' (Smith, 2007:67). Here 'must do' is complicated by the duality of my roles – ones which directly conflict. Khadija's mother has specifically tasked me with taking care of Khadija – ensuring she remembers to use the toilet when 'nature calls'. This is statement of trust. I get that, I grasp it and accede to her request. Why not? Even if she had not explicitly requested, I would still be duty-bound to ensure Khadija's, as well as other children's, needs are taken care of – of course, within the limits and bounds of my role. Thus to be shown such trust by a parent is no easy thing for me – not something I can take for granted. I need stakeholders' trust. Researchers

do need trust. It makes the business of research much more palatable. But then, I was not prepared for what Khadija would disclose to me. Although there is a mutual level of respect developing between Khadija's mother and me, this is not fully-fledged friendship. Boundaries between Khadija's mother and me are very clear and these need not be crossed. That Khadija has divulged a potential safeguarding issue to me complicates my position. At this stage, I am caught within the duel of trusts – mother's trust versus daughter's trust. Not only do I have Khadija's mother's trust, I also happen to have Khadija's trust. Added to this, my access to the school is a demonstration of the school's trust in me. This makes me a 'victim' of trust. I muse, 'What can I do, what am I capable of doing (which is the proper question of an ethics without morality)... How can I go to the limit of what I 'can do'?(Smith, 2007: 67). Perhaps, I 'know' what I [can] do. But the sense that, whatever I do, a party will be left feeling 'let down' – betrayed even – churns my stomach. It can be argued that this is a straightforward matter of putting the child's 'best interests' ahead of everything else. But then, perhaps, it is not the 'what' that troubles me so much as the 'how'. It is a balancing act which requires delicate handling. Khadija's mother should not be left feeling she is not trusted by either me or the school to take 'good' care of Khadija. I am also too aware to ignore the cultural differences that exist insofar as child disciplining is concerned. Thus, at no notice at all, I am caught up in a legal/ ethical quagmire.

### **The ethics of belonging**

Deleuze (1970:23) highlights the salient difference between ethics and morality in that ethics, which is a 'typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to the transcendent values. Morality is the judgement of God, the system of judgement. But Ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference

of modes of existence (good-bad)'. Furthermore, Massumi (2002:218) notes that ethics is situational and pragmatic in that;

it happens *between* people, in the social gaps. There is no intrinsic good or evil. The ethical value of an action is what it brings out *in* the situation, *for* its transformation, how it breaks sociality open. Ethics is about how we inhabit uncertainty together. It's not about judging each other right or wrong. For Nietzsche, like Spinoza, there is still a distinction between good and bad even if there's not one between good and evil. Basically the 'good' is affectively defined as what brings maximum potential and connection to the situation. It is defined in terms of becoming.

My understanding of Massumi's ideas on ethics is that an ethical decision and the subsequent action is interpersonal as well as circumstantial and contextual. Therefore, within such affective encounters, there might be possibilities of creating new understandings and modes of belonging. When I probe further, Khadija discloses that she was beaten by her mother for soiling her pants. In African culture, this socialisation is an acceptable way to 'train' a child to be responsible. The reasoning is that the more the action-punishment sequence occurs, the more the child will associate soiling clothes with pain – negative reinforcement of sorts. Inflicting physical pain as a form of disciplining children is mainstream without any legal ramifications. Whether or not it is a result of corporal punishment remains a matter of conjecture. This throws up the debate, controversy even, surrounding the role of the state in what are perceived as 'family affairs'. Fabiano and Fabiano (2012:114) note the complex issues surrounding inflicting physical pain on children during toilet training; 'if toilet training is too harsh or abusive, it adversely affects the child's willingness to cooperate, to think, to solve problems and to incorporate self-control'. Thus, it will be left to the schools and others responsible for safeguarding children to determine whether what Khadija is going through is abuse. This bearing in mind what happened to Victoria Climbié – if the authorities elect not to involve themselves and this 'disciplining' escalates, Khadija will be left feeling let down. She is the one who the school and I are supposed to be safeguarding. Better be over-cautious than

complacent. The risk still remains that 'trust' between the school and the parent is at stake. Effective relationships between the school and the parents develop when the two parties work in partnership and this seems to be the tight rope schools, and researchers in my position, walk.

My instinct, with dual influence of my African heritage and adopted English culture, compels me to share my observations with Miss Walsh and the teaching assistant. With a good chance that my inferences may have been inaccurate, I elect to err on the side of caution. For good measure, I also confer with my supervisor who ratifies my decision to share the information, including my observation record with the school.

### **The ethics of becoming-independent**

Within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2012), Physical Development (PD) is one of the stipulated seven areas of learning and development. One of the early learning goals of this section is the issue of health and self-care. There is an expectation that children of Khadija's age should 'manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently' (EYFS, 2012: 8). The inclusion of these expectations indicates that the development of such personal attributes is considered imperative to the normative development of children within the early years. However, a key shortcoming of these propositions is that they are based on an overarching assumption that all children are the same when it comes to development and can easily be placed on a continuum outside of which they may be labelled regressive from the norm and therefore deviant. This over simplifies child development which is influenced by a range of intricately linked factors. To understand children's development, and therefore their development of belonging and identity, I propose that it is more helpful to treat each child as a dynamic individual constantly interacting with a range of dynamic, complex factors. We can assume that being able to go to the toilet independently forms part of a measure of



'successful' transition (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002) from home to school. It is important to highlight that this is only part of a complex process. Transition is more than just being able to use the toilet independently. It is not only external. Rather it also involves complex internal processes. Thus, to only pin Khadija's transition evaluation on her toilet use 'ability', as of course could be our interpretations of her responsibilities at home, in the family, her mother's choice of discipline, would be oversimplification. Transition as highlighted by Dowling (2010) cannot be viewed as a one-off event but rather as a process.

### **Eviscerating essentials from the morass**

Having strove with matters of ethics and morality, it is important to try and make meaning of the Khadija predicament in respect of belonging and identity, the primary focus of the present study. First, the significance of mutual trust emerges as one of the key signifiers of connectedness or, at least, a keenness to be connected to; being connected to someone whom to confide in, whom to assign responsibility to, one with an ear to listen and pay attention to one's welfare and concerns. It is unclear why Khadija's mother specifically delegates responsibility for Khadija to me. In the absence of this certainty, I can only speculate and here I try to come up with well-reasoned speculation at that. Like I indicated previously, I assume that Khadija's mother demonstrates trust. Whether or not this mother's trust in turn influences her daughter's trust in me remains guess work. In spite of the lack of clarity as to the underlying influences behind the mother and daughter trust in me, there is very little doubt as to the purchase of trust in belonging and identity. Trusting relations can be both a cause and an effect of belonging. Trust shows an individual is connected, at least to someone – if not to a group – within the setting. It can be argued that if Khadija's mother did not trust me, it is unlikely she would have entrusted her daughter's welfare in my hands. If she did not trust the school, she might not have sent Khadija to this school in the first place – of course here I risk overgeneralisation. Beyond the trust factor,

there might be a whole host of other factors parents consider when making decision on school choice. Back to Khadija, children tend to confide in people whom they trust, those whom they feel a connection to; those whom they hope can do something about their complaint. It is reasonable to infer that Khadija's divulgence is also a cry for help. Therefore, the action I take must show that her voice within the context of the school matters. Listening to and heeding the child's voice helps enhance children's confidence in the school system and demonstrates they are an important part of the school. It enhances their sense of membership. That said, cohesion within the school community – comprising children and members of staff – cannot be realised without including the parents and carers in the dynamic. This is what makes Khadija's case, a moral and ethical dilemma.

### **A tentative closure**

During the course of this plateau, I become aware, not only of the data I gathered, but also of my own 'self'. Thus, it ends up being a duality prism for both reflection on data and introspection on self. There are instances when the two become so interwoven it becomes hard to ascertain the distinction between the two particularly when my interpretation of the data draws some influences from my own experiences and cultural background. Thus, in the process of deliberating on the data, I become aware of the evolution of my own belongingness and identity within the context of the setting as influenced by my culture-based values, beliefs, conceptions and, yes, biases. The aftermath brings to light a profound insight; that the business of interpreting, hence analysing, culturally-grounded actions and events is not straightforward. Therefore, determining the mutually acceptable course of action becomes perplexing.

This plateau has thrown up key dilemmas which show up when least expected. Such dilemmas sometimes wrong-foot the researcher and can sometimes lead to researcher scrambling for amicable solutions. In this

case, trust – often considered a researcher’s invaluable asset – turns out to be a proverbial double-edged sword. Trust on its own would have been wind in my researcher sails but the information I was being trusted with placed me in an ethical and moral juxtaposition. In a ‘perfect’ order, interpreting actions grounded in culture require a consistent cultural lens to view them, to pass judgment on and to respond to – especially so in cases with potential ‘safeguarding’ ramifications. I am all-too-aware that what I or other professionals may consider potentially ‘harmful’ treatment of children may actually be consistent with the concerned family’s cultural values and beliefs. What compounds my paradox further is my cultural in-betweenness. Although, I must concede, my knowledge of the Somali culture is not authoritative enough to pass ‘fair’ judgment on, my conversance with my ethnic culture and adopted English culture (hybridity) makes me aware of the disparities which exist between different cultures. Although I cannot claim to be fully acculturated into the English culture, I can profess with near certainty that I am no longer fully Zimbabwean and this shows in my interpretation of culture. I am sitting on the hyphen and dipping my value judgments from either side of this precarious hyphen. This makes making judgment calls sometimes out-of-reach, especially when one wants to make a decision acceptable to both the family and the school – something close to cordial. In the end, I do what I perceive is best for Khadija – this in consultation with my supervisor and the teachers. Eventually, it has to be about Khadija – the child whose sense of belonging and identity has to be nurtured in an environment which puts her welfare first. After this event, I emerge with a sense that belonging and identity within a primary school setting is not always clear cut. It is a delicate balancing act which, at times, demands caution. To add to the complexity, in a sense, this plateau appears to illuminate on my sense of identity and belonging – the relationship between the dilemmas I face as a result of my encounters with Khadija and my own sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ – which is continuously developing, evolving and mutating – as a researcher, a woman, a mother, someone who has crossed continents and has had to, and continues to, negotiate inter-

/trans-cultural dilemmas as an individual, as a parent, partner, teacher and researcher – yet still perpetually considered an immigrant by the native members of my adopted country of citizenship.

## 12 Affective encounters: Joshua's Narrative

To exist is to differ; difference is, in a sense, the truly substantial side of things; what they have most in common and what makes them most different. One has to start from this difference and abstain from trying to explain it, especially by starting with identity as so many persons wrongly do, because identity is a minimum, and hence a type of difference, and a very rare type that, in the same way as rest is a type of movement and the circle a type of ellipse (Tarde, 1895: 40).

### Introduction

In this plateau, I present the story of Joshua, a three year old boy at Bee Primary School, diagnosed with Down syndrome at birth. Joshua's narrative provides yet another layer to our understanding of belonging and identity. My encounter with Joshua arouses the enduring debate around the educational inclusion and exclusion of children with special educational needs. As highlighted by Monchy, Pijl and Zandberg (2004:318), 'physical integration or 'just being there' is only a very basic condition: it takes much more to become part of a group' and subsequently develop a sense of belonging. Whilst this plateau may not provide answers, it is conceivable that the questions thrown up will provide some valuable insights into what it means to belong for a child with Down syndrome in a mainstream school and the dilemmas encountered by teachers when they try to keep a balance between being inclusive and differentiating children according to their needs. While the discourse of 'inclusive education' seems set to persist and evidence of its perceived merits (or demerits) remain inconclusive (Goodley, 2007), I am, in the end, both grateful and glad I meet Joshua in this context because I draw discernments which I would otherwise not have been able to have had. McLaren et al (2012:7) observe that generally in society 'the bodies of disabled children typically are cast as lacking and not imagined to articulate a range of potentialities'. I explore this notion further in this plateau where, additionally, I utilise Deleuze and Guattari's (2008)

question, 'what can a body do?' as opposed to 'what a body is'. Taking this as a point of departure, I consider the capacity a body has to form specific relations with other bodies (Buchanan, 1997). This, in many ways, defies the able/disabled, mind/body and normal/abnormal dualisms whilst creating space to consider ways in which bodies '(un)fold themselves in time and space and in relations of power and powerlessness...' (Davies, 2000:250). It means 'moving beyond disability as an identity category forged over, and against a likewise fixed able-bodied normativity' whilst making it possible to 'conceive of the particular belonging that is also shaped by impairment-specific spatial practices as an idiosyncratic belonging' (Berman, 2010:195).

Before I get into the details of Joshua's exposé, I begin by problematising disability. Thereafter, I move onto giving an overview of the divergent perspectives on 'inclusive education' and how these standpoints influence thinking on the decision to be or not to be 'inclusive' and the ways in which this might impact upon children's development of a sense of belonging in general. It is envisaged that this will lay the foundation to the ensuing discussion of Joshua's narrative.

### **The '*problem*' of disability**

Given the tangent divergence on 'disability' as a concept and a social construction, it is, perhaps, fitting to start by examining discourses that constitute relative understandings of disability and belonging. The way in which children are identified as disabled in communities in general, and education in particular, implies an assumption that the definition of disability, hence special needs, has been settled and, in a way, 'everyone' 'knows' what it means (Ypinazar and Pagliano, 2004). Mercieca and Mercieca (2010) also highlight the fact that disability is currently measured in terms of severity and how far it is from 'ability'. The paradox remains, as echoed by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011: 78), where 'currently it might be possible for a child to be defined as 'disabled' within one service

and not within another' which makes it a worthwhile endeavour to revisit the debate surrounding the subject of disability as exemplified by two dominant discourses: the medical and social model of disability. Hickey-Moody (2007) notes that these two dominant discourses are influential in terms of how we understand and interact with people with disabilities.

The medical model is predominantly used, particularly in formal settings – including schools (Baglieri, 2008), due to its adoption by the World Health Organisation (2001) and, subsequently, within the UK legislation. Thus, while I am aware of the plethora of definitions of disability, due to the context of disability in this plateau, I will commence by exploring the 'normalised' legal definition given in the Disability Discrimination Act (1985:Online) utilised in the UK:

a person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. ...' Mental impairment' includes an impairment resulting from or consisting of a mental illness only if the illness is a clinically well-recognised illness.

The subsequent Equality Act (2010) qualifies a 'disabling' *impairment* as one which 'has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. Though the definition in these Acts is useful in making determination of disability within the UK context consistent, it still has inherent within it some shortcomings, the main one being the salient proclivity towards pathologising disability. This demonstrates the relative dominance the medical model has within the subject of disability to the extent that it overshadows, masks even, the incompleteness of the singularity of this paradigm. By adopting the medical model of disability within the legal, hence formal, definition overlooks the social model of disability, also a principal model, equally important to the comprehension of this subject. The primary focus of the medical model is the *limitation* resulting from impairment. It views disability as the 'problem' a disabled individual has to contend with to perform 'normal' daily routines. Hence, in the eyes of the medical model,

being disabled is having a *problem* (Raphael and Allard, 2013). Thus, if, for example, a child with a mental impairment *cannot* do a certain task, it is due to the disability rather than the task itself – there is nothing wrong with the task, but there is a ‘problem’ with the mental impairment. The impairment, rather than the task, has ‘disabled’ the child. In contrast, when children deemed not to have a disability fail to do the same task, it may be due to the ‘suitability’ of the task.

In contrast, the social model of disability holds that it is society, not impairment, which disables individuals ‘through designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled’ (The University of Leicester, 2013). It is society which has a ‘problem’ rather than disabled people – here ‘society’ meaning the numerical *majority*, which also happens to possess the *majoritarian* power to dictate *what* is ‘normal’. The social model of disability thus acknowledges the role and responsibility of society in reducing ‘disabling’ barriers (Mercieca and Mercieca, 2010). As encapsulated in Clough’s (1988) poem below, the barriers encountered by disabled people are an indicting mirror reflection of the weaknesses of society itself:

Don’t you understand that  
The comments you make about my child  
Tell about yourself  
And not about him?  
And the needs we discuss  
Are yours  
And not his.  
When you look at my child (Clough, 1998: viii)

The question, therefore, is not what is a disability, but rather when does a uniqueness become a disability or an impairment? There is a notion of ‘deviation’ from the norm, when certain uniqueness are deemed too different to be ‘normal’ and labelled ‘disability’ or when children like Joshua are ascribed an identity as having special educational needs. That said, the social model also has certain shortcomings in its approach to disability, the main one, according to Crow (1996), being that it does not



take into consideration the personal experience of pain and limitation which often results from impairment. In concurrence, French (1993) and Danieli and Woodhams (2005) argue that suggesting that the limiting effects of disability can be resolved by removal of barriers by society is oversimplification which dices with the risk of entirely overlooking the complex nature of disability.

These two dominant schools of thought on disability demonstrate how complex and problematic the subject of disability is. From both the medical and social models, we are offered presentations of understandings of what is 'normal' and how any different is relegated as 'deviance', hence having 'special' needs. This, in turn, influences the debate surrounding inclusive and special education.

### **Divergent perspectives**

The debate around inclusivity in education has, at its 'core', two fundamental dilemmas which, up to a point, seem to prolong the lack of resolution on the 'best' way to proceed (Goodley, 2007). On the one hand, proponents for 'special' schools propose that special schools for children with certain disabilities or conditions such as Down syndrome are, for practicality reasons, beneficial to children and their families as well as professionals (Jenkinson, 2012). For children and families, the perceived benefit might be that children in these settings can get focused 'specialist' attention which may not be readily available in mainstream schools (Garner, 2009). What it means, argue the advocates of 'special' schools, is that children in these settings are likely to make more educational progress as resources, both material and human, are already in place for them and settings are adapted to their needs (Croll and Moses, 2000). A further argument for these settings centres on 'familiarity' where the teachers are familiar with working with children with special needs and are conversant with their demands and expectations. Similarly, the children have the comfort of knowing that they are with adults and children who

understand them and this, so it is suggested, helps their confidence and self-assurance – a factor that might be absent in mainstream schools. Special education proponents further raise the ‘readiness’ question where children, staff and resources within mainstream settings are perceived as lacking ‘inclusivity’ readiness (Watson and McCathren, 2009).

The main risk of ‘including’ children with special conditions, or special educational needs, in mainstream schools is that in those settings the children still experience a severe lack of inclusion. For example, children with special conditions are given separate tasks to the rest of the children and tend to be assigned an additional adult to look after them while the teacher takes care of the rest of the class. This makes children with special conditions more aware of how *different* they are from the rest of the children and this may not be good for their self-esteem nor their development and this, in essence, is exclusionary. Thomas and Loxley (2001) observe that, because of the ‘special’ status assigned to children such as Joshua it is assumed within mainstream schooling that the child will take on a new identity based on their *difference* as opposed to their membership to the new school. This ascribed identity has a limiting effect on expectations of the child, hence what they *can* do, within the school. Thus, the argument goes, children end up feeling more isolated, limited and excluded in mainstream schools than they would in special schools (Ainscow, 2005). The argument is that low academic achievement can become pathologised where the focus tends to be on cognitive ‘ability’ as opposed to cognitive development within the setting (Black-Hawkins; Florian and Rouse, 2007).

In contrast, supporters of ‘inclusive’ education (e.g. Frederickson et al, 2007) contend that inclusive education is beneficial to children with special needs as it prepares them for membership to a community of people with different conditions and from different backgrounds. Putting children in special schools, they argue, does not help children, but rather further extends social stigma and reinforces a sense of *difference* within

the children, which does not help their membership or sense of connectedness to the greater community. Terzi (2010) observes that institutional practices of separating children on the basis of so-called 'special educational needs' is regressive in that it promotes labelling and discrimination on account of children's individual differences by learning needs which, in a way, is a de-facto deficit model devaluing children with special conditions as inadequate; focusing on what they lack rather than what they *can* be. Meanwhile, Warnock (2005:15) proposes that 'the concept of inclusion must embrace the feeling of belonging, since such a feeling appears to be necessary both for successful learning and for more general well-being'. This suggests that children with special conditions can have fulfilling educational experience in a mainstream school; even more fulfilling than 'exclusive' schools because they learn to accept and be accepted and that there is more to life than just their impairments.

### **A Unique Child**

My encounter with Joshua throws me right into the middle of this debate. It is a debate between models, a conversation between inclusivity with exclusionary undertones and special education with an inclusive agenda of 'bridging' the gap between children with 'special' educational needs and those not considered so. It conjures up a split within me where, *rationally*, I can appreciate the merits of both sets of arguments. Thus, on the one hand I can see why having specialist schools to support children with special conditions would be beneficial to children and their families. Yet concurrently, I can appreciate how this arrangement has the makings of exclusionary practices as it is predicated on notions of deficiency or 'neediness' where segmenting children by 'special' educational needs, is akin to subdividing society into communities of deficits. I am also aware of two of the four EYFS principles, namely: *A Unique Child* and *An Enabling Environment*. The two principles are a tacit acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each child and how, as a result, the environment needs to be tailored to accommodate the diversity of 'uniquenesses' of children, at

least within the early years context, through a 'differentiated' curriculum. What I struggle to reconcile, though, is how certain 'uniquenesses' become 'special' needs while others are simply learning 'styles'. What seems 'clear' is that the two are accorded different 'statuses'. When they are 'learning styles', the class teacher is expected to cope with via differentiation, but when it is a 'special' need, it is acceptable for the teacher not to cope with as an additional adult has to come into the setting to provide 'additional' support. It is the child rather than the teacher who is 'needy'. Yet, if we are to view this from Clough's (1998) poem, cited above, the enlisting of the services of an additional adult might also be seen as testament of the 'neediness' of the teacher in terms of skills gap to satisfy the differentiation expectations of the child with 'special' needs. After all, as argued by proponents for inclusive education, for example Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck (2005:39), 'all students are unique individuals with special needs requiring differentiated individual attention; therefore, practices used effectively for exceptional students should be considered for use with all students'. From this perspective, it appears bringing in an additional adult deflects attention from the teacher's skills base to the child's 'special' needs as the reason for not having a readily *enabling* environment. One may wonder how this 'special' differentiation might affect the generation of identity as part of the early years community for children like Joshua. It is a matter of conjecture whether following processes, procedures and guidelines pales a consideration of individual children's development of a sense of self. In respect of this, and for the purpose of practical convenience and emphasis, it is neither overbearing nor redundant to recollect a Giles and Middleton (1999: 37) quotation I used in the introductory section of this work: 'we are defined and define ourselves in terms of how others see us, how we see others, how we act with other people and how other people respond to us, not only on the individual level, but also within the social institutions'. I am left wondering how Joshua feels and thinks in relation to his sense of belonging and identity. I am at quandary whether the implicit 'status' accorded Joshua does not put him in a position of disadvantage rather than the intended

'levelling of the playing field'. If the teacher is not going to have as much input in Joshua's education and welfare as in the rest of children while in the setting, there is a chance her accountability over, hence attachment to, Joshua is going to be relatively less significant.

Whilst these rational positions are seductive, I am, nevertheless, persuaded by Hickey-Moody and Wood (2008:2) that 'no bodies are more 'able' than others, rather, all bodies are different and context produces 'disability'. Moreover, as Deleuze notes, 'they [bodies] are not affected by the same things, or *not affected* by the same things in the same way' (Deleuze, 1990: 217). Therefore, the ways in which children experience their bodies – disabled or otherwise – is influenced by a range of complex contextual factors which necessitates the need to 're-name the subject as a multiple, open-ended and interconnected identity that occupies a variety of possible positions, at different places (spatially) and at different times (temporally), across a multiplicity of constructions of self (relationally) (Roets and Braidotti, 2012:168).

A look back to a record of facts about Joshua I accumulated in my journal:

*Joshua is of white British heritage. He attends nursery from nine in the morning to twelve o'clock noon when other children go for dinner. Unlike other children in the setting, and due to his condition, Joshua wears a nappy. While he has some verbal communication difficulties due to speech and language delay, his non-verbal communication skills such as smiling, eye contact and facial expressions are his strongest assets. His mother explains that Joshua understands what people say. By working closely with Joshua's mother and Mrs Clooney, I am becoming more familiar with Joshua's non-verbal communication. During 'choosing time' and at circle time, Mrs Clooney often asks me if I could keep an eye on Joshua. Joshua at times plays with Gemma (15/06/09).*

Like I argued earlier, the distribution of adult responsibilities over children is susceptible to deconstruction. First, though supposedly 'included' within

a 'mainstream' school, with the exception of rare moments when he sometimes enjoys the company of Gemma, I often observe Joshua playing alone which, in itself, appears to be exclusionary and isolationist. In addition, the teacher, Mrs Clooney, who, it is safe to say, is the most 'powerful' and most significant adult in the classroom delegates responsibility over Joshua to me while she takes care of the rest of the class. I am not sure whether this is an indicator of which section of the class she places importance on. Then there is the issue of 'keeping an eye' which also merits further unpicking. There is a possibility of perceived weakness, hence vulnerability, associated with impairment or disability which is evocative of the perception of disability as a deficit made 'complete' or shored up by 'additional' care. A further node from this rhizome is an undertone of 'surveillance', a shackle a child can only 'free' himself or herself from if they 'demonstrate' their 'uniqueness' is 'mainstream' rather than 'deviant' from the 'norm' as to deviate, at least in the eyes of the deficit model, is to be vulnerable; to be 'weak'; to have a 'problem' – not to be trusted with autonomy or independence but constantly requiring surveillance. While on this point, it is worth pointing out the fine lines between care and surveillance and between providing autonomy and neglecting – a dilemma teachers are likely to be in within the context of their job. Yet, still, it can be contra-argued that, perhaps, Joshua's 'uniqueness' is being accorded more 'quality' attention than the rest of the class and, therefore, benefitting from being 'unique' not 'mainstream'. Thus, in this sense, being 'unique' has certain 'advantages' over being 'mainstream'. From this perspective, can it be legitimately argued that 'keeping an eye' is according Joshua disproportionately more 'quality' attention than is given the rest of the class? If this argument is to be put forward, it is worth considering how other children feel, their sense of connection to place and how their identity and worth in the context of the setting, in light of Joshua's seemingly 'preferential' treatment, shapes up. I ponder on whether children share the same prism of equality and 'equalness'. Whose membership to the setting is more significant – the

child on whom the adults 'eye' is constantly on or the one who is left to get on with their business?

In latter parts of my journal, I capture a particular encounter:

*All the children are sitting on the carpet with their legs crossed waiting for Miss Douglas the teaching assistant to start the registration. Miss Douglas is sitting on a relatively small chair in front of the children. I sit on the carpet at the back. It is Joshua's sixth day in nursery. He arrives holding his mum's hand. Whilst in the corridor, his mum takes off his coat and hangs it. Joshua holds his mum's hand tightly as they walk towards the rest of the class. His mum takes him to the back where he sits next to me and Kyle. Miss Douglas says 'good morning to each child' and the children respond by saying 'good morning Miss Douglas'. When Joshua's turn comes, Miss Douglas says 'good morning Joshua' whilst waving her hand to him. Joshua smiles. Kyle (a five year old boy) shouts, 'Joshua is not saying good morning, Miss Douglas' Jessica (a girl of 5) retorts, 'he can't talk'. Miss Douglas uses one of her strategies for controlling slightly unruly talk by counting down. 'Five, four, three her eyes clearly focused on both Jessica and Kyle. By the time she has reached 2 both children are sitting in the regulatory way (Observation recorded 30/06/09).*

## **The politics of difference**

Minnow (2002) ponders,

When does treating people differently emphasise their differences and stigmatise or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatise or hinder them on that basis? (p. 560).

My diary entry resonates with Minnow's reflections. We can, for example, see how the routine ritual of wishing children 'good morning' can become a mechanism of inclusion. We can see the teacher's wave as a signal that she is sensitive to Joshua and that she recognises that there are other ways of greeting one another. We can also see one boy, Kyle, who – for

whatever reasons - wants the children to respond uniformly. Jessica meanwhile seems to want to 'out' Joshua; to publicly reveal that he 'cannot talk'. A statement that begs the question of 'how does she know Joshua cannot talk?' But, conversely, we could also see her statement as a form of protection where she wants to excuse Joshua from a practice that she thinks he might not be able to achieve. Perhaps what can also be asked here is, 'whose interests are best served when language is privileged over other models of communication?' (Viruru, 2001:31). The word 'can't' is depictive of deficit thinking, which highlights Joshua's 'inability' as opposed to his 'capability'. This marks him as Other in the setting.

Whilst I can only wonder at Jessica's statement, it, nevertheless, marks him out as 'different'. Thus we can see from the diary entry a heady mix of practices where Joshua is both one of a group and yet marginalised – a situation which Deleuze and Guattari (2004:32) summarise as being 'on the edge of the crowd, at the periphery'. Yet, as they go on to state, 'I (which in this instance I am understanding as Joshua) am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or a foot' which adds yet another layer to the complex and multilayered nature of what it means to belong. Perhaps, the 'periphery' signifies that which has been repressed in the construction of 'normative' ways of being and belonging. Yet, to be attached by a hand or a foot, makes me consider ways in which Joshua might be attached to the group by his hand, for example, through an array of spatial and intersubjective transactions which contribute to a particular way of belonging (Berman, 2010).

My mind shifts back to Miss Douglas' and her role. Following Foucault, we can understand as ensnared within her habitual and regulatory practices where the daily ritual of registration is part of the plethora of practices aimed at rendering the child as docile. Yet we can also see her wave as a human practice aimed at giving him the option to connect with her and the other children with his hand. Timperley (2004) proposes that it would be



beneficial if teachers reflexively ask themselves, 'how am I positioning the child with an impairment (and/or other individuals)? What are my beliefs about this child? Are they enabling or disabling and what are the children learning from the way I respond to this child and their classmates' concerns about her/him?' (Timperley 2004 cited in Rietveld, 2005:19). Such questions would provide a starting point for rethinking Mrs Douglas' practice where the very practice of whole group registration might be subjected to scrutiny. This is not to suggest that Miss Douglas entirely abandons taking the register, but that she might enact other practices until such times as Joshua has got a handle on the context and its accompanying rituals. Similarly, in asking 'what are my beliefs about this child?' Miss Douglas might begin to contemplate whether there is a gap between 'belief' and 'practice'. She might, for instance, hold the 'belief' that through dialogue and discussion she can enable her class to consider what it means to be a community, what it means to belong and what it means when we label someone as different or as in the case of Joshua, as one who 'can't talk'. As things currently stand, however, Jessica's words, 'reaffirms the normalcy of the person doing the labelling' (Deacon and Stephney, 2005:15).

Let me now turn to another diary entry:

*Joshua is at the Chinese corner playing with a toy alligator he brought from home. Three boys, Kyle, Jack and Keane join him at the Chinese corner. They begin to play with the toy cars they have taken from the construction area. They bang the cars against each other whilst making some exploding noises. Joshua is playing alongside them with his toy alligator. Jack shouts to Kyle and Keane 'Look, Joshua has got a toy from home.' With a surprised look Keane responds 'I'll tell Mrs Clooney'. Jack seems to have a different idea when he suggests 'Just take it'. Kyle says 'No, let's play racing cars'.*

*But, Keane snatches the toy alligator from Joshua and runs across the classroom. Joshua follows Keane. Mrs Clooney shouts 'Keane, you know*

*the rules, stop running now! Keane explains that 'Joshua has got a toy from home' whilst handing over the toy alligator to Mrs Clooney. Mrs Clooney puts the toy in her pocket and reminds Joshua that toys from home are not allowed in the setting and that he will get his toy back when it is 'home time' . Mrs Clooney then holds Joshua's hand and takes him to the construction area where Gemma Dylan and Jamie are building a Lego tower. She asks them to play with Joshua. Gemma asks Joshua if he wants to build a Lego tower with them. Joshua smiles whilst pulling the box closer to him. He picks two yellow Lego bricks and gives them to Gemma. Gemma assembles. This goes on for a while Joshua giving Gemma Lego bricks before Gemma suggests to Joshua that he should take the turn to do the assembling whilst she provides the bricks. Gemma gives Joshua three Lego bricks (one blue and two yellows) one by one whilst he assembles them. She then picks a red piece and brings it to Joshua. Joshua does not take it. He picks a yellow piece and assembles it. He glances at Gemma before picking another yellow piece. Gemma assembles the red piece and rushes to pick another red piece. This continues for a while. As the construction of the tower progresses, Joshua and Gemma giggle as they compete to take the Lego bricks and assembling them (16/07/09).*

## **Objects**

In thinking about this extract, I want to begin by considering the 'toys from home' rule. Objects carry a certain significance in the everyday lives of children which means, when they cross the boundary between home and school they 'make connections across the domains of home, community, and school' (Jones et al, 2012:52). Such objects can provide comfort to a child during transition whilst also connecting and separating home and classroom which might also be about the co-imbrication of the ongoing variation of the processes of individuation and *differenciation* (Parr, 2005) connectedness and separateness.

Initially, I felt protective towards Joshua where the rule seemed particularly harsh given who he 'is'. Yet Joshua, by his own actions, challenges such perceptions. He is not fragile and in need of protecting. Rather, he seems accepting of Mrs Clooney's application of the no-toys-from-home rule so that he may be considered an equal among equals, in no way different from any other, capable of being bound by the same rules governing the actions of the rest of the class with no sense of exceptionalism. This is perhaps helpful in shoring up his sense of membership as to treat him differently or to apply rules selectively, leaving him out, may insinuate he is not a part of the common jurisdiction. While exempting Joshua from the reach of setting's rules may easily be construed as doing Joshua a favour, this practice, if allowed to prevail, may also serve to marginalise the exempted. Thus, making the no-toys-from-home rule applicable to Joshua is likely to help Joshua's development as a *bona fide* member of this community. When I enquire about this rule, I am informed that it is intended to keep the sense of equality among children prevalent within the setting. Mrs Clooney explains that using school toys only within the setting is primarily appropriate as it serves to ensure every child has access to any toy. Perhaps thinking in terms of belongingness, it might make it possible for the children to refer to the toys as 'ours' rather than 'mine' or 'theirs'. Therefore, a 'foreign' object would be considered disruptive; disruptive of the norm; breaking away from EYFS tradition where 'there is an emphasis on 'taking turns', 'sharing fairly' and 'understanding that there needs to be agreed values and codes of behaviour for groups of people . . . to work harmoniously' (Jones et al, 2012:54). It is inevitable that the classroom community fabric needs to be sustained and kept intact by ensuring that members adhere to the rules and expectations. By policing the no-toy-from-home rule, MacLure et al (2012:461) note;

children might reasonably expect that helping to police behaviour would be positively received, since classroom procedure is a matter that teachers clearly care a good deal about, and continuously represent as every-body's business—a public, collective responsibility. By helping to enforce order, children may hope to earn approval by showing that they are 'signing up' to the teacher's

priorities. Yet, by taking it upon themselves to act on her behalf, they may be considered to be usurping her power; and may also be viewed by their peers as acting disloyally.

If Joshua were to be allowed to keep his own toy, access to it will probably be limited to him thereby rendering him an 'outsider', and his toy a 'foreign' object which is not exactly what Joshua needs. On the objects from home to school, Jones et al (2012: 54) propose that 'when objects travel from home to school, outside to inside, they become potential agitators'. They further suggest that such objects 'may stir up unwanted affect, such as anxiety if lost or stolen'. My observations indicate that Joshua's toy from home is already having a disruptive influence on the classroom environment with Keane wrestling the toy out of Joshua's hand and running with it to Mrs Clooney, signs are that all is not well since the discovery of the foreign object. By running after each other, Keane and Joshua are in breach of established classroom etiquette – 'no running' – hence the admonishment, '*Keane, you know the rules, stop running now!*' At the same time, this might be causing Joshua considerable anxiety as he seems unsure what Keane wants to do with his toy and whether he will be able to get it back.

## **Touch**

There also seems to be symbolism in how, at times, adults hold Joshua's hand either to show reassurance or to console. Joshua comes to school accompanied by his mother holding his mum's hand. In the observation above, Mrs Clooney holds Joshua's hand and takes him to the construction area. In early years practice, touch is a commonly used 'tool'. Besides showing a sense of emotional closeness and attachment between the adult and the child, touch can also have a calming or consoling effect if a child is upset. In this instance it seems Joshua's appearance of being upset, is met with touch where perhaps the pain of losing his alligator is mollified by the warmth of Mrs Clooney's hand. To this end, Piper, Stronach and MacLure (2006) observe that when children have a show of being upset, they are invariably asking for a consoling

touch which they call 'asked-for' touch. Extending this perspective on touch, Voos, Pelphrey and Kaiser (2012) suggest that daily social (inter)actions often involve 'tactile encounters, including touching and being touched by other people. Notably, although we use all of our senses to perceive social cues, being touched by another person is a most intimate exchange; a gentle caress [which] can convey a rich message'. But then this has to be mutual; there has to be bidirectional consensus; tacit or explicit. In practice, though, there seems to be an unwritten code, an abrasive assumption, especially by adults, that children of Joshua's age and disposition are touch-manipulable; readily receptive, if this is not self-deceptive of adults. Such practices seem to resonate with Piper; Stronach and MacLure's (2006:Online) observation; 'even young children considered eligible for unasked-for touching (for the purposes of caring and cleaning) there appears to be preference for portraying the child as 'asking for it' so as to avoid being (mis)interpreted as following one's own desires rather than responding to the child's, or ignoring the child who does not know what's good for them'. In a research they conducted in the early years (reception), MacLure et al (2012) found that difference is accorded a complex status and, occasionally this *difference* can be an accessory to the maintenance of classroom decorum. Thus, children like Joshua are more likely than others to be watched, touched and manipulated by adults without their consent (MacLure et al, 2012). They further propose that children must 'earn' exemption from unsolicited touch by demonstrating that they have reached an appropriate developmental stage' perhaps by their responsible deployment of independence and autonomy. As far as Joshua is concerned, there appears to be inherently a propensity to be seen to be 'sensitive' and 'caring', sometimes excessively so, even to the extent of inhibiting his show of development.

### **Bodily affectivity**

Now shifting the lens to the play between Joshua and Gemma we can begin to appreciate how there is a rhizomatic flow of bodily activity

between the two children where bricks, hands, colour, action and smiles intermingle so as to produce both a tower and giggles. Such transactional dynamics between human and nonhuman bodies trouble the ambivalent molar representations of identity as unified, stable and bounded whilst directing us to recalibrate the 'closed equation of representation,  $x = x = \text{not } y$  ( $1 = 1 = \text{not you}$ ) with an open equation:  $\dots + y + z + a\dots$ ' (Massumi, 1992: 6). In other words, this is about thinking through the rhizomatic conjunction 'And ...And...And'. Therefore, And, in relation to the 'intra-activity' (Barad, 2003) between human and nonhuman bodies becomes about open-ended connections, multiplicity and becoming  $\dots + \text{hands} + \text{bricks} + \text{colour} + \text{space} + \text{movement} + \text{sound} + \dots$ . Joshua and Gemma are both 'caught up' in the flow of dynamic relationality (Blackman, 2008). Indeed, Deleuze notes, '...a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality (Deleuze, 1992: 625). Even the selection of bricks, the sorting by colour that 'just happens' between Joshua and Gemma highlights the affective dimension of colour. Thus, colour as noted by Deleuze (2005:121), is 'the affect itself'. Additionally, Colebrook (2002:106) states that 'affect occurs not just when the eye is confronted by colour, but when this seeing gives [Joshua and Gemma] the thought or image of that virtual difference that allows colour to be given, not just as given to [them] in this affection, but as anonymous affect'. Massumi (2002:217) argues affect is the 'connecting thread of experience' and the 'invisible glue' which bring about a sense of 'belonging-together' (Massumi, 2002:217). As indicated by Hickey-Moody (2013) 'physical modulations' such as assembling Lego bricks, the textures, colours and sounds involved in the process, prompts feelings of comfort and inclusion within the group. This persuades me to think about belonging in terms of an array of connections and attachments, going beyond representations of identity and difference based on the obvious deceptively 'neat' categories of, for example, disability/able-bodied, girl/boy. Massumi (1992: 86) adds;

No real body ever entirely coincides with either category. A body only approaches its assigned category as a limit: it becomes more or

less “feminine” or more or less “masculine” depending on the degree to which it conforms to the connections and trajectories laid out for it by society.

Neat, straightforward categories such as disability and gender are characterised by their ‘inability to conceive of difference-in-itself’ which is about continuous and discrete bodily variation/difference in intensity (Deleuze, 1994:63) which contributes to individuality and an ‘idiosyncratic belonging’ (Berman, 2010:195). Thus, ‘difference-in-itself’ not difference from, is about seeing difference as ‘respectable, reconcilable or federative’ where a sense of belonging might be realised through ‘swarms of difference’ rather than resemblance (Deleuze, 1994: 50). If well-harnessed, Joshua’s uniqueness, perceived in the setting as an attention-warranting ‘difference’, can be a source of celebration of the value of difference and diversity within the contemporary context.

Turning now to another diary entry;

*Three girls, Gemma, Holly and Regan are at the home corner. The girls are role-playing; Gemma is making tea, while Holly is vacuum cleaning. Regan watches Holly vacuum cleaning for a while before suggesting, ‘I am the mum! Gemma responds; ‘Let’s all be mums’. Holly agrees. Joshua arrives at the home corner with a toy car. He lay on a relatively small two-seater sofa facing up and begins to flip his car. Holly asks Joshua, ‘Do you want to be my baby?’ whilst wrapping him with a small blanket. Joshua stares at Holly for a while and gently removes the blanket and places it on the floor and continues his play. Gemma says ‘No Holly, Joshua is the dad (22/07/09).*

Olsson (2009:153) postulates that ‘when our body is being restricted in its capacity to act, we feel passivity, sadness, dissatisfaction’. Thus, we can understand the blanket as having agency whereas a ‘wrapping’ it has the potential to still Joshua’s body or as Olsson suggests render it passive. We can also see the blanket as being implicated in the discursive production of mothering where ‘baby’ is always tied to another. Moreover,

in general, home corners tend to be monopolised by girls where boys have to fit into an imposed agenda (Nichols, 2011; Verma and Pumfrey, 1994). That said, there is something interesting about Joshua potentially making the move from 'my baby' to 'dad'. By removing the blanket, he removes that which marks him out as baby and, in so doing, offers Holly an opportunity to reposition him as 'dad'. And whilst I suspect that 'dad' within this context is also a role that is relatively passive I nevertheless do feel hopeful that it is also a role that offers varying degrees of action.

### **'Concluding' reflections**

In turning to Deleuze and Guattari, I can begin to capture alternative notions of 'difference'. They argue that 'life begins with pure difference or becoming, or tendencies to differ, such as the differential waves of sound and light, and these differences are then actualised by different points of perception' (1986:114). I take this as a rally cry not to automatically fall into 'traps, including those of stereotypes or specific roles, including that of baby or indeed of Down's syndrome. So whilst life might begin as a baby the moment I begin to describe that baby in terms of 'girl' or boy' I am immediately putting down a division. What I think Deleuze and Guattari are willing me to do is to acknowledge the work that concepts do, including the concept of a boy with Down's syndrome. As they note concepts are 'bricks' that can be used to build the courthouse of reason. But concepts like bricks can also be thrown' (Deleuze, 1988: 127). So, rather than representing the world as a certainty or fact, they can also be immersed in 'a changing state of things' where ... + blanket + plastic alligator + Lego bricks + warm hands... are all caught in constant flux where difference and identity are in molecular relationship.



## 13 So What?

'Tree' stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end; they have a linear progression, and tell a story about growth, about achievement, about upwardness... Rhizome stories, narratives, literature, on the other hand (or limb) don't have these delimited starting and ending points. They are about a maze of surface connections, rather than about depth and height; they make the statement 'and...and...and ...' rather than 'to be', as they show connections between events and people and ideas without necessarily offering any causative explanations or directions for those connections... So. No ending, no conclusion. The writing just s t o p s (Klages, 2006: 177).

### A messy affair

This plateau is an attempt to bring down the curtains where I (re)trace my footsteps; trying to map out the pattern(s) they imprint; making sense of the journey I have travelled right from the 'beginning' – a reflection on the research journey where I look back at my initial thoughts so as to see how my assumptions and beliefs were challenged and also what persuaded me to new understandings about belonging and identity.

It was chaotic when I started, messier in the middle and intriguing when I finished – with no tidy closure. Thus, whilst this plateau is an attempt at closing, I will, by no means, claim to present conclusions. Rather I will put forward some reflections and introspections on the partial understanding (or is it a claim to understanding?) of this intriguing cog of human life – belonging and identity. As echoed by Popper (1963: xii) 'we can never know for certain, there can be no authority here for any claim to authority'. Therefore, there is no definitive conclusion to the subject of belonging and identity as who we are and the quest to belong can never be concluded (Davies, 2000).

When I began this journey, I endeavoured to unpick the notion of belonging and identity among early years children in two primary schools. Even when I was taking the first small steps in this long journey, at the

back of my mind I had some assumptions which influenced and guided my conduct and approach to this study. This resonates with Punch's (1984: 94) observation that 'where you stand will doubtlessly help to determine not only what you will research but how you will research it'. Where I stood then, what I was immersed in were my own beliefs, my own values and, yes, my own fears, assumptions and hope. These put a multi-coloured shade on and, clouded the lenses through which I saw the subject of my study. On the primacy of this lens, I reasoned that for children to have a fulfilling experience in school, they had to have a sense of connectedness both to place and people within the early years context and for them to have this connectedness, they had to have consciously or subconsciously developed some form of identity. These assumptions had their 'roots' in my own childhood and childhood education. As pointed out by Crouch (2010) 'memory is not simply 'placed' in time in a linear 'ordering' but rather 'exists in a net with others, open to being grasped anew in other moments'. Thus, there was a significant constant, perhaps unsettling, criss-cross between my experiences and the children's experiences and narratives – a reflexive intercourse which I display throughout my thesis.

### **A considerable shift**

In doing this research, I grappled with complex theories, my childhood memories, knowledge and experience of what belonging meant to me then (in Zimbabwean context) and what it meant to me now. In the process, there were shifts in my thinking which makes it intriguing to tell the story about the process of doing this research – a process that enabled a shift in the way I think about belonging and identity. I grew up in an environment which nurtured a binary perspective in me. Church doctrine which says either you are one of us and belong to God or you are an enemy – no in-between. Such binary polarisation discourses also operated within the wider 'community' in Zimbabwe. In the political amphitheatre, was the belief that individuals should align themselves to a

political party which means declaring an allegiance to either the ruling party or the opposition. At the same time not being a member of the ruling party meant you were automatically branded a traitor. These and other factors instilled in me a binary view which gradually lost traction through an encounter with postmodern ideas and reflection. It was not an easy affair deconstructing my deeply entrenched values and beliefs I had considered 'truth' in the greater part of my life. Thus, conducting my current research ethically meant practising self-reflexivity which was about constantly asking myself why I am choosing to see and make sense of phenomena in this/ these way(s). Thus, I had to become conscious of the energy patterns routed in my own history, my own culture and how these influence my perceptions of reality (Andrew, 2013). Such a research practice, notes Etherington (2004:32) entails 'writing the full interaction between ourselves and our participants so that our work can be understood not only in terms of what we have discovered, but how we have discovered it'. This enabled me to visualise what I had taken for granted which consequently led to a shift from a binary oppositional perspective to nomadic thinking.

When I made the first step I envisaged it was foregone that there would be an obvious beginning and an unambiguous distinct conclusion. But then this assumption, looking back, could not be further from the 'realities' which unfolded. My initial thoughts assumed a fixed, predictable subject while the 'realities' which unfolded suggested anything other than fixed or predictable. Belongingness and identity as a subject for study emerged to be ultra-dynamic; responsive to the individuality and collectivity of protagonists whilst being sensitive to contextual setting. It became 'clear' to me that there was not going to be a logical finale to the study. That belonging and identity turned out to be profoundly fluid made researching the subject complex. We know it is there, but we cannot quite comprehend it or grasp it in its entirety. It was akin to shooting at a moving object; an attempt to pin down the slippery and, at times, the elusive – observing children in different transitions, trying to capture glimpses of

belonging in-between. I could have a sense of its existence but yet was unable to put a finger on it. Like a shooting star, shining bright drawing closer to you and when it seems it is within grasp, it just vanishes before you can even make sense of it. Even so, like Estragon and Vladimir in the play 'waiting for Godot' (Beckett, 1956), I could not stop looking for clues of its manifestation. The best way was to capture it in motion. What this account manages to do is capture a series of moments-in-time between children and adults and between children themselves in the two early years settings. I consider these manifestations of belonging and identity as not fixed but consistently emerging under certain conditions and diminishing when these conditions are threatened. Because belonging and identity are 'never complete' but 'always in process' (Hall, 1990:222) a rhizomatic approach seemed so appropriate as it acknowledges the fluidity, fragmentary and evolving nature of belonging and identity whereby individuals are constantly discovering and re-discovering new belongings and identities and, at times, rerouting existing ones. Grosz (2001:27) argues that 'we do not know what a body is because a body is always in excess of our knowing it, and provides the ongoing possibility of thinking or otherwise knowing it. It is always in excess of any representation, and indeed, of all representations'. The body of knowledge of belonging and identity, as I found out, is expansive; going far beyond, and deeper than, the scope of any given piece of research, yet this expansiveness renders further knowings and opportunities for further explorations.

### **Grappling with the elusive**

At the beginning of this project, I encountered some challenges. That belonging and identity is fluid as opposed to being fixed posed some challenges in terms of how to go about researching a phenomenon that is constantly shifting. I needed a commensurate perception to appropriately interpret the movements in the settings and an appropriate nomenclature that would enable me to articulate this constant movement. My encounter

with Deleuze and Guattari; Butler; Bhabha and Derrida's work was a result of a search to find ways of making sense of the fluidity, multiplicity and fragmentary nature of belonging and identity. Perhaps, the experience of how swimmers learn to swim captures in a pertinent way my experience of doing the current research. May (2005) observes;

Swimmers do not learn facts about the water and about their bodies and then apply them to the case at hand. The water and their bodies are swarms of differences. In order to navigate their bodies through the water they will need to acquire a skill: to 'conjugate' their bodies with the water in such a way as to stay on its surface. This skill involves no memorization. It involves an immersion, a finding one's way through things... There is no one way to do this... (May, 2005: 111).

There are no prescribed, definitive, predetermined ways of learning and mastering the art of swimming as the movements of the waves cannot be predicted but rather, through experimentation the swimming body adjusts to the buoyancy and movements of the waves. As noted by May (2005) there are multiple ways of doing this. Just as the movements of waves cannot be predicted, so was my experience of doing research about belongingness and identity.

### **Possible lines of inquiry**

So what? Whilst I cannot suggest the best ways or step by step guide to belonging, I offer insights into the materialisation of belonging and the challenge of bedrock assumptions of understanding the world such as the day start with the sun and end at night which fails to capture the complexities of what it means to belong highlighted in my thesis. On account of the constancy of knowings-in-part, belonging and identity as a field of study continues to throw up further possible lines of inquiry. To build on and to complement this study, our understanding of children's sense of belonging and identity can be broadened and further enhanced by exploring a range of avenues or lines of inquiry.

Khalid's account, for example, presents opportunities for further exploration particularly in the link between ethnic origin and bilingualism and children's sense of being and connection in a cosmopolitan community. This can be studied alongside, or in tandem with, an exploration of cosmopolitanism in English primary schools. This will give rise to opportunities for further examination of the two-way majoritarian-minoritarian influence of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in English primary schools. The focus could be on the interaction and, at times, the competition between contrasting socio-cultural dynamics among children, between children and between children and adults in primary school contexts and how this plays out in children's, being and becoming. A better understanding of these dynamics might help towards creating and sustaining socio-culturally responsive primary school environments.

Sean's account, on the hand, opens up a different research avenue. From it we learn the significance of groups and group membership to children. Like in any other group situation, rules are in place to govern the conduct of members and to ensure equity between them so that no one has an unfair advantage over others and to promote a sense of togetherness between members. To this effect, further studies to do with the role of children's groups and group processes in their pedagogical experience would be a good development. This would help explore both the constructive and disruptive influence of children's groups, their structures, their life cycles and their life spans in school settings. Here, an opportunity also exists to examine the link between group self-regulation and children's sense of self and connectedness. In these studies it would also be interesting to examine inter-group interaction, duplicity and competition in relation to the role of the adult in those educational settings and how these interact with educational outcomes.

Somewhat challenging and, in a sense, unique is Gemma's story. Her parents are undergoing marital separation. What this story achieves is informing us of the impact this is having on Gemma. However, it would

enhance our understanding further if an investigation is made into the support structures available in schools for children experiencing familial upheaval and their effectiveness. In this case, observations of the impact family upheaval have on the children's sense of self, their relationships with other children and adults in education settings. Such a study would be worthwhile as this will help schools serve children in a more holistic way.

Another contemporary area of interest reflecting the challenges of modern-day England is brought to light in Khadija's narrative wherein the touchy subject of immigrant life surfaces. This is particularly challenging for Khadija and her family due to their state of near statelessness having had their application for asylum rejected. To seek asylum is indicative that the family does not have a sense of membership to their country of origin. Further compounding their predicament, the family's hope of gaining membership of their host country, England, is terminated. Thus, the intervening period between the rejection of their application for asylum and when they are removed places them in an unenviable hyphen whereby they neither belong here nor there and are being forced back to a country they do not want to be a part of. Khadija's family challenges us to (re)think schools beyond reading and writing where schools might be possible sites for leading the community in terms of negotiating community life. In this case researchers' interest might be on the welfare of children of failed asylum families awaiting removal and how this impacts on their sense of self and membership within English educational settings and the influence of this on their ability to meet set educational outcomes. Considering that the government is caught between its commitment to meet children's welfare and trying to prevent the perception that its 'generosity' towards asylum children is de-facto encouragement to more would-be asylum applications, researching this area would provide insights into the interplay between the government's balance between its political image and its ethical responsibilities towards the young, often vulnerable, members of the asylum community under its

care and whether the *Paramountcy* Principle is applied equally between children regardless of the background or immigration status in the spirit of the Children Act 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (to which Britain is a signatory) and Every Child Matters 2003. Equally, of interest to researchers would be these children's relationship negotiation in English education settings.

## **Curtains**

In the opening of this thesis, drawing on Shakespeare's (1968) and Donne's (1624) work depicting the world as a big stage on which a cast of characters play constantly changing roles whose effectiveness hinges on the presence and availability of others, I illuminated on how the interplay between these roles help cast the persistently shifting individual sense of belonging and identity. This longing for a sense of belonging and identity is spurred by the incorrigibly insatiable human propensity to connect and be connected to while preserving a sense of self. As the treatise evolved, weaving through the montage of narrative strands of belonging and identity within the early years context, it incrementally became apparent that there would be no tidy tying up of the subject, but rather an imposition of a termination of a discussion which has possibilities of further instalments open to future exploration. To effect this termination, I have to satisfy myself that I have somewhat sufficiently addressed the overarching goals of this endeavour and that substantial insights can be drawn from this body of work to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing dialogue within the field.

Perhaps the insights emerging here is the dynamic and complex characteristic of children's sense of belonging and identity and how its tendency to transmute makes the business of studying it convoluted. Methodologically, I harbour a sense of cautious optimism in existing possibilities for the adoption of a rhizomatic approach in qualitative studies of belonging and identity, especially so due to an acknowledgement of the



absence of clear-cut beginnings and endings. Conceivably, the other take-away for contemplation concerns the role of the investigator in the context of research. In my case, the persistent dilemma remained around the extent of my involvement; how much my presence and participation shade the emerging narratives. Connected to this was how I would manage the information I 'stumbled' on during the course of data gathering. This was particularly so where privileged and sensitive information was divulged by participants. Perhaps, far-reaching implications can, for now be deferred to further debate. But, in my case, I found myself drawing on my supervisors' advice and guidance to effectively negotiate allied treacherous ethical hurdles.

This study also brings to light further imbroglios to grapple with. It confirms the increasingly complex context that the early years is, not least due to the intricacy of threads making up the contextual fabric. Chief among these threads are the demands of individuality on the functionality of the early years as a learning community. Among the key protagonist on this 'big stage' are children and adults, all of whom possess complex individualities which influence who these children and adults are – their identities. Then we have 'spaces' on this 'big stage' within which the roles are played out, never mind the movement of the characters between these spaces, each movement leading to an assumption of a different role governed by different, often conflicting, sets of rules. The interaction within and between people is, in itself, convoluted. Compliance becomes key to the successful negotiation of these roles, particularly if the individual is not to become an island, in certain instances to the point that this compliance compromises, or at worst threatens, individuality hence sense of identity. Further complicating the role of compliance is the majoritarian/minoritarian notion wherein influence does not reside with numerical advantage, but rather with the balance of power. Thus, although fewer than the children, adults in the early years contexts are seen to wield disproportionately more influence than the children, thereby making them the de facto majority. Therefore, controlled deployment of power by the

adults yields a degree of 'self-governance'/'self-regulation' to the children. This mishmash of transmutations makes the business of studying belonging and identity similar to aiming at a moving target. There is an abundance of non-fixity, to such a point that, in this treatise, belonging and identity are 'captured' as moments-in-time, bursts of manifestations of belonging and identity. Without notice they show up and, without notice, they shift and transmute – sometimes simultaneously with a touch of spontaneity. This is the rhizome that belonging and identity are. Therefore, the study of the two is a long, winded journey on a big stage on which, collectively, the characters canvas a montage of different belongings and identities, none of whom, and of which, is an island. As at the beginning, this thesis does not claim to be a giant stride. It is a small step.

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