

A study of the role of fixed play equipment on relationships between five-and six-year-olds in an international school playground in Ethiopia.

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A study of the role of fixed play equipment on relationships between five-and six-year-olds in an international school playground in Ethiopia.

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Abstract

Lingering on the material aspects of the playground, this thesis examines the entangled relationships of the fixed play equipment with a group of Year One children. It draws on ethnographic observations and small-scale descriptions of interactions between the children and the material world of the playground.

The research was carried out within an international school playground in Addis Ababa at the school the researcher was teaching. It addresses the question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

Drawing on the fields of education, childhood studies, children's geographies and new materialism with an awareness of studies of childhood in the Global South, this thesis seeks to reflect on how the intra-actions of the equipment impact the children's relationships with other things. The thesis adopts a new materialist approach and builds on aspects of the agency of objects by authors such as Änggård (2016); Hackett and Rautio (2019); Knight (2016); Kraftl et al. (2021); Pitsikali and Parnell (2020) and others.

The three data chapters focus on the bars, the sandpit and the tricky trail as three distinct pieces of equipment found in a school playground. Each chapter contains a review of prior research; observations of the equipment inter-acting with Year One children; and pieces of writing that use Bogost's Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) in order to speculate what it would be like to be the equipment and suggest a new way to approach what is happening in the playground.

This thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of education, childhood studies, children's geographies and new materialism (with specific reference to playground equipment) and is written in a way that is designed to encourage speculation and the engagement of the reader with the playground equipment in a different way. It uses the setting of a playground in an international school to explore the agency of things and ends with some practical suggestions for schools on improving their play areas.

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A map showing the location of Ethiopia

Source: <https://wikitravel.org/en/Ethiopia>

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Kenna, Alice and Patrick.

Follow your dreams wherever they take you!



Glossary

This Glossary is intended to share with the reader my interpretation of terms that I have used in the thesis. This is not to say that these are the only meanings, or indeed the correct meanings, but rather they are the meanings that I draw from terms — which are open to interpretation.

For ease of reference alphabetical order is used. This has no implications for the hierarchy of importance with which I regard particular words.

abduction: ‘is primarily a creative process, which is seen as an alternative to the inductive and deductive dichotomy’ (Sántha and Gyeszli, 2022:175). An abductive approach was used in the analysis in order to be open to theories, the data and imagination.

affordances: the opportunities offered for intra-action with a thing. Based on the definition offered by Jansson (2015:167), they are ‘the possibilities for activity offered in an environment’. Affordances were originally proposed as a theory by Gibson in 1977.

antianthropocentric: indicating a desire to move away from anthropocentrism but acknowledging that I am not able to escape the pull as Bogost (2012:64) remarks: ‘anthropocentrism is unavoidable, at least for us humans.’ I have stepped away from the use of postanthropocentric as used in the field of OOO. Discomfort with the use of the term post is also discussed by Kraftl (2020:3-5) in his book introduction as he calls for a ‘decentering’ of the child. This is echoed more recently by Tilhou (2022) who suggests ‘undefining’ the notion of childhood.

autotelic: having a purpose in itself, that is: ‘autotelic practices are internally motivating in that the activity is the goal and the reward in itself’ (Rautio, 2013:394).

friendship: the interaction of two individuals who have a mutual liking for each other and whose relationship is caring, close and familiar. I regard friendships as a positive as Tympa et al. (2021:3) state ‘In summary, evidence suggests that there is general consensus about the benefits of having friends on children’s wellbeing.’

hyperobject: an object that possesses the following characteristics: viscosity, (sticks to things and not easily got rid of), nonlocality, (it is here but also everywhere — like the sun) temporal undulation, (we cannot see their start or end), phasing, (we can see only part of it) and interobjectivity (they relate to other objects). Described by Harman (2018:233-240), who claims that all objects can be described using this term, the word was originally used by Morton and is one of the key terms in OOO. Kraftl (2020:71-75)

discusses hyperobjects and explains how the simultaneous minuteness and vastness of plastic makes it impossible to perceive.

intra-action: the interaction of objects that are not separate and so intra-act rather than inter-act. (Barad, 2007:128) Intra-action is important ontologically as it indicates that the world is entangled in a complex web. Agency is considered by Barad (2007:214) as intra-action and is not limited to humans.

new materialism: part of the 'material turn' of writers such as Barad (2007); Bennett (2010); Lenz-Taguchi (2010), new materialism is a perspective that focuses on the interdependence and entanglement of entities — people and things — in terms of their relationships and intra-actions. Ingold (2020:77) defines it as 'a somewhat hyperbolic brand-name for what is actually a congeries of approaches that have little more in common than the resolution to take material things seriously. And 'assemblage' is at the heart of it.'

OOO: Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) is a philosophical approach that decentres the human and follows a flat or 'tiny' ontology (Bogost, 2012:23) which is liberal and egalitarian. I have produced speculative pieces of writing where I write as a piece of playground equipment and use OOO in my thesis as a research method. In Chapter 2 I discuss how I align OOO with the new materialist approach of the thesis as a whole.

place: a 'meaningful location' (Cresswell, 2013:7) or 'embodied' space (Thrift, 2003:92). A place is a space that has been given meaning by a person. In taking this anthropocentric view I do not wish to imply that I think it is impossible for things to also give meaning to spaces and create place but rather I wish to acknowledge that humans are restricted by the limits of our communication. The places that I write about in the thesis are those made meaningful and embodied by humans but I focus on the fixed playground equipment and speculate that the space might also have become a place for them.

posthumanism: an umbrella term for a range of approaches that emphasises the equality in humans and nonhumans and seeks to avoid the dichotomy (Barad, 2007:37).

post-qualitative: a broad term encompassing genealogies from posthumanism, new materialism, actor network theory, OOO, affect theory and Deleuzian and speculative philosophy. It is an approach responding to concerns about qualitative approaches that calls for a balance in our response to, and understanding of, data, methods, clarity and voice (Rautio, 2021). In my research I have used OOO and speculative writing with a leaning (not fully developed) towards posthumanism and new materialism.

relationship: the interaction of two or more individuals or things together where there is not the closeness and familiarity of a friend.

sociogram: a social networking tool first created by Jacob Moreno in the 1930s (Scott, 2017:14). Prof. Robin Banerjee has created an online tool for creating sociograms that is freely accessible from the

website: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/cress/tools.>) and is used by educators and psychologists (Roberts et al., 2020).

space: a complex term meaning many different things depending on the context and having four key features as defined by Thrift (2006:140-141) (referring to the work of Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu) 1. applies to everything 2. not boundried 3. in constant motion 4. not being one kind of thing.

speculative writing: pieces of writing, used as a research tool, which although OOO in approach also bear a resemblance to the speculative fabulations of (Haraway, 2016) in that they are pieces of speculative fiction with an emphasis on reality — being written from the perspective of an actual piece of playground equipment. They are written with a consciousness that in the same way (Nagel, 1974:439) says about bats that “I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those re- sources are inadequate to the task.” I too am restricted in my imaginings of what it is like to be another object by my own experience. Nevertheless, I have chosen to try and found that the activity has provided useful insights into the interactions in the playground.



Chapter 1: Introduction, Setting the Scene



The Key Stage One playground from a first-floor classroom

1.1 Where It All Began

This piece of research is set at an international school (Mana Barumsa) in Ethiopia and focuses on the interactions and entanglement between individual pieces of playground equipment and the children in the playground. The thesis describes research that took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and uses data from other authors, observation notes, photos and pieces of speculative writing to look at relationality in the playground. (My interpretation of these and other terms are defined in the Glossary.)

1.2 The Field of Friendship

At the start of my research, I was a Year One class teacher and seemed to spend a lot of my time after break or lunchtime in supporting children to sort out friendship issues that had happened on the playground. (I discuss my positionality in more depth in Chapter 3.) I can strongly relate to Clarke (2018:9) who says:

I have come to realize that whatever happens within my children's atmosphere on the playground sets the temperature for their day and disposition.

Friendships and relationships with peers are of great significance to all children. James and James (2012:108) write:

... going to school to meet their friends may be as important as, if not more important than, the education they will receive.

This importance of the topic of friendships and relationships is reflected in the complexity of assigning research in this area to one particular field. Whilst clearly straddling the fields of psychology and sociology, friendships and relationships have long been of interest to researchers across a wide range of fields including child development and education; but especially now with the current emphasis on well-being. In this thesis, I will refer to studies from the fields of education, childhood studies, children's geographies and new materialism. Within the field of education there is a clear call to schools and educators to take some action and responsibility for working with children to create positive peer relationships and friendships. Key Stage One (Year 1 and 2 children who are 5- to 7-year-olds) is a 'neglected' area of friendship research (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016:398; Tympa et al., 2021; Strelasky, 2022) and these authors call for a pedagogy of friendship which I hope to contribute to. (The use of the terminology 'Key Stage One' here reflects the current usage within the school and, although I sense that this language may evoke colonial overtones, I wish the research to stay as close as possible to the language used at the school in order to be transparent in my research relationship.)

1.3 The Importance of Friendships

Friendships are important for children as they help them develop a range of key life skills such as 'the ability to regulate interactions and emotions, fostering the skills to better understand social relations' (Coelho et al., 2017:813). Children in Year One are still relatively new to the art of friendship, although within this group there will be a range of skill and experience. They are developing their skills and gradually sharing more with friends as Early Years educators Tympa et al. (2021:2) explain

from the age of three to six, children begin to confide their fears and concerns to their friends, while one child tries to support the other morally, in order to cope with the events, the ones that cause them stress and fear.

Jensen (2018) states that from the age of six children begin to form emotional intimacy — this is the age of the Year One children in my research. The research of Carter and Nutbrown (2016) suggests that peer friendships between children support them through transitions and lead to smoother adjustments to the new classroom. Friendships allow children to have support from other people. Ladd et al. (2011:1434) researched friendship with children they classified as 'anxious-solitary or unsociable' and highlight that:

because friends provide support including affirmation, assistance, and companionship, (see Berndt, 2007), they often buffer children from adjustment problems including loneliness, depression, and victimization.

Research from the field of educational psychology states that the impact of these friendships is not just current but 'Childhood measures of competence with peers not only predict immediate measures of

childhood mental health but also adult measures of stability and life satisfaction' (Doll et al., 2003:103-104).

Although there are factors such as proximity that have positive influence (Faur and Laursen, 2022), friendship is a 'complex process' (Bergnehr et al., 2020:533). In my research, focus moved away from the friendship between individual children to the relationships that emerged between the children and the fixed play equipment. (The reasons for this are discussed more in Section 1.5 and Chapter 3.) From an organisational point of view, I was fortunate that my role at the school put me in a position of power and meant that I was a gatekeeper, this is something that I discuss when I look at the ethics and positionality in Chapters 3 and 4 and this allowed me access to the school and to the playground. As someone working at Mana Barumsa I was entangled in relationships with the place and people and in a Majority World country but from a Minority country.

1.4 Minority and Majority World Research

Mana Barumsa is an international school in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Researchers like van Blerk (2019) have placed an emphasis on linking the 'Minority' and 'Majority' worlds and my situation in an international school also straddled the two worlds. Whilst the school is in Ethiopia, a Majority World country, some students and many teachers come from many other countries, including myself, we are 'ferenji' (a word meaning 'foreigner'). Researchers such as van Blerk (2019) and Kraftl (2020) (both UK based professors) have called for more research that is explicitly 'Majority World' based and working with young children. My own research contributes to this international research although I am aware of my own Minority World views and culture and as suggested by Murriss (2022:2). I want to acknowledge this and I discuss this further in Chapter 3.

The research took place in the playground after my role changed from a Year One class teacher to Deputy Head (see Chapter 3). I no longer had my own classroom in which to research in, and, feeling that researching in the classrooms of others was not for me, I decided to focus my research on the outdoor play areas instead. Although the decision was made because of these practicalities, I also realized that one critical way for children to develop their friendships is to have time outside in a less formal environment, that 'Access to play is required for the development and maintenance of friendships' (Carter, 2022:4) and break or 'Recess periods provide a unique context within which children learn social skills, develop their friendship networks, and master conflict management' (Doll et al., 2003:117). Chatterjee (2005) has taken this a step forward in proposing that children can make friendships with a place. This seems pertinent in

the playground as a familiar and hopefully safe place where children can form attachments (Koller and Farley, 2019). Building on this and other research, Wales et al. (2021:188) suggest that 'The multiple affordances fuelled the children's enthusiasm for being outside.' The opportunities to interact with the things in the environment was the key factor. In her practical recommendations following research on how young children select their friends, Carter (2021:3) suggests that schools should 'Permit children to go out promptly at playtimes and to avoid encroaching on children's allocated free time' as this is seen as key to allow children the time needed in the freer space. My own research takes place outside, in a place that many children will be friends with, it is about the relationships between the children and the fixed equipment in the playground.

1.5 Entanglement and Posthumanism

As I began my observations, I became entangled in the place and things in that space — I became interested in how the 'things' in the playground impact relationships. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the terms place and space.) This entanglement came from me spending time lingering on what was going on — sitting still, watching and listening — something which is to any primary school teacher a luxury. I felt that I was seeing things for the first time. Rogoff (2003:13) explains that 'Like the fish that is unaware of water until it has left the water, people often take their own community's ways of doing things for granted.' Being outside and in that place, I began to observe how the children interacted and were influenced by the play equipment. How the play in the sandpit was different to the football being played on the grass and how the things and people intra-acted. Nearly twenty years ago, Burke (2005:29) wrote about the 'international interest' in what she terms 'material culture':

Currently there is an international interest in understanding the ways that the material culture of children's learning environments might be designed to enhance learning, social behaviour, health and well-being.

In the almost twenty years since Burke wrote this, there has been a shift and expansion of interest in this field of education and childhood studies research. I was challenged to start considering place, to change my perspective and to shift my gaze from the children to the playground after reading posthumanist researchers such as Taylor and Hughes (2016); St. Pierre et al. (2016); Barad (2007); Merewether (2019); Tsing (2017). My own revelation was somewhat like that of Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) who whilst analysing photos realised that despite their best intentions their gaze was anthropocentric. In their study, they ask us to shift our gaze away from the girl in the sandbox and to consider the role and agency of the sand. Their proposal is to take a relational materialist methodological approach and suggest that doing so will help us to consider the intra-relations of humans and non-humans. This experience of reconsidering research and taking a posthuman approach is echoed by Hackett and Somerville (2017) in their writing

about drums in the museum and their emphasis on movement is similar to my own when writing about the bars in Chapter 6. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010:540) have been instrumental in bringing posthumanism into the field of education and state:

In educational research, it might, for example, increase our attentiveness to children's strong relations to the things, artefacts and spaces in pre-schools and schools that are often overlooked in favour of the social or interpersonal relations.

Taylor and Hughes (2016:6) set out to explain how post-humanist theory has developed and define posthumanism a 'a constellation of different theories, approaches, concepts and practices.' Whilst reading, I was attracted by their use of words like 'unsettling' and 'flux' to describe posthumanism because my experience of research felt muddled and made me slightly uncomfortable. They state that posthumanism attempts to blur or muddy the binaries of humanism such as animal/human, body/mind, self/other (Taylor and Hughes, 2016:7). It also attempts to divert other binaries such as good/evil, right/wrong, knowing/unknowing and expert/ignorant. In my own research I see the equipment and child as blurred when they intra-act. The traditional path of research follows a single, linear path to knowledge but Taylor and Hughes (2016:18) describe how posthumanist research 'emerges' and knowledge is not discovered but rather is 'an enactment of knowing-in-being that emerges in the event of doing research itself.' I found this definition of research to be freeing as it allows me to come as I am, there is not a necessity to be an expert but rather a freedom to follow my own path or 'the scent' of the thing (Bennett, 2010:14). This more sensory approach feels much more real and is a much broader definition of educational research than I have previously been aware of. A posthumanist approach allowed me to take into consideration the things that are going on all the time but that I have put in the background as they are non-human. These are things such as the play equipment, weather, events and the atmosphere — excitement caused by the approaching end of term. Taylor and Hughes (2016:20) use active verbs and create an exciting and inspiring description of the enactments:

... a practice of the plunge: letting go, diving, freefall, surfing, swimming, waving and drowning ... to (try to) see the world as a grain of sand ... do away with binaries ... Plunging is a messy, ungainly and sometimes dangerous business: there are no methodological safeholds, handholds or niches for secure knowing.

The concept of 'plunging' and being submerged in the research is invigorating and appears much more realistic. It suggests that there is something out there for us to find out or discover and that we may gain knowledge this way. This draws back to the 'textured' world (Law, 2004:2) where things are entangled so 'this' (whatever 'this' may be) is included in 'that', but 'this' cannot be reduced to 'that' (Law, 2004:64). So, the children and equipment intra-actions are included in what is happening in the playground but are not all that is happening in the playground. In posthumanism there is no secure knowing and this is liberating in allowing us to come across something and to hold value onto each grain of sand rather than look for the diamond that it will make. St. Pierre et al. (2016:26) echo my own thoughts and views on posthumanism

when they state that it ‘promises educators a way out of theoretical, material and empirical structures that seem to strangle us.’

Posthumanism is a liberating approach. St. Pierre recommends that, as we abandon the humanist qualitative methodology, we read philosophy and go back to deepening our understanding of ontology and epistemology. She recommends that we ignore the familiar methodologies and act as if the inquiry started before we ourselves began. However, St. Pierre et al. (2016:28) acknowledge that ‘It’s very difficult to escape our training.’

St. Pierre’s writing encourages me to want to try a new path and also to look back to some of the philosophy readings that I have avoided in order to better understand myself, the past and the possible approach that I may be taking. This constant, dynamic movement resonates with my own research experience. The objects in the environment have agency or ‘thing-power’ and Bennett (2004:348) sets out to ‘explore the possibility that attentiveness to (nonhuman) things and their powers can have a laudable effect on humans.’ By focusing on the non-human, we can learn about the human.

1.6 The Research Questions

It is now obvious to me that you cannot consider children’s relationships to each other without considering the place that they are in, however, I undertook a journey to get to this position in my thinking. I would now agree that place attachments (Chawla, 1992) are ‘an essential part of human existence’ (Koller and Farley, 2019:491). (Place is discussed more in Chapter 2.) I started this research as a teacher in response to questions I had about facilitating the relationships between the 5- and 6-year-old children in my class. As I moved out of the class teacher role, I realised that the daily discussions around friendship issues were still there although I was no longer having to deal with the repercussions on a daily basis. The opportunity, provided by my change of role to Deputy Head, allowed a different kind of thinking about the issue. Key to this was the move to research in the playground and to focus on the fixed equipment in the playground — a shift that I had not anticipated but which flows from my prior experiences. (This is discussed more in Chapter 3.) Humans are entangled in a relationship with the non-humans. It was this change in my way of looking that made me reconsider my initial research question which was:

- What is the nature of friendship between 5-and 6-year-olds in an international school?

As the research progressed, I became more interested in how the environment and the fixed equipment in particular affected the relationships rather than trying to analyse and describe the nature of the

friendships. In response to this, I changed my research questions from friendships to relationships and the questions to:

- In what ways does the material environment effect the relationships between children in the playground?
- How do the pieces of fixed equipment facilitate the building of relationships between children?

However, these questions did not encapsulate the entangled nature of the research as they seem to downplay the intra-action between the children and the equipment and the blurredness of the separation between the two as there is ‘a state of inseparableness and intertwinement’ (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010:532). So, they were changed once more to one question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

I have continued to feel strongly that, as an EdD rather than PhD student, I should have a practical focus and application of theory and aim for a reciprocal research relationship (I discuss this more in Chapter 4) so I also sought to consider ‘How can schools use these findings when reviewing playground design?’ One challenge for me, as a researcher, is to share this knowledge in a meaningful way with others.

The research ‘relationship’ is fundamental to my own understanding of this and implies a reciprocity that I will explore more in Chapter 3. The research process is not linear but as Pink (2009:42) says of ethnographic representation it: ‘involves the combining, connecting and interweaving of theory, experience, reflection, discourse memory and imagination.’

My research relationship is based in the Year One and Two playground at Mana Barumsa International School. As you have, most likely, never been there I need you to use a bit of the ‘imagination’ that Pink suggests and come and visit the site of my research in a school in Addis Ababa.

1.7 A Day in My Life

Although no two days are the same, my days have a rhythm dictated by a bell and the movement of beings. Today I am slumbering and silent as the dawn breaks over the surrounding roof tops, aluminium sheets sparkling in the light, dogs barking and the city and houses around me, slowly come to life. The guard walks around my edges, my ground is soft from the heavy rain that fell overnight. He does his rounds, concentrating more on the radio in his hand than me or my surroundings. He leans against the green metal bars that mark my boundaries, he looks down at the road and footpath below. He’s watching the first staff pull up in cars and enter the school gate. He moves, the radio is off now, in his pocket, as he slowly unties the end of the string of the green, yellow and red flags that

are hung around me every afternoon. The colours of these flags are the colours of the flag that hangs on the tall white pole behind me, blowing proudly in the breeze and though my flags are small, tattered and torn, there is a part of me that feels proud that I know where I am ... Ethiopia.

The guard coils the string in his hand as he goes, he unwinds the string from around the bars, which are by the slope - next to the hanging bars, he continues, past the slide and the climbing frame to the metal pole at the corner. The flags are down and more and more people are now passing me on the path. Some of them, smaller and lighter ones thud across me, not worrying about the squelch as they scream with the joy of being young, outdoors and seeing friends again. Other small ones plod in slowly, holding the hand of a larger one and cuddling up to them as they sit on the wooden benches that run down one side of me. The noise gets louder as more and more small things walk over, run over me. One or two of the big ones stand in the middle and watch. The small ones circle around them, they go along the wooden tricky trail, climb up the ladder and down the slide, swing upside down, the feel is happy. Then the loud metal bell clangs, the running stops, some small ones slide to a stop, some don't stop. "Freeze!" "What does the first bell mean?" Then, the second bell, more movement, most are walking but some run, up the seven concrete steps at my end, nearest the tall building with the big windows and onto the flat paving. More big ones are at the top of the steps. Other big ones move away and watch, some from the slope, a group of the male big ones stand by the railings, the same ones, day after day, they are old friends. The small ones stand one behind the other, some twisting and turning but most facing the building, the shiny marble steps on which today six big ones stand. There are twelve lines, six with all the girl small ones and another six with all the boy small ones. They alternate boy – girl – boy – girl. Last year they didn't do that, just 12 lines, I don't know why this year is different. Some of the small ones stand still, others hush the ones talking, others giggle, and he has just taken his hat. The noise turns into a murmur and then a whisper. The big ones speak. Today it is short, today the small ones are happy, today the small ones move away quickly into the tall building.

My equipment is empty, but there is not yet stillness, big ones with one or two little ones running behind, come down the path. Sometimes the big ones pause like those two now, they greet each other with kisses on both cheeks, they kiss the cheeks of the small one too. The little one pulls, it knows that the other small ones are already in the tall building but the big ones linger, murmur and exclaim. They are in no hurry, though the sun is getting stronger and I can feel the heat burning off my dampness. The two big ones stand under the roofed walkway that leads from the tall building down one side of me to the pole and smaller buildings at the end. Finally, they leave, a few others pass through, sometimes a small one by itself but now I can almost hear the whisper of the wind.



1.8 Reflections on the Playground

Writing as the playground was a heuristic device that enabled me to shift my gaze, and so my thinking, from the 'small ones' in the playground to the whole environment. The full version, and account of the whole day, can be seen in Appendix B. The playground in my description feels the weight of the humans and so I describe the adults as 'big ones' and the children as 'small ones'. There is the 'indent' left by the heeled shoe and the 'tug' of the grass. The children react to their surroundings and so the 'squelch' after

the rain causes certain shifts in their behaviour. The inanimate are not inactive or without agency. Writing this description of the playground was important part of me being reflective and considering the impact of place as Pink (2009:40) explains:

If place is central to our way of being in the world and that we are thus always participating in places, the task of the reflexive ethnographer would be to consider how she or he is emplaced, or entangled, and her or his role in the constitution of that place ... by aligning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more with theirs, begin to become involved in making places that are similar to theirs and thus feel that we are similarly emplaced....

We listen to the place (Kanngieser, 2020; 2023). Part of this is a feeling of longing or nostalgia that may be caused by the enforced separation — I wrote this description of the playground during a few months in 2020 when I had left Ethiopia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was in England and I realised as I wrote that I was missing Mana Barumsa, the place as well as the children and staff. I had a longing for the familiar or a feeling of nostalgia. The power of place to cause such feelings and the realisation of the importance of acknowledging, identifying and living with feelings, rather than ignoring them, is part of my approach to research.

The observations of the Year One children (5 – 6-year-olds) that were part of my research took place in the two playgrounds that are used at lunchtime for play. The Year One and Two children are separated to allow them more play space and rotate between the larger playground, Key Stage One (5 – 7-year-olds) playground, on Tuesday and Thursday, and the smaller, EYFS (3 – 4-year-olds) playground, used on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. These two playgrounds each have a different ‘feel’ or atmosphere — that is sense of place. The playground in my description above is the larger Key Stage One playground that is in the area in front of the building. As I started writing about the playground, I realized that there was a lot more that happened in the playground than just it being used at break and lunch times. I realised how much the playground must see and how much it is a crucial part of the life of the whole school. This account of the day is based on a Friday when the children have assembly and Golden Time (a reward time when children usually have a choice of activities) to play outside. Not every activity happens every day.

Reflecting upon writing as the playground forced me to realise that I had a deep knowledge of the playground that was formed over the time that I had spent in and around it over my almost three years at the school (at the time of writing). As Christensen (2003:16) writes in her chapter describing how children create meanings through living in a place: ‘Knowledge of place accumulates and changes over one’s lifetime through inhabiting, being and becoming in a place.’ It is a knowledge that has been formed slowly, like the drip, drip, drip formation of stalactites. The day after day experiencing of place, of sights, smells and sounds has formed the knowledge that I have of the place so that it is something that I almost embody

– I have lived with it (St. Pierre, 2017). Body and place are entwined as it is through the senses and ‘with’ the body that we experience any place. In his book *The Fate of Place* Casey (2013:256) expresses it as:

Just as we are always with a body, so, being bodily, we are always within a place as well. Thanks to our body, we are in that place and part of it.

These bodily experiences enable me to create images in my mind that I can almost reach out and touch.

Pink (2009:40) comments that: ‘sensory knowing is produced through participation in the world.’

In order to allow myself time to linger and shift my gaze, I have used Bogost (2012) Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) throughout the thesis.

1.9 OOO in the thesis

Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) is a philosophical perspective that puts the object as centre and enables the creation of speculative writing taking on the persona of that object — as I wrote as if I were the playground. This is discussed more in Chapters 2 and 5. I have created a piece of speculative writing as each of the different pieces of playground equipment — the bars, sandpit and tricky trail. This is a huge shift from my initial approach to the research question — from the nature of friendships in the playground — to now reflecting on the types of relationship that are brought about through the messy entangled play of the equipment and the children. The use of OOO in this way is one of the contributions to knowledge discussed in the final chapter and has been used as a data collection method rather than adhering to the theoretical approach.

1.10 Presentation of the Data

The pieces of speculative writing using OOO as a research method (rather than an approach) are one of the three types of data presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The other methods are observations including sketches and teacher interviews (all of the methods are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). The aim was to provide some triangulation in terms of data collection by having the pieces of writing, interviews and observations present data on a single piece of equipment. In these chapters the focus is to let the data speak for itself rather than add my own interpretation and focus on analysis. This is an important distinction and can be clearly seen in the lack of coding. The appendices provide full details of the research including transcripts of the teacher interviews (Appendix S,T and U).

1.11 Where Next?

In this chapter, I have set the scene and introduced the research question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

Moving on from here, my thesis tells the story of my individual meanderings and muses that came to light through my research relationship with the place, staff and children at Mana Barumsa International School, a pseudonym for a school in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Throughout this thesis I have included photographs which I feel are important as they illustrate the research, provide an insight into the situation and may count as knowledge, as Coleman and Osgood (2019:2) state in their introduction to their paper on a glitter workshop, photographs....

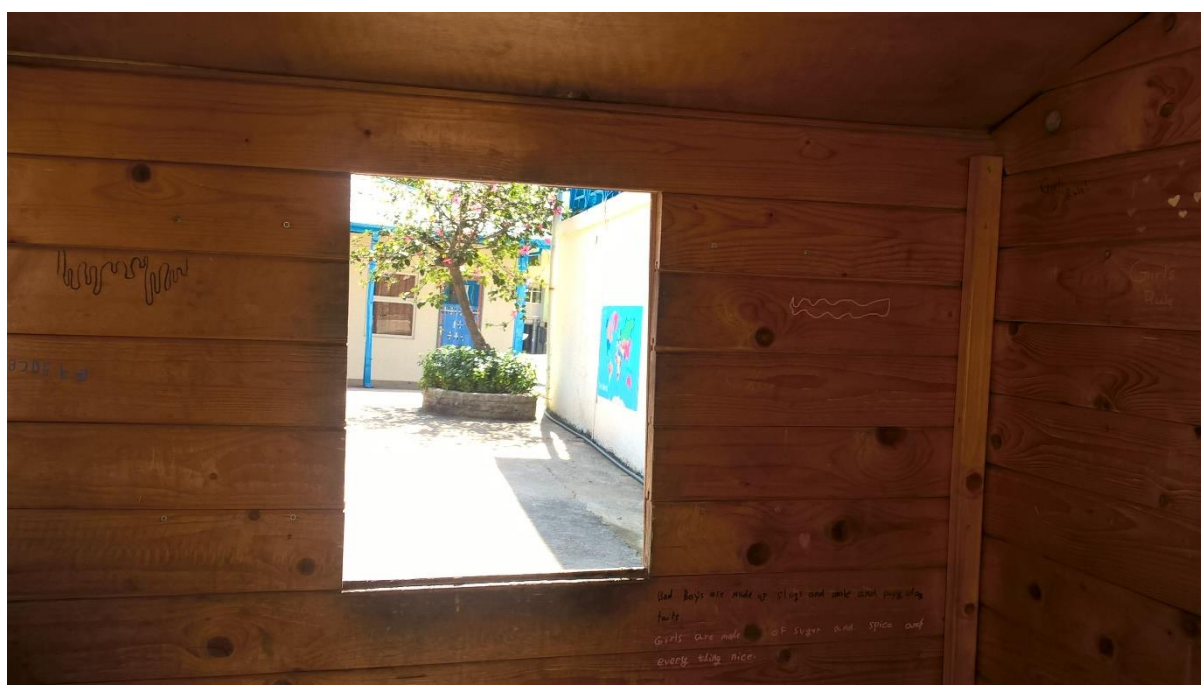
not only illustrate the points we make and give readers/viewers a different sense of ... but also extend what might count as academic knowledge production and circulation.



Wattled Ibis in the KS1 playground in the rain

In this photograph you can see the playground in the rain. The luscious green grass counters the images of Ethiopia often evoked such as drought and famine. It's not just children who use the playground — these birds are wattled ibis, endemic to Ethiopia. They move freely around the playground and the fixed equipment. In my writing I was constantly surprised and challenged by small events and I hope that as the reader you too may catch a glimpse of this and gain some insight into another experience of the playground.

Chapter 2 of the thesis locates this research in its place in the wider literature in the fields of education, childhood studies, children’s geographies and new materialism. It also introduces Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) (Bogost, 2012) which is a concept used in my analysis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Chapter 3 discusses the research context and my own positionality. Chapter 4 highlights the research ethics including the use of my ‘Research Hat’. Chapter 5 is ‘methodology’, a term that I use with some hesitancy as it seems to presume that the process is fixed and linear when my own research is messy and entangled. In this chapter, I discuss what I did and why I did what I did. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 each focus on a different piece of equipment within the playground — the bars, the sandpit and the tricky trail. Each chapter contains observation research notes, photos, teacher interviews and speculative, descriptive passages that use OOO (introduced in Chapter 2). Finally, Chapter 9 discusses some suggestions for the school in terms of my response to the research question in terms of implications and conclusions.



Looking out the window of a tukul in the KS1 playground

The photo above is taken from inside one of the tukuls (playhouses) in the KS1 playground. This research does not hope to show everything that is going on but rather provide the view through one researcher’s window onto the playground and perhaps hint at what is just out of sight. We are at Mana Barumsa International School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We are looking at the playground and how the fixed equipment affects relationships between five-and six-year-old children. I invite you to turn the page and keep reading.

Chapter 2: Literature Review



The EYFS playground

2.1 Introduction

Looking at the photograph of the EYFS playground at Mana Barumsa School in Addis Ababa, wherever you are from in the world, you will be able to already note some similarities and differences with your own experiences of *'the playground'* as it is recognisable or even *'unremarkable'* in form (Knight, 2016:14). In this chapter, I provide the background picture of where my piece of the jigsaw puzzle fits into the wider body of knowledge and literature in the fields of education, childhood studies, children's geographies and new materialism. I begin by commenting on the current field of childhood studies and, in order to reflect the context of the research — an international school in Ethiopia, I place a particular emphasis on the Global South. My focus is on relationships between young children and I reflect on the work of Carter and Nutbrown (2016) and other more recent authors on friendships. This leads onto the research on children's geographies and the concepts of place and space. Then I discuss playgrounds and research on play and movement. The lens that I consider these fields from is posthumanist and so I consider the other or more than human aspects of the playground. Here I discuss the work of Änggård (2016); Hohti (2016b); Pitsikali and Parnell (2020); Kraftl (2020) and others. Finally, I explore Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) and antianthropocentrism which all provide background to my research question.

2.2 An International School in Ethiopia

Mana Barumsa is one of thousands of the international schools scattered around the world, most of which are found in larger cities. Globally, international schools are growing rapidly in number (Bunnell and Poole, 2021). This research context is important as much of the current research in the fields of both childhood studies and children's geographies is from the Minority World or Global North (Beazley et al. (2018); Gough (2019); van Blerk (2019) Yusof et al. (2021). Crossing the fields of children's geographies and education is the relatively recent field of the geographies of education. There is a call for further research that is based in the Majority World, as Kraftl et al. (2021:6) say: 'there is, however, a need to challenge both the Anglo-centrism and minority Global North dominance of research in this area.' And more recently there was a call for more black geographies by black geographers (Noxolo, 2022).

Whilst I cannot claim to challenge the dominance of Anglo-centrism, my own research aims to make a small contribution to the research in the fields of children's geography and education as it considers the playground. The location of Ethiopia moves the research away from the 'minority Global North' but it is important to recognise my own 'Anglocentrism' and the nature of Mana Barumsa as an international and English-speaking school. It is also a school where the parents of the children are diplomats, in business or other professionals, that lead to them being in a fortunate position of wealth. Mana Barumsa certainly does not reflect life in Ethiopia for the average Ethiopian but it also straddles the different worlds of Addis Ababa and is both Ethiopian and 'other' — a 'ferenji' both in terms of the people but also the culture and material aspects of the school. From the use of 'blu tack' and other imported goods in the classrooms to the imported play equipment that I look at as part of my research. There is a complexity to researching in a place that is between things but there are also aspects of research from around the world that echo this experience.

2.3 Relationships

As discussed in Chapter 1, friendships (the interaction of two individuals who have a mutual liking for each other and whose relationship is close and familiar) or relationships (the interaction of two or more individuals or things together where there is not the closeness and familiarity of a friend) (both terms are defined more fully in the Glossary) are a significant research area and are important because of the many wellbeing benefits they bring — central to which is happiness. This concern is universal within a wide range of fields. In the field of education, friendships are regarded as important because as Wang et al. (2019:170) say - they provide an indication of the social abilities of a child:

Making friends, keeping friends, and being a friend to one another are important social goals and indices of social competence during childhood and adolescence.

'Building relationships' appears under the 'Personal, Social and Emotional Development' goal in the EYFS Framework (DfE, 2021:12). Whilst from the field of children's geographies, Beazley et al. (2018:600) reflect in their conclusion about the important role of friendship in providing some stability and support for children: 'with friendships significantly contributing to positive emotions and well-being.' Similarly the research of others from a range of educational subfields including early years education, linguistics and child development, (Carter and Nutbrown (2016); Coelho et al. (2017) Hoyte (2021); Ladd et al. (1996); Wang et al. (2019), suggests that peer friendships are very important for well-being because they offer emotional support to children through transitions and lead to smoother adjustments to the new classroom. Papadopoulou (2016:1556) concludes her research on space for friendship in a Greek Reception class by saying:

Considering the significance children attribute to friendships, but also the multiple socio-cognitive, emotional, existential and adaptive benefits of forming close bonds with peers, supporting children's friendship experiences in the school environment becomes a priority. We may need to consider ways of creating 'enabling' environments, environments that give friendship the space and time it deserves.

My own research addresses this call to focus on environment as I consider the role of the fixed playground equipment. My initial impetus was a reaction to my role as a class teacher dealing with children coming into the classroom and telling me of problems with their peers. As a Year One teacher, I could see that friendships were an issue for the 5- and 6-year-olds I was teaching. This was impacted by the large intake of new children into the school at this point — the year group increasing from approximately 50 to 75 children. Friendships are complex and need to be 'navigated' (Carter, 2021). However, studies of friendship between children of 5 – 6 are less common than with older children. According to Carter and Nutbrown (2016:398), 'Children's friendships have been a somewhat neglected subject in the key stage one school context.' Five years later and this same call was repeated by Carter (2021:5): 'Friendship remains an area which receives little attention in the literature, specifically in education.' From the field of educational psychology, there has also been a call by Coelho et al. (2017:821) for friendships to be explored in a more informal setting:

Future research should explore the relations and interactions of peers within other contexts, such as an informal environment, with the possibility of establishing forms of intervention that make it possible to foster positive interactions.

My research answers both these calls — being with Year 1 children in the school playground. Within the field of childhood studies, research has tended to be Majority World based, as van Blerk (2012:323) explains:

The childhood studies literature, which has been framed the way in which children's lives have been researched, has mainly emerged from the Minority World, yet much can be gleaned about the wider relationality of children's lives from the Majority World context.

It is critical to look at children's lives and their friendships where they are happening and not to make assumptions that what we will observe in one location will apply to another. This has now been recognised by researchers in the field of friendship geographies, as Bunnell et al. (2012:491) state:

The meanings attached to friendship moreover take on different connotations in different contexts and cannot simply be read off from a western centre or from adult-centred accounts.

Other research in this area looks at how different places have significance for children in terms of relationships (Korkiamäki and Kallio, 2018). Individual children are specific in their uniqueness and as Amri et al. (2018:241) state, may be categorised as being a member of many groups as:

Children themselves are not a homogeneous group ... Age, gender, beliefs, income level, socio-economic status, culture, race, disability, and family structure.

This is an important point to bear in mind, the children at Mana Barumsa are from wealthy families — Mana Barumsa is one of the most expensive schools in Addis Ababa. The children who attend the school have access to resources that are on a par with wealthy children in the Minority World. Any research context is very specific and the international school and children in my research are unique. Tatek Abebe has written about 'disadvantaged' youth in different areas of Ethiopia and in different settings many times over the last fifteen years including street children in Addis Ababa, begging as a livelihood pathway and youth protests in Oromia region (Abebe, 2020; Abebe, 2009b; Abebe, 2009a; Abebe, 2008; S. C. Kassa and Abebe, 2016). In a similar vein, Mulugeta and Eriksen (2020) have written about working children in Addis Ababa. These children are in a very different situation to those children who attend Mana Barumsa and will have life experiences almost unimaginable to the privileged children in my own research. These polar extremes are present in all countries but are made systematically invisible in majority countries and so seem more shocking. This case is made strongly by Kebede and Collins (2022:3), who state that 'the inclination of the national policy to place all Ethiopian children in one box is problematic'. There are Ethiopian children attending schools such as Mana Barumsa whilst 'the majority of schools in the Afar and Somali region are operating without basic infrastructure such as electricity, potable water and toilet facilities' (Kebede and Collins, 2022:4). I feel it is important to say that these facts are not easy to write and that I am clearly in a privileged position myself and though entwined in Ethiopia I am still an outsider. It is perhaps due to my privilege that I have the time and inclination to look at the issue of friendship rather than survival.

Research on friendships or relationships from other parts of the Majority World also tends to focus on human-to-human interaction rather than looking at the whole environment and so including things. For example, Minority World research from South Korea by Park and Park (2018) focused on the impact on

friendship stability of intervention by mothers in solving relationship problems between five-year-olds and Wang et al. (2019) focus on friendship stability between 6 year olds in a Finnish kindergarten. An exception from the Majority World would be the doctoral thesis and more recent book of Giorza (2018); (2021) which look at a range of incidents at a South African preschool from a posthumanist perspective.

2.4 Space and Place — Everyday Eventfulness and Place Ballet

Place is a key concept in the field of children's geographies (Holloway and Valentine, 2000:8). Due to the breadth of use, differing interpretations and complexity of the concept, there are varying definitions of the terms 'place' and 'space' but in this thesis I will use the definition provided by Cresswell (2013:7) that place is a 'meaningful location'. In other words, it is a space that has been given meaning by one or more people (Cresswell, 2013:10). This is similar to the meaning given by Thrift (2003:92) who states that 'place' is to do with 'embodiment' and being in a space. I would add that this is not to say that the space needs to be embodied by a human — in respect to school playgrounds I will state that these are places.

Schools are central in the 'institutionalized triangle' (Rasmussen, 2004:157) of places where children spend time (these being home, school and recreational institutions). Here we can observe how things impact on human-to-human relationships because children spend long periods of time with peers and formation of friendships is regarded as significant within education. Bunnell et al. (2012:501) explain:

Schools are important sites of socialization and social reproduction. Within such spaces, friendship formations and collapses are major features of identity production.

Schools are not unusual — there are schools in every country, every town and in almost all of these schools there is a playground — they are everyday places — spaces created into places by meaning. Linger on what goes on in these everyday places can help us think in new ways. It is in the everyday places and happenings that sometimes it is possible to get the greatest insights. We should begin to reflect on the 'eventfulness' of the everyday, as Lobo (2016:171) states: 'Playful practices that move bodies and emanate from the eventfulness of everyday life can help move thought in new directions.'

In my own research I focus on an everyday and uneventful yet meaningful place — the school playground. I take the opportunity to linger there and focus on individual pieces of playground equipment. In the data analysis chapters I draw upon the concept of 'place ballet', a phrase coined by (Seamon, 2015:391) who defines it as 'an interaction of individual bodily routines rooted in a particular environment'. A specific place facilitates certain movements and behaviours and creates different and unique possibilities. In

research on a marketplace in Sweden, Seamon and Nordin (1980:40) define place ballet as ‘a notion that joins people, time and place.’ This links to the observation by Knight (2016:21) that the movements in the playground are ‘an assemblage series of choreographic negotiations, reactions, considerations, and productions.’

When we focus on the ordinary we can see the extraordinariness of it, (Pink, 2012). In her doctoral research, Hohti (2016a); (2016b) used the everyday situation in her classroom. Her research was based on a series of entries into a classroom diary that was typed by pairs of children onto a laptop computer. The task was open-ended and allowed the children to write about anything that interested them. They wrote about everyday things and lingered on the ordinary. Hohti’s research highlights clearly the entangled nature of the classroom from the planned and purposeful learning to everyday minutiae that comes from having a group of people together — from writing stories to someone picking their nose (Hohti, 2016a:1152). She also recognises that the timetable gives a structure to the day and a predictability that allows other things to be focused upon. She takes a post-humanist perspective on her ethnography and her research journal is provoked by the references to small items to consider the complexities of relations within the classroom (Hohti, 2016b:86) explains:

I could also see how children’s lives are embedded in a much ‘messier’ entanglement of events than a teacher imagines when following a lesson plan. Often the pedagogical content of the lesson almost disappeared within the web of all the other happenings, in which material beings like chairs, small toys or food played a bigger part than I had believed.

There are many authors (Hackett and Rautio, 2019; Hohti, 2016b; Yuniasih et al., 2020) who discuss the ‘entanglement’ of the human and non-human. This entanglement with the everyday things in a ‘space’, the repeated movement, builds up in layers and gives meaning so changing ‘space’ into ‘place’. In their research with mobile playgrounds in Sweden, Ekman Ladru and Gustafson (2018:91) discuss how the presence of teachers and children changes the spaces visited and that by ‘encountering’ the space children and teachers are coproducers of place.

Place and space are as discussed used differently by authors. There are several studies on how children create ‘space’ for example, Kellock and Sexton (2018) researched the classroom environment in a UK primary school and Eriksson (2020) investigated how children created a place when a mobile preschool used public transportation. In my own research, the two playgrounds became places — cocreated by the children, teachers and the fixed equipment that is there. As places, playgrounds have their own particular feel and culture.

2.5 Research in Playgrounds

Research into playgrounds is certainly not a new idea. More than 150 years ago, Stow (1859:98) wrote about playgrounds in his training manual for trainee teachers:

The play-ground, or “uncovered school” as we have already said, permits the superabundant animal spirits or “steam” to escape, while at the same time it aids to the health of the pupils, affords relaxation, and secures contentment with their other lessons indoors, without the usual coercion which is necessary when there is no play-ground.

This seems eerily familiar in tone, if not words, to something that might be written today. The same year, 1859, the first UK legislation about play came into force — *The Recreation Grounds Act* and in 1877 the first UK playground opened in Birmingham (Woolley, 2008:499). The design of the playground is something that has been criticised by Gill (2021:19-20) as ‘depressingly sterile and consistently unimaginative’. He explains:

‘Designers have created a new lexicon for such spaces. Americans speak of ‘cookie cutter’ playground. Australians call them ‘plastic fantastic’. In the UK the term ‘KFC’ playground (kit, fence and carpet) was coined by landscape architecture academic Helen Woolley.’

Research by Woolley and Lowe (2013:71) suggests that there are three types of playground design: natural, composite and KFC (KFC is a term coined by Woolley (2008:501) to describe a playground that consists of a ‘kit of play equipment’, is ‘fenced’ and ‘carpeted’ — it has a thick rubber play surface). Both playgrounds at Mana Barumsa would be described as ‘composite’, a mixture of fixed equipment and more natural elements. Woolley and Lowe (2013) analysed and rated playground designs in one UK authority and produced a scoring continuum that reflects the relationship between design type and play value - natural playgrounds scored most highly, then composite and KFC lowest.

This matters because, in the UK, school breaktimes are ‘universally experienced’ by children (Baines and Blatchford, 2019:6) and so all schools have some form of play area. Key Stage One children have an average of 85 minutes break time each week and the majority of this time is spent in the playground, (Baines and Blatchford, 2019:6) making them everyday places to most people in Minority World countries. At Mana Barumsa children more than double this, a twenty-minute morning break and a twenty-minute lunch break each day — so a total of 3 hours 20 minutes spent in the playground each week. Playgrounds are governed, in Minority World countries, by a series of restrictions that are designed to make them safe (Olsen et al., 2019; Olsen and Smith, 2017; Pitsikali and Parnell, 2020; Pitsikali and Parnell, 2019) but also designed to provide the best environments for play. As Olsen and Smith (2017:1065) comment: ‘Children deserve to have outdoor play environments that are designed with intention of them learning, discovering, and enjoying.’ The separation of spaces designed for adults or children is not universal but a privileged Minority World creation (Satta, 2015; Fairchild, 2021). However, it is impossible to limit what goes on in the playground by legislation, as Knight (2016:26) concludes:

Children's playground play is designed and regulated but not entirely so: playgrounds are chaotic, complex sites where encounters and collisions work choreographically and pedagogically beyond our reach and control.

The regulation and legislation around playground design is an indication of the thought that goes into making the area safe but also environments designed for 'learning'. The playground has been recognised as an important place for learning and has been championed by organisations such as Learning Through Landscapes (2023). Acknowledging the complexity of this legislation is important as it explains why certain types of equipment can be found in school playgrounds — including the one at Mana Barumsa. My own research looks at how the playground facilitates relationships and the role of the equipment in 'learning, discovering and enjoying' (Olsen and Smith, 2017:1165).

A revival in interest in playground research was sparked by Opie and Opie's 1950s-60s research and continues to be so (Potter and Cowan, 2020). This research has generally focused on the humans in the playground but the research of Knight (2016) and Pitsikali and Parnell (2019); (2020); Pitsikali et al. (2020) have brought a different focus to playground research as the geography of the playground — the physical space is brought into question, and Pitsikali et al. (2020:160) suggest 'reflection on play, age and space as an assimilation rather than distinct elements interacting with each other.'

In my own research, I follow this 'assimilation' and focus on the effect of the other than human on the humans in the playground. The fact that playgrounds are known or familiar makes them at risk of being overlooked because they are everyday features of schools and neighbourhoods. The everyday nature of playgrounds should not cause us to write off the depth and complexity of playgrounds as a place, as Pink (2012:14) says: 'to understand everyday life we need to acknowledge that it is neither static nor necessarily mundane'. Indeed in looking at playgrounds from a post-human perspective this becomes irrelevant as Knight (2016:14) explains:

A new materialist theorization of playgrounds sees that the child and play equipment are only part of larger, complex, sensorial, atmospheric, corporeal, and temporal assemblages that include objects, times, lights, atmospheres, and animal/human/creature bodies. Through a new materialist reading commonplace playgrounds lose their banality and regularity.

School playgrounds are places slightly separate from the usual goings on of the school. Though adults are present, they are less controlled and different activities and relationships are allowed. Potter and Cowan (2020:251) explain:

Socially, playtimes are positioned as moments outside of formal teaching, with adults (if present) usually acting in a supervisory capacity, and the majority of social interaction happening between children. While still constrained by adults in several ways (e.g. duration of playtimes, enforcement of school rules, physical boundaries such as fences), playtime arguably gives children greater freedom to draw from their wide ranging experiences than inside classrooms, where particular modes (e.g. linguistic) and forms of meaning-making (such as canonical knowledge given priority in the curriculum) are valued above others (e.g. knowledge of global media and folklore).

The relative freedom from adult constraints means that playtimes are an opportunity for children to develop relationships and interact more on their own terms — perhaps more authentically (Pearce and Bailey, 2011) — although, of course, still supervised and under the control by teachers and school rules. This adult supervision has been voiced as an issue of concern by other researchers (Woolley, 2015; Thomson, 2004) who suggest this controls children and limits where and how they can play — encouraging physical or social activities but negating other forms of play. (This is a topic I return to in Chapter 6 where I discuss comments in the teacher interview about imaginative play.) In the National Breaktime Survey (Baines and Blatchford, 2019:11) report that evidence:

strongly suggests that breaktimes are important sites for peer interaction and for the development of personal, social, cognitive and emotional understanding and skills.

Within the context of Mana Barumsa, the playtime allows children to mix across the three Year One classes and form new relationships as well as strengthening existing ones. The playground provides an opportunity to observe and begin to understand some of the complexities of children's relationships. Despite the growing amount of research in the playground with children as co-producers there remains an awareness that more could be done in particular in settings that are culturally diverse, such as the one at Mana Barumsa. Streelasky (2022:15) says:

Finally, due to the changing global landscape, future research focusing on how young children develop friendships in culturally, linguistically, and economically super-diverse classrooms is needed to provide a broader perspective on children's socialization in contemporary classrooms.

There is a wealth of research from playgrounds around the world: Engelen et al. (2018)'s research in Sydney focused on the use of 'loose materials' in the playgrounds to engage the children; Potter and Cowan (2020) use a similar research setting, their research focuses on the use of games and activities in the playground and is much more human based and Snow et al. (2019) focus on the activities that girls desired in the playground. More recently, the research of Pitsikali and Parnell (2020) focuses on the fences in playgrounds in Athens (which I discuss more in Chapter 7, on the sandpit.) There is a growing field of co-produced research by and with children as to what should be in playgrounds. Jansson (2015:177) concluded her Swedish research interviewing children on playgrounds with a call for children to be involved in playground management decisions at a local level. Meanwhile, in a Scottish study by Hayball et al. (2018) on children's perceptions of their local environment, children not only collected the data but analysed their images with the aim of facilitating more child led research. Giorza (2021) gives an example of the importance of objects in her research on the intra-actions of pre-schoolers with objects in a public park, where finding a pen and a floating piece of paper, create unexpected entanglements. The role of objects is often unnoticed as we see only what we expect and so, when we take time to linger and notice, what we find can surprise us. Writing about the playground, (Knight, 2016:18) describes the complex intra-actions occurring:

In the playground corporeal, material, and sensation(al) encounterings perform corporeal, material, and sensation(al) choreographies: bodies tense, stretch, and move, temperatures change, shadows and sunlight travel, equipment shifts, atmospheres adjust, and plants and creatures intercept.

2.6 Humans and Others

When explaining my research, I am struck that my approach is still very anthropocentric as I am focused on doing what I feel is best for the children. However, I acknowledge the power and agency of the non-human and the insights that a different way of looking at ‘things’ can give insights. I feel resonance with Jane Bennett who, in her talk at the Vera List Center (Bennett, 2011) on her research on ‘thing power’ (a definition can be found in Bennett (2010:17) and hoarding, explained:

I don’t describe it as a post-human project, quite to the contrary it is my conviction that to really understand social practices ... it’s necessary to understand the non-human components that are always at work inside them.

Bennett states that in order to understand the humans or ‘social practices’ then it is also necessary to understand the things — in my case the fixed playground equipment. I feel that my own research is not post-human as I value humans above things. I hope that by looking at the research from an antianthropocentric viewpoint (as discussed in 2.11) it illuminates the human-to-human relationships in the playground in a different way. In particular, I consider the fixed play equipment. Graham et al. (2022:14) note that:

Objects in the environment are not inanimate features to which we ascribe an abstract concept but are meaningful in a sense that they ‘engage’ with us, indicating how we can interact effectively with them.

My research in the playground seeks to address this interaction between things and people in the playground and hence a starting point is to look at the post-human in play.

2.7 Play and Movement

Play is a complex concept — Hughes (2012:97) states that there are 16 different types of play but this is likely not to be exhaustive. There is a significant body of research (Änggård, 2016; Hackett and Rautio, 2019; Rautio, 2013; Yuniasih et al., 2020; MacRae, 2012) on the impact of things on children’s play. In MacRae (2012) the ‘lifeless baby doll’ calls out to the children and to her and causes unexpected reactions and behaviour. This intra-action demonstrates a blurring of the boundaries between adult and child as well as person and thing. In a similar vein, Änggård (2016:84) has looked at children’s play from a posthumanist perspective in reaction to the anthropocentric view of humans being the only agents in an environment. Änggård (2016) uses an interesting combination of Barad’s agential realism, where she highlights ‘intra-action’, and Piaget’s play classification, which is part of his theory of development,

referring to symbolic and practice (or sensori-motor) play. In her analysis of children aged 6-8 years old, in two Swedish schools with outdoor education, Änggård (2016) focused on the materiality of natural items and the environment and analysed the interaction of individual children with stones and a large smooth rock. Although Änggård (2016:84) makes some reference to the interaction of the children:

The sliding is made into a collective game. Verbal conversation, however, does not seem important in this activity. The communication between the children is mainly embodied and non-verbal. The children communicate through their bodies, the noises they make, laughter and screams.

Änggård is merely hinting at another dimension of the data from the video recording and the focus remains on the human to non-human interaction and in particular the agency of materials and the response of the child. It is in this gap that my own particular research falls. In this research I focus on how the material environment and inter-actions with the non-human affect human-to-human relationships. So, referring to the first example of the group of children sliding (Änggård, 2016:84), I would like to focus on how the inter-action with the material as the children slid down the rock facilitated the relationships between children. In the example with Fanny and Diana building a house (Änggård, 2016:85), I would like to discuss how the interaction with the materials to build the houses impacted the relationship of Fanny and Diana. In an earlier paper Änggård (2015:2) focuses more on the camera itself and how this acts upon the situation and changes things. In her writing based on research with children in museums, Hackett (2015) highlights the multimodal meaning making that occurs and gives an example of interactions with a large stuffed bear. Marco, the bear has agency as one of the children says 'he's tickling me' (Hackett, 2015:79). Focusing on materials rather than objects, the research of Rautio (2013) and Kind (2014) draws attention to the autotelic properties of materials such as stone, sand and water. Whilst research by Carter and Bath (2018) on 'object friends' highlights how things can take on the role of friends and suggest that they offer affordances to children. They also look at the role of objects in lone play which is something that I discuss further in Chapter 8 when reflecting at the tricky trail. In my own research, I am interested in how the 'things' react and have agency and how this then effects the human-to-human relationships. Movement is key to play as highlighted by the research of Hackett (2015); Myrstad et al. (2022) and others. One way that we can capture this is through the use of mapping as Knight (2016:26) explains:

Mapping playgrounds helps capture, through partial recordings, the playground as a constantly shifting, unpredictable assemblage of aspects, objects, and movements. These unpredictable assemblages acknowledge the presence of, albeit ironic, pathologizing play discourses that declare children need time outside to engage in free play, but in places that are carefully designed and regulated. Thinking of playgrounds as unpredictable assemblages removes the filters that block out everything except human activity and takes notice of the sensorial, material, and corporeal.

The movement in the playground in my own research is shown by observational sketches (as discussed in Chapter 5) and used in the data analysis (Chapters 6 - 8).

2.8 Shifting our Gaze and Posthumanism in the Playground

When we are researching children perhaps it is a natural assumption to focus on the child. However, if we shift our gaze and look rather on the things and the interactions of the child with those things we can gain new insights as Sørensen and Franck (2021:698) explain:

We demonstrate how dispensing ‘the child’ as primary object of analysis will not abandon the child per se but may rather offer new insights into and alternative understandings of how various aspects of childhood can be enacted and experienced by including non-humans as actors.

Most playgrounds are full of objects — things — pieces of equipment — it is these that make the playground a place of learning and exploration for children. In my research, I shift my gaze away from the children in the playground to the things. Knight (2019:4) explains how research on the playground can shift from a humanist to posthumanist vision:

Playgrounds are understood as obvious play spaces, a particular type of pedagogic site for children to build social relationships, play, and undertake physical activity. Dislocating from a humanist vision of play, a posthuman reading of play in urban commonplaces takes notice of the energies and activities occurring in all manner of spaces beyond a simple interaction between child and play equipment. Factors such as surfaces, light, time, animals, birds, sounds, gestures, shade, and rain are seen to possess playful agency. Playing becomes clusters of choreographic, pedagogic intra-actions, bringing about a rethinking and rearticulation of “lively playing” as a complex series of entangled movements, affects, and sensations across vast scale and durational differences.

Looking through a posthuman lens we can see that there are a number of factors interplaying to form the choreography (Knight, 2016) of entangled movement so that it is ‘beyond a simple interaction’ between child and equipment. It is this interaction that I place at the centre of my research and one method I use is speculative writing using OOO.

2.9 Bogost, Harman, Bryant and OOO

Originating in the discipline of Philosophy, Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) is a move away from seeing humans as the only agential force in any given situation — a move towards postanthropocentrism. OOO falls under the broad banner of relative speculativism (Bogost, 2012) and is driven by the work of four key proponents: Bogost (2012); Harman (2018); Bryant (2011); Morton (2011). It has been embraced as a philosophical stance by some architects, artists and game designers who perhaps are drawn by the focus on objects rather than subjects. I am aware that my own use of OOO alongside of my post-humanist approach to research may seem to be contradictory and problematic as there are clear differences between the two, in particular in regard to the concept of unity (Harman, 2018). Within OOO there is a resistance to any form of ‘mining’ (Harman, 2018:257) and the object in itself is regarded as equal whether it may be considered a part or whole — so in my own research, the grain of sand, pile of sand, sandpit, and playground that the sandpit is in, all have equal value — none are more complete than the other.

Post-humanism focuses on the entangledness of things, whilst OOO clearly asserts the presence of individual things including the characteristics of properties of a thing as being irreducible and separate (whilst being at the same time part of an object.) Whilst post-humanism acknowledges a flat ontology, the flat ontology of OOO is egalitarian — there is no hierarchy of objects (including humans). Bogost (2012:23) uses the term ‘tiny ontology’ where ‘anything whatsoever’ (physical matter, properties, marketplaces, symbols and ideas) are equal in being and presence. Bryant (2011:20) states this new ontology decentres the human and brings an equality to the relationship. The differences in stance between OOO and post-humanism are not always clear cut. OOO is often more liberal in the acceptance of the position of others. Bryant (2011:26) goes on to state that humans are entangled with objects and not superior to them and ‘Onticology and object-oriented ontology draw our attention to these entanglements by placing the human and nonhuman on equal footing.’ Similarly, according to Harman (2018:256) OOO follows the Aristotelean view of flat-ontology and whilst stating that OOO is not materialist (as it is not interested in matter and does not see matter as ‘doing things’) he is keen to emphasise the sympathy between Bennett and OOO (Harman, 2018:242).

There are strong critics of OOO such as Ingold (2015:16) who refer to OOO as a ‘blobular-ontology’ that is ‘out of touch with life’ and highlight instead the entangledness rather than separateness of OOO. This is echoed by Boysen (2018) who raises concerns about human ethics and responsibility if we (humans and things) are equally responsible and not entangled. Criticism also comes from authors such as Cole (2013) who raises concerns about the contradictions within the theory in the concept of relationships, logocentrism and how Harman (2018:9) division of objects into ‘real’ and ‘sensual’ is noticeably similar to Kant’s ‘noumena’ and ‘phenomena’ (Cole, 2015:321). To be clear, I do not philosophically align with the approach of OOO and would be criticised by any proponent as I stray from the path.

Rather, following Bennett (2012), I have sympathetically used OOO as a research tool and here should highlight that I have muddied my OOO as I gingerly tread a line between the swirls of new-materialism and the ‘coy objects’ of OOO that Bennett (2012:225) also negotiates. My own use of OOO in my research was not planned or even well thought out — I fell into OOO through a misunderstanding about a task set me by supervisors who asked me to write about my day at school. I understood the task to be to set out to write about my day from the perspective of the playground. The piece of writing in the introduction (in full in Appendix B) is this piece. Having started, I felt that this type of speculative writing allowed for new creative possibilities in thinking about the playground and how the equipment and children interacted. I wanted to present the data from a perspective that brought greater equality into the relationship between

the play equipment and the children and attempted to decentre the humans. In seeking other researchers who had used a similar technique I came across OOO.

In OOO people are not at the centre but on equal footing with everything else and where things exist independently of their relationships with other things (Pilling and Coulton, 2020). In my own research I have used OOO speculative writing as a research tool or method to allow a different perspective to surface and be focused upon — that of the object. Lindley et al. (2020) carried out several research projects using OOO and technology at the Imagination Lancaster laboratory including a video of answers that a ‘Google Home’ smart speaker might produce to questions asked it:

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhWcKMVwO2E>) and a role play of an interview with a smart kettle (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ3LHRQqDIc>). These projects are similar to the pieces of writing that I have done as they combine OOO with animism. In my own pieces of writing, found in the three data chapters, I write as if I am each of the pieces of equipment and so they are monologues rather than the dialogues of Lindley et al. (2020). The use of OOO monologues as part of the data was a conscious choice to facilitate speculation and a recognition of the entangled world of the playground. Speculative writing using OOO allows us to slow down and focus on the ordinary, day to day things where we can ‘linger’ as Bogost (2012:35) explains — ‘Our job is to go where everyone has gone before, but where few have bothered to linger.’

I hope that through the pieces of speculative writing the reader is enabled to slow down and linger in the playground and look at things from a new perspective. There are a few researchers who are now using OOO within the field of education, for example, Krumsvik (2020) who carried out research over several years on the use of ‘clickers’ to encourage participation in lectures, discusses the affordances of the device and how it was more than a piece of plastic. The affordances of playground equipment are discussed by other researchers such as Gill (2021) and in my own analysis I build upon this area. In her thesis Choi (2018) writes up the same observation of the kindergarten block area using three different perspectives — humanism, object-orientated ontology and new materialism. In her reflection on this process Choi (2018:119) comments:

However, the stance and narrative of object oriented ontology is leading us to acknowledge objects outside anthropocentric meanings, such as building, mathematical materials, non-commercial, or even open-ended materials decided by human perceptions and intentions. This approach allows us to rediscover the qualities/beings of the recyclable things and relations among them beyond the idea of intended materials. While the qualities of the objects and the relations emerged from the observer’s observations and sentience, the objects have more qualities and possibilities beyond what the observer knows.

As Choi (2018) writes, the qualities and possibilities are beyond what we know or have experienced. It is the discovering things beyond our expectation that is the excitement of using OOO and speculative writing.

2.10 Antianthropocentrism

Within OOO there is a call to be postanthropocentric; one of the concepts that Kraftl (2020:7) takes from OOO is shifting the focus from the child to the environment:

Yet I take from OOO, especially, an injunction to *lose control* a little: to remain absolutely concerned with children but to let them slip from view – to move out of focus ... I argue that in *not* noticing, in *not* paying attention to children at some junctures, it might be possible to undertake even more powerful analyses of that which matters to children.

When looking at children, Kraftl calls for us to adjust our lens, to lose control and allow our gaze to wander. This is a call taken up by Rautio (2021) and Sørenssen and Franck (2021:697) amongst others. Kraftl (2020:7) credits OOO and others for providing a ‘sense of humility’ and a repositioning or decentralising of humans — so that they are no longer the centre of our world or world view:

Contrary to what we often think and feel (at least in Western cultures), neither humans nor children are the centre of our world.

In seeking a different approach, Kraftl appears struck by the concept of ‘speculation’ and this seems to me to encapsulate the OOO approach: it allows a new way of looking at things without having to be convinced that you are right; it enables possibilities to open up and new ideas to surface and be examined, pondered or dwelt upon rather than automatically discarded. In doing so, it facilitates creativity and provides freedom. Kraftl (2020:63) is not blind to some of the possible difficulties but also states the positives:

Speculation can, of course, be a dangerous thing, promoting introspection, frivolity, a lack of rigour, narrow-mindedness and a blindness to working with others to seek evidence or explanation. Yet, as I argue throughout this book, speculation might also be expansive, enabling experimentation, creativity and/or alternative ways of looking at or inhabiting the world: a telling of small (and/or tall) stories that provoke further thought and action....

Kraftl moves on in his writing, from the idea of using speculation, to the challenge of taking a ‘speculative leap’ and considering the world from a different perspective — this is where the challenge of OOO begins. In a recent response to Kraftl, O'Brien (2022:53) uses a piece of speculative fiction which ‘can be a valuable practice of paying attention in order to see through assumptions and suggest possibilities.’ In my own research, I combine more classic research methods — observation and interviews with speculative writing to provoke new ideas, I suggest new ways of seeing the same thing and make recommendations for schools to put into practice. Kraftl (2020:75) asks the reader to consider taking the perspective of objects or hyperobjects (see Glossary) and asks:

what happens if – taking the speculative leap of faith that OOO asks us to – we attempt to take the perspective of non-human traces of hyperobjects, seeking to map their phasing?

It is the next step then to use OOO to write as if you are the thing and this is the piece of writing (Kraftl, 2020:187) entitles: “*I am aluminium: a litany (after Bogost, 2012: 18–19).*” In response to Kraftl and others, Penfold and Odegard (2021:61) have written about making plastic ‘kin’ and interacting closely with it and reflecting on aesthetics experimentation comment:

By attending to the material, its properties, and its potentials, new perspectives have emerged that dissolve dichotomous thinking about people/matter, standardization/creativity, and destructive/constructive thought.

Writing in their study on the intra-play of stones and children in playing traditional games, Yuniasih et al.

(2020:3) comment:

Taking the perspective of the material is particularly important to make visible that objects and materials have the capacity to act on and play with children, and make children act or perform in certain ways.

As I write speculatively and focus on individual pieces of play equipment, my attentive gaze wanders away from the children and takes a speculative approach that allows for reflection on the impact of the equipment on the relationships between the children. I aim to adopt an antianthropocentric approach and position myself against the tide of anthropocentrism but not postanthropocentric as I acknowledge that, even as I try not to be, I am not entirely shifting beyond the human in my focus and that, being honest, I would not actually want to.

2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the call for more research from the Majority World and with children in Key Stage One (5-7 years old) from (Carter, 2021) and others. I have noted that my own research responds to this being set in Ethiopia and with Year One children. I have considered the complexity of the terms place and space and defined place as a space that has been given meaning (Cresswell, 2013). I have discussed research in playgrounds across the world and then explained my shift in gaze from the child to the equipment. In response to the call from Streelasky (2022); Carter (2021) and others for more research on children's friendships, my own research will aim to answer the question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

Considering the research of Thomson (2004), I note that it is important to keep the construction of the playground, and the control and surveillance that goes on by the school organisation, in mind — so that we acknowledge the limitations imposed on play and relationships between children and equipment by this. One way that I seek to do this is by building on the writing of Kraftl (2020) and his use of OOO in writing. I have introduced my own use of OOO and pieces of speculative writing as a research tool. Through my use of observational sketches, I build on work on mapping by Knight (2016); (2019; 2021). I am interested in how sketches can be used to show interactions in the playground and the insight they these provide into relationships between the fixed equipment and children.

In Chapter 3 I move on to give more information about the research context, relationships and my own positionality.



The Ethiopian flag flying on the school flagpole.

Chapter 3: The Research Context, Relationships and Positionality



The Nursery or EYFS playground where the fixed equipment discussed is found.

In this chapter, I consider my own positionality within the research and the ethics involved in the many decisions throughout the research. I reflect upon the research ‘relationship’, how my own different roles at the school impact the research, discuss my own positionality and outline the process for ethical approval. I start by giving some background information on how I came to do this research. Then I describe the school — Mana Barumsa — with some facts, a photo montage and a dialogue with myself. The next section focuses on the relationships within the research and refers to work by Thompson (2015). As I started to move into the idea of doing research at Mana Barumsa, the school where I worked, where my children learned and where I had many relationships and memories, I gradually realised how ‘ontologically entangled’ (Murriss, 2022:4) I was in the place.

3.1 Where It All Started

My path to a doctorate started a long time ago ... In 1996 I was a final year undergraduate student studying Industrial Design and Technology with Education and designing a playground. In 2000, as a secondary school teacher, I became interested in how relationships impacted children’s learning and success. My Masters’ research focused on teacher-pupil relationships. In 2017, I started to teach Year One in Ethiopia and became interested in how five- and six-year-olds make and stay friends. In 2019, my

promotion to Deputy Head shifted me out of the classroom to look at what was happening in the playground. This resonates with St. Pierre (2017:689), who states about her doctoral research, 'It began before it began, and I had always been in the middle of it.' Nearly 30 years later, my cyclical journey has taken me back to thinking about the design of the playground. There is a link between these things that has led me to where I am but there was also a small spark, a moment of curiosity or as St Pierre et al (2016:104) writes, a 'jolt' that caused my inquiry to begin:

Still, some encounter with the world jolts us and demands our attention. It sets our curiosity to work; sends us to the library to read hoping to find others intrigued by the same problem; intrudes in our conversations with colleagues ("Have you ever wondered about —?"); saturates that liminal space–time between sleeping and waking; and, eventually, re-orientes our seeing, re-orientes our thinking, re-orientes being, so that orthodox distinctions fail, normalized boundaries dissolve, and things that are not supposed to relate connect and surge into new intensities.

In my research, I am now focusing on how the equipment facilitates the relationships between children. I was writing my thesis at a unique time where international focus was united upon the global COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of this upon my research was multifaceted: from cutting short my time for observations and making focus group interviews impossible; causing additional stresses both at work and home and in school, changing how things operated on a day-to-day basis including in the playground. I was living and working in Ethiopia and in a unique situation, I was either Acting Head or Deputy Head at the time. I am reflecting and observing in a situation that although I have now moved away from, my history makes me deeply entangled in. I find the idea of the researcher as separate to the research difficult to accept because I know that my own presence makes the situation something different to what it was. It is because of this growing realisation of my own entanglement in the world that I feel drawn to post-qualitative inquiry (Rautio, 2021) (see Glossary). St Pierre et al (2016:102) explain how the thinking of Descartes, and the dualism that he introduced, pervades the way we think about research:

A researcher (the subject) studies the world (the object) to know it (this is the epistemological project called empiricism). Here, existence has been separated into the knower and the known for the sake of knowledge.

I feel led to join those who challenge this dualism and this sense of knowledge having clear boundaries. Accepting this entanglement and lingering on the small and seemingly everyday things has become critical to my research approach as I discuss in Chapter 5. This has been supported by my growing understanding of my entanglement in my relationships at Mana Barumsa. I wonder if I chose my research or if my research chose me — being where I am at a particular time, I am not sure that the choice was really in my hands — of course it is possible to say that I signed up, I chose to move forward but was this simply an aligning of the stars that means that this is the one here and now. I have attempted in my writing to deconstruct and interrogate the situations that I observed in the playground in the three chapters on different pieces of playground equipment with the aim of providing insight for teachers into the

relationships between fixed equipment and children. By doing so I hope that my research will be the starting point for discussion in schools, like Mana Barumsa, around the world.

3.2 Mana Barumsa International School

Mana Barumsa (not the real name of the school) is different to most international schools across the world in that most children at the school are from the country where the school is based, i.e., most children at Mana Barumsa are Ethiopian. The choice of name Mana Barumsa for the school's name was made very late on in the writing up of the thesis as I felt unease at the earlier choice of name which was Cunningham. Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham was a British Major General who was part of the force that liberated Addis Ababa from the Italian occupation in 1941 enabling the return of Haile Selassie, the exiled Ethiopian emperor. There are several places in Addis named after historical figures from this time and Cunningham has a similarity with the actual name of the school. One of the reasons that I felt drawn to change the name is this similarity and concerns that the actual name will be easy to guess for those familiar with this history and so not entirely ethical. The other reason for the change is a feeling that by choosing another western name I was committing my own act of colonisation that makes me feel very uncomfortable.

Mana Barumsa means 'school' or literally translated 'house of learning' as 'mana' means 'house' and 'barumsa' means 'learning' in Afaan Oromoo — the language with the largest population from the more eighty Ethiopian spoken languages but not the Federal language which is Amharic. (Afaan Oromoo is the third largest spoken language in Africa and is written down in the Latin alphabet with the use of double letters to show emphasis and double vowels to show a long vowel sound.) The names of the equipment are given in Amharic at the start of each chapter because Amharic is the language most commonly used at the school. There is a political twist to this choice of name for the school and a signalling of my own allegiance to an Ethiopian cultural group that is perhaps irrelevant to my research but of course not — as it is part of who I am.

Mana Barumsa splits admittance into two categories: local and international. Amongst the international children there is a majority of Ethiopian diaspora children. There are also a significant number of children from other African countries. This is due to the presence of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa and the UN. There is a minority of children whose parents come from Europe and North America. The school runs through from 3-year-olds in Nursery to 18-year-olds studying for the International Baccalaureate (IB). It is a private, fee-paying school and so has children from an advantaged background.

The research setting therefore means that the focus will mainly be on Ethiopians in a Majority World setting. It is important for me to point out here that Mana Barumsa is not representative of Ethiopia — most children who attend the school are extremely privileged — arriving at school in chauffeur driven four-by-fours and living in gated communities in affluent suburbs. They spend holidays in Dubai or the USA and go to the Sheraton or Hilton hotel at the weekend to play in the playground or swim. It is a world within a world. Ethiopia is also not a typical African country — it is unique and proud that it is the only African country not colonised in the 19th century. It was invaded by the Italians and British troops assisted Emperor Haile Selassie to liberate the country (as discussed in the choice of school pseudonym). History is of course more complex than that but the attitude of Ethiopians towards the Minority World is unique and different to other neighbouring countries who were colonised. Ethiopia also hosts the African Union and is African in a way distinct from other countries.

Mana Barumsa treads a line between being a local school and international school — there is a dualism — the teachers are nearly all from other countries but all other staff are local Ethiopians. English is the language of instruction but Amharic is used in the playground and staffroom by local staff. UN Day is celebrated but so is Meskel (a traditional Orthodox Christian celebration of the finding of the true cross.) The school straddles the two worlds. Physically Mana Barumsa is set on a site in a central part of Addis Ababa but in a mainly residential neighbourhood. It dominates the area to the extent that even the local bank branch is called Mana Barumsa Branch.

3.3 Photo Montage

It is difficult to explain or capture ‘the feel’ of a particular place but in order to try and capture some of the meaning behind the playground at Mana Barumsa as a place I have created a photo montage of images. These images have been taken across the nearly five years that I have now worked at Mana Barumsa and I have selected them as they represent something to me about the research context. The montage is overleaf and explanation of the photos chosen can be found in Appendix C.



3.4 Dialoguing Between Different Versions of Myself

As I wrote my thesis it became clear that I needed to untangle my own positionality and one tool that I used to do this was to create a dialogue with myself. In this section I aimed to problematise some of my earlier writing about the research — in particular the fact that I am a white British woman writing in and about Ethiopia. This is recorded as a conversation between myself and can be seen in Appendix D. Going forward from this dialogue, and becoming more aware of how my thinking has changed, I have learned to be more aware of the different perspectives about a place and to stop looking for neat and easy answers. I am entangled in Mana Barumsa, Addis Ababa and Ethiopia but what I think, feel and experience is also unique to me because of who I am and the relationships I have. The implications of this for my own study is that I can identify a shift in approach to both knowledge and the power of things. My perspective is to no longer regard knowledge as something that is fixed and measurable and to see ‘things’ as having agency. This reflection has led me to recognise that I am in a relationship with my research.

3.5 Research Relationship — An Approach

I am in a complex relationship with Mana Barumsa through the multitudes of roles I hold but I realise that I have developed an attachment to the playground that I find hard to explain. The term ‘relationship’ better echoes the ‘feel’ that I want to have about my own research and emphasises the respect that I hope is in place. Relationship emphasises the between-ness of the research that it is me and the other — we are cocreators. Thompson (2015) in her blog article says that the term research ‘site’ should be avoided because as she says the research is:

...not simply the ground on which the researcher walks, but is also a place already occupied by people, social relations, history/ies and stories.

Thomson’s explanation strongly evokes the sense that the research is about more than the playground as a location but about people, things and all the inherent messiness that that involves — the friendship breakups, the power dynamics, the gossip ... the vast interplay and intra-connectedness of humanity. The term ‘site’ refers to ‘the ground’ and is commonly used in the construction industry. ‘Site’ implies that what is already there has little value but it is what is coming next that is important — as if the research will bring something more meaningful than is there already. There is a condescending air to the term ‘site’ which infers that the research is static and can be studied in a scientific way. However, schools are dynamic spaces — constantly changing in both big and small ways as individuals pass through and make their impact. In the same way, the term research ‘sample’ seems to imply a fixedness that does not reflect the reality of the research situation. As Thompson (2015) says:

a sample is a small part of something that the researcher has selected and worked on in order to illuminate the whole, it is a piece of something larger which the researcher will analyse – then the agency of the researcher, and the inert and passive nature of that which is sampled, are clear.

The school is not a fixed entity and is not the same from one year to the next as staff arrive and leave and the children transition year groups. It is not even the same term to term when the weather and scheduling of events creates a certain feel – there is a reason that the terms are known after events that shape them – ‘The Christmas Term’. So, it seems logical to conclude that we cannot expect the ‘sample’ research to be reflective of the whole – as the name seems to suggest. We take a blood sample and presume that the rest of the blood will be the same – it’s a closed system – schools are not closed systems but living and breathing organisms. The words ‘site’ and ‘sample’ make unhelpful, disrespectful assumptions and instead I hooked onto the term Thompson used – ‘research relationships’. My research epistemology is constructivist as I have built up my knowledge of research through observations, interviews and writing but primarily through my relationships. As a practitioner researcher, I am researching in a place where I already have existing relationships. A flood of questions came through my mind including:

- How can you carry out research in the place where you work without offending or taking advantage of people?
- How do you recognise your knowledge of the situation but not feel tied to it?
- How can you make your change in role clear to others – children and colleagues?

Within a school, relationships make or break the experience for teachers and children alike. I came to think of relationships as not the glue between but rather a main part of research, as Thompson (2015) states:

These qualities of a relationship (and Relationship) – mutuality and reciprocity, contingency, requiring ongoing attention in order to be sustained, indeed a kind of fragility – are extremely helpful in orienting a researcher and their research project.

All relationships require time and energy to be successful. In my research I am looking not only at the human-to-human research but at how the nonhuman effects those human-to-human relationships. In creating the research relationship with others there may often need to be a shift in the power balance particularly where, like me, a management position is held by the researcher. So, the emphasis is in ensuring that there is time for people to ask questions, time to listen and when dealing with young children, time to adopt the role of ‘observer’ (Clark and Moss, 2017:80). In the introduction to their book on Voice, Jackson and Mazzei (2008:2) explain some of the difficulties of ensuring that we truly ‘hear’ what people are saying to us, especially in a situation of unequal power.

Letting readers ‘hear’ participants voices and presenting their ‘exact words’ as if they are transparent is a move that fails to consider how as researchers we are always already shaping those ‘exact words’ through the unequal power relationship present and by our own exploitative research agendas and timelines. ... who decides what ‘exact words’ should be used in accounts? Who was listened to, and how were they listened to?

Ultimately as the researcher you decide what to put in and what to leave out, how this is recorded and how these decisions are made needs to be as transparent a process as possible. (The teacher interviews are transcribed in full in Appendices S, T and U.) In doing this, it is crucial that the power dynamics be identified and acknowledged. The research process itself may impact this as you can only be present some of the time, so you miss events. Time restrictions may apply pressure on both participants and the researcher in the quest to 'have enough' or reach a final answer or a tidy conclusion when research is in fact messy. These power relationships are discussed more in Chapter 4 where I look at ethical concerns such as me being a researcher and Deputy Head — a position of power within the school.

3.6 Location: The School Playground

Schools are frequently used for research (Rogers, 2020) and as a research relationship are a suitable location. The use of the playground, which for many children is a place where they feel relaxed and enjoy their time, means that children will feel comfortable and are perhaps even friends with the place. (As discussed in Chapter 2.3 there is a growing field of research in them.) In this section I discuss some of the difficulties in my own research in the playground mainly caused by my own role in the school and also the opportunities.

As explained, I had made the decision to move out of the classroom and into the playground because of my change of role to Deputy Head. I soon realised that as I was planning to be an observer, I could hope to observe children in a more relaxed situation and also avoid the teachers feeling uncomfortable about having me in the classroom for long periods of time. In her article on the differences between research with adults and children Punch (2002:326-327) deals with seven main issues and one of these is 'research context or setting'. Punch (2002:328) clarifies further on the differences between research with adults and children when she notes:

Adult spaces dominate in society, thus it can be difficult to find child spaces in which to conduct research. For example, the school environment is a place for children to learn but is organized and controlled by adult teachers. Research conducted at school should take into account that children may feel pressure to give 'correct' answers to research questions.

As schools are adult 'controlled' they may have pressures of behaviour or expected answers to questions as part of the pressure to conform. When explaining the challenges of giving cameras to children to allow them to carry out their research independently Burke (2005:31) explains:

First, one has to overcome the assumption that prevails within school environments that knowledge is owned, controlled and transferred to others by adults. This cultural knowledge of school is powerfully held by child and adult alike.

The playground is a place in the school where the classroom rules do not apply in the same way — children can run and shout — they have more freedom to move around — the expected behaviour is different. As Strelasky (2022:8) explains when writing about research on friendships in a Canadian kindergarten:

The outdoor space appeared to provide the students with a place where they could develop trust with each other, and collaborate on imaginative games that included rules and the negotiation of new rules that seemed to be understood by all the children.

However, although different, the playground is still under the control of adults who supervise the play and make decisions as to what is allowed. The decisions can sometimes be arbitrary and reinforced inconsistently. Children at school therefore have their own expectations based on their prior experience. As Punch (2002:325) says a component of the implications of the context is that children have their own expectations of adults and how adults treat them, as children.

Many children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society.

Whilst I acknowledge that there is a difference between ‘places for children’ and ‘children’s places’ (Rasmussen, 2004), it was hoped that, by coming to an area of the school where the expectations of behaviour and interactions differed from the classroom, children would be freer and more authentic in their responses. Within the research I also want to be aware of my own positionality from a cultural perspective.

3.7 Culture in Research Relationships

McWilliam, E., K. Dooley, F. McArdle, and T. Pei-Ling (2009:70) had to deal with cultural differences in their research, as they explain:

The interpreter said it was culturally inappropriate for students to comment in any negative way on the performance of teachers.

In my own research relationships, there were cultural differences as a non-Ethiopian researching in Ethiopia. Some were more subtle than others. An example, I discuss in Chapter 4 the reactions to children who walked past and saw me sitting on the floor — in this situation I was going against cultural norms — a teacher sitting on the floor outside. Even in the classroom, Ethiopian teachers sitting on the floor, such as during a carpet session, is considered unacceptable. It is these small cultural reactions that researchers need to be aware of. Ross et al. (2020:288) speak about the ‘unknown’ biases that the author/ researcher has because he is an able-bodied white male researching children with disabilities. In my research, I tried to become aware of the biases that I possess as an educated — white — female — parent — Deputy Head. Each of these roles gives me a lens through which to see the world — when you go to the optician, they

may put more than one lens in the glasses' holder to 'fix' your vision problems, each lens is there to tackle one particular part of your vision. So, the biases that I possess must each be acknowledged and addressed separately. (Although I acknowledge my parent lens, I have not explored it in any depth this thesis.) In Chapter 3.4, I reflect on how I have become more aware of my own perspective in a piece of dialogue writing that challenged me on my own stereotypes. This reflects the aims of ethnography stated by Campbell and Lassiter (2015:2) that it should 'move beyond understanding and towards transformation.'

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with my own relationship to the research and my research position. Starting with some history on how I stumbled into the research. I have provided some background information on Mana Barumsa and present a photo montage as a way of giving a more intimate introduction and to help the reader gain a 'feel' of the place. This is important as it acknowledges the entanglement of me as a practitioner researcher with the place. I discussed the use of a dialogue as a tool to entangle the positions of my two selves as an attempt to challenge my assumptions. I then introduced the research 'relationship' referring to the work of Thompson (2015) on site or sample and the 'school' as a research location and echoing my own place attachment. I recognise that the research landscape is dynamic and so what I have observed may not be replicable. I have explored the playground as a place of research as this is where I aim to explore the question of:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

Finally, I touch on culture and question the impact of my own culture and background on the research. In the next chapter I will look at how I wore a 'research hat' as an identifier and discuss power relationships and some of the practicalities of the ethics procedure. I highlighted the different roles that I held at the same time as being a researcher and the conflicts these presented.



Flowers and tyres in the EYFS playground

Chapter 4: Ethics — My Research Hat — A Gold Sequined Baseball Cap!

Wearing your Research Hat as a Teacher & Power Dynamics

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the process of ethical approval and the ethics involved in the many decisions taken throughout the research. I start the chapter by discussing my differing roles at Mana Barumsa and how these roles implicated me in different relationships with individuals. I give a brief historical background to teachers as researchers and then mention the more recent research of Hohti (2016b); Leggett and Newman (2019) and Westbrook et al. (2020) before describing the concept of my 'research hat' — as pictured — as a way to indicate to others my role as 'researcher'.



The gold sequined baseball cap

4.2 A Brief History — Teachers as Researchers

Teachers who undertake research in their school are in a liminal state or zone between two roles (A. G. D. Holmes, 2020:5). Historically, teachers as researchers can be traced back to the teacher action research movement (US in the 1950s) and research as part of curriculum reform (UK 1960s –70s). These developments in education are important to revisit briefly as they were responsible for the shift in the perception of teacher and the definition of their role, as Hammersley (1993:426) explains:

It was emphasised that the teacher is (or ought to be) a skilled practitioner, continually reflecting on her or his practice in terms of ideals and knowledge of local situations, and modifying practice in light of these reflections; rather than a technician merely applying scientifically produced curriculum programmes.

Hammersley (1993) discusses the advantages of being a teacher researcher (TR) but then goes on to express each advantage as a disadvantage. The unique position of the TR in being able to understand the situation and the history also means that the TR may have misconceptions that an outsider would more easily spot. The advantage of being able to use existing relationships that the TR has may also mean that individuals are excluded and included based upon this. Hammersley (1993:433) concludes:

There are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or an outsider. Each position has advantages and disadvantages, though these will take on slightly different weights depending on the particular circumstances and purposes of the research.

I feel that I had made the assumption that teacher-research has more worth because of the experience of the teacher and the relationships they have. This assumption, like many, is dangerous. I need rather to focus on my own experience and understanding of the situation. I found the blurring of roles demanding and there are other teacher-researchers who have expressed their feelings of the challenges of 'having your feet in both camps'.

Stenhouse (1975:148) summarised this as '...curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher....' and there are clearly advantages of being an 'insider' — you hold a key to access materials and situations that others would struggle to access. Many research projects have failed because relationships with 'key holders' or 'gate-keepers' has fallen down (T. Kassa, 2022; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Teachers in situ have the advantage of being able to overcome these issues. In my own situation, I was in a position of power within the school structure. I had asked permission of the school leadership to carry out the research, I obtained the consent of parents and staff and the assent of the children. However, I still felt that, given the power dynamics, there may be a feeling of obligation on the part of these. I discuss this more in Section 4.9.

What is yet to be established is how individual teachers cope with the demands of adopting two sometimes very contrary roles within the same school. There are several teacher-researchers who have written about the experience. One example of this is Hohti (2016b:75); (2016a) who began her research while she was a primary class teacher in Finland and discusses the liminality of her position:

Thus, from the beginning, the research setting blurred the divide between practice and research, between teacher and researcher and between the knower and the known.

Hohti (2016b:86) also felt conflicted in her role and expressed her feelings about the challenges of 'having your feet in both camps: As a researcher, I found it problematic at first to be involved in the current study both as teacher and researcher.' Leggett and Newman (2019:138) make the useful point that it is not only teachers who may research in a school:

We have thoughtfully selected the term 'PR' rather than 'teacher-researcher' as this expands the possibilities for a wider array of participants, including administrators, teacher candidates, activists and parents.

Leggett and Newman (2019) study is based on research carried out by staff at four early childhood centres in Australia and they discuss the impact of the research on staff professional development. Staff came to own the research and felt empowered. In their conclusion (Leggett and Newman, 2019:148) state:

Participants have grasped the idea that to re-search, is to look again; to see what you didn't see the first time, and to reflect on your findings in a deeper, more meaningful way. Thinking critically and being intentional about aspects of daily practice has challenged educators to look for better ways to make sustainable changes that are of benefit....

These 'better ways' or 'sustainable changes' are some of the reason that PR is considered important, indeed some teacher education courses have a compulsory research component. Westbrook et al. (2020) highlight research impact and making a difference. Taking on the role of unobtrusive observer is something that requires skill (James, 1996:317). Ross et al. (2020:288) speak about the 'diligent, continuous, uncomfortable reflection' required as a researcher. It is crucial that I reflect on what I am doing and the research process. This is important for me to state here as I want to continue to be aware of the impact of my own research.

4.3 The Research Context & My Roles at Mana Barumsa

As Deputy Head, or Vice-Principal, the concept of practitioner research (PR) was particularly relevant to me as a manager. My paid role at Mana Barumsa was to be Deputy Head of Primary. This involved me taking responsibility for a wide range of areas including assessment, professional development, curriculum and day to day organisation of scheduling. Every day was different but some of the tasks may be: carrying out an observation of a new teacher and giving feedback; covering a class for a teacher who is sick; meeting with teachers from a year group about testing or meeting parents to discuss a specific issue with a child. I continued to work hard to try to learn the names of all the children in the school and I am recognised out of school by children and parents as 'Ms Catherine'. (In Ethiopia everyone only has one given name — if other names are needed for identification, then a person's father's name and grandfather's name may be used.)

Having worked at Mana Barumsa for several years I also have some friends amongst the teaching staff. One of these was Julia who I taught in Year One with and so had known me before I became Deputy Head. This means that there is more equality and honesty in our relationship. It also meant that I feel a sense of loyalty to Julia and others who had known me for longer and value their opinions in a different way. To my friends, like Julia, I am 'Cath'.

The other two Year One teachers came to the school after I became Deputy Head so my relationship with these teachers is more professional. These colleagues know me as Deputy Head or Acting Head and this means that there is always a certain professional distance and respect. Some of the teachers, like Taitu, (a pseudonym) had known me before I became Deputy Head but are colleagues rather than friends. To these members of staff, I am 'Catherine'.

I have three children who have attended Mana Barumsa. At the time of my research, the older two were in secondary and so on a separate part of the campus. My youngest was still in Primary and so I am known to some staff and children as 'Patrick's Mum'. Patrick's year group uses a separate part of the campus although they are sometimes allowed to use the EYFS and KS1 play areas for special events. The play areas are not connected to my children but when I meet them, I still have the role of 'Mummy'. I have an ID card that I wear on campus. On the bus to school, I put it on and as I leave my office and walk towards the gate, I take it off. This symbolic gesture to me is when and where I change my role and stop being 'Miss Catherine' but become 'Cath' and 'Mummy'.

Most recently I have adopted a new role that of 'Researcher'. The tasks involved in my researcher role and my Deputy Head role were not to the casual observer much different — I could have been doing either. As Deputy Head, as well as researcher, I have a strong vested interest in the 'success' of the research, in whatever form that may take. I feel perhaps a greater responsibility and attachment as I am not simply walking into a situation and walking out — this is a criticism made of many researchers. Ross et al. (2020:288) speak about the 'emotional labour' required of the researcher. I can see that my connection with the students and my emotional investment in them as children in my care combined with my desire to complete the research to a high standard may be draining and bring significant pressures. The complexity of my multi-faceted roles at Mana Barumsa is part of my unique research relationship.

4.4 Reciprocity and Trustworthiness

As I stand in a space in-between, one role seems to bear more weight in terms of perceptions and my approach — that is my role as Deputy Head. The pressure to conform to a role comes from a range of places — students, parents and teachers — all of these have preconceived ideas about how a teacher or Deputy Head should behave. My then 12-year-old daughter told me "You can't do that! You're the Deputy Head!" The pressure also comes from within myself as to what I perceive the role to be and the standards that I hold myself to. For me this role makes it even more critical that I am seen by all to be trustworthy and that there is reciprocity in terms of my research findings having some sort of meaningful impact on the children and staff involved in the research relationship. Rogers (2019:10) explains how this affects her own research:

I was particularly mindful of the benefits I would gain from the research (e.g., a doctoral degree); thus leading me to reflection my obligations to the researched community, including the participating NGO. The study's reciprocal underpinnings therefore helped strengthen and maintain the research relationship long after the fieldwork completed.

In their research, J. Harrison et al. (2001) use examples from their own research relationships to highlight issues around reciprocity and trustworthiness. The story of how MacGibbon, one of the authors, gained access to her research relationship seemed similar to my own story — she had worked at the organization for some time and so had a relationship established with the gatekeepers as J. Harrison et al. (2001:328) explain:

I am sure that this relationship between trustworthiness of me as a person (rather than a researcher) was based largely on the notion of reciprocity, but it was also contingent on the Refuge construction of me as someone who would bring something useful to the Refuge organization.

I had taught at the school for two years prior to requesting access from the Head of School to undertake research at the school. I had gained the trust of him and others and even when the leadership at Mana Barumsa changed, I had a positive reputation and relationship that meant that I was encouraged to continue my research. I also believe that there is reciprocity as there is some expectation that I will be able to share ideas to improve the school. This has been echoed in conversations with new school leaders whilst I have been writing up. Rogers (2019:10) acknowledges that the reciprocity may also be a technique for accessing research relationships:

Giving back in this way may be construed as an important technique to negotiate gate-keeping, but as Tracey Skelton (2008) argues, we should respect and recognise young people's value (and time) to the research.

Research should give back to the children as well as the school as an entity. Skelton's paper focuses on 'young people' rather than children but several of the points she makes resonate with my own experience. Children, especially young children like the Year Ones in my research relationship, are in a position of very little power. Skelton (2008:24)

states:

In an adultist society we have power in relation to young people because of our older age — hence the age difference is a marker of power.

Research can also be an opportunity for children to feel that they are doing something meaningful, making a difference or giving back to someone. Skelton (2008:25) tells the story of her own research experience — being interviewed by a student teacher and comments:

Children often have few formal opportunities to give something back to adults, to people they respect and care about who are not related to them.

In interactions with children, it is important to listen and give them time and opportunities to contribute. Skelton's conclusion, which is echoed by others (Pahl, 2019), is that we need to respect young people and allow them to make their own decisions about participation in research. I am interested in the references to 'self' and 'other' as part of the research process and although, due to the pandemic, I was unable to use co-production (see Chapter 5), I wish throughout the research to acknowledge that I am not an expert but someone who is learning as I go along. This challenges assumptions as there is an expectation of school

leaders to be the ones who have all the answers. The same can be said of research as Pahl and Pool (2021:658) explain:

The word 'research' has a tendency to create a separation between the sub-ject/object of study, what is to be found out and the research methods used.

4.5 Conflicted Roles

I realised that staff and children had different responses to me in my differing roles; this realisation, and the acknowledgement of the possible problems that this could cause to me being effective in my separate roles, led to me desiring to have a visual symbol to others of my role. Certainly, I was then, and continue to be, aware of the differing pressures on me from the differing roles I have and how hard it is to make yourself step out of the path that you have already trod and feel comfortable in. In particular, I wanted to manage the expectations that I felt others had of me. In my early research notes I struggled with this:

I feel in my research that it is hard to get out of the Deputy Head or teacher role and into something else. There are certain expectations of me. I took a group of students out of the classroom to complete the research forms and we sat, for sake of quickness, outside of the building on the floor. A class of older students went past and it was interesting to note their surprise at seeing me sitting on the concrete floor with a group of Year One students (wearing my shiny gold baseball cap!).

Research notes, 27th December 2019

As Deputy Head, I was a new or 'unfamiliar adult' for most of the children in Year One. Clark and Moss (2017:80) refer to the work of Fine (1987) on the possible roles that 'unfamiliar adults' may take in research with children: 'leader; supervisor; observer; friend'. There were some siblings of children I had previously taught and several staff children who I knew socially through their parents. To these known children I was already either a 'leader' or a 'friend'. However, I wished the children in the cohort to regard me as an 'observer'. It was necessary for me to consider carefully how to obtain the position when my Deputy Head role within the school may automatically mean that I am perceived as 'leader'. At times in the research, I almost felt that I had succeeded at this as the children at times seemed to play around me as if I was not there. This, and also the active paying attention that I was doing by developing my ethnographic 'gaze' (Coffey, 1999:145), led to me see and hear things that I may have otherwise missed. I hoped to see some of the things that happened in the silence and stillness (Gordon et al., 2005) — things that a normal gaze may not linger on but pass over. Some of these things caused a conflict between the two roles I noted in the following example in one observation:

I also noted two boys who ran past me and one said, "I'm going to kill you!" and pointed his fingers at the other boy. They both ran off. At this point I was surrounded by a group of children and so did not see what then happened. I was struck at this point in the different position I was in as a researcher. As Deputy Head or as a teacher I would have felt the need to intervene and speak to the boys about the appropriate use of language. This was not appropriate for me to do with my research hat on.

Research notes on December 17th Observation, 20th December 2019

My own use here in the notes of the phrase ‘with my research hat on’ indicates that I began quite early in the research to sense my differing roles. I attempt to articulate it again, a few months later:

From the start my role was conflicted. It was crazy hair day and I took off my wig to put on my researcher’s hat — the gesture was, at least to me, symbolic of a change of position and role. However, it was not as clear cut as I hoped that it would be. I sat with my gold hat on the side steps where I could see most of the playground. My position was also selected because I wanted to stop the Year 4 children in the top playground coming down the stairs and the Year 1 and 2 children going up the stairs. So, although I had my research hat on, I was undertaking the role of Deputy Head too.

Research notes on February 26th Observation, 7th March 2020

Further on in the same day’s notes I unpack more about how the wearing my ‘research hat’ also caused me to feel different. I recorded the putting on and taking off of the hat — indeed it became symbolic to me of a shift in my role, my approach and who I was or am.

At the end of the playtime, I took off my hat and went to speak to both Julia and Taitu. I asked them to remind the children of the rules for playing on the slide. I felt that I had a responsibility to do this after my observation. However, I also felt slightly conflicted and a bit guilty, as if I was deceiving them, I had been there as a researcher and I had used my finding against them. I am aware of the necessity of treading carefully. Overall, I feel that my responsibility to keep the children safe has to pre-empt the other conflicting factors.

Research notes on February 26th Observation, 7th March 2020

The challenges that I faced, and the feelings of guilt and deception, are of course not unique. Indeed, these feelings may have still existed if I had only one role in the context — that of researcher. I am not in a position to judge the responsibility and level of involvement that a researcher feels in a given situation.

4.6 A Gold Sequined Baseball Cap

I introduced my gold sequined baseball cap with the research – I wore the hat as I presented the PowerPoint that I used to explain my research to the children (See Appendix E). I have been aware for a long time of how what I wear effects how I feel in myself and how others perceive me – this is discussed by several researchers (Woodward, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2021). I first noticed that what I wore made a difference to the way I acted and felt at university when I was in the Territorial Army. Each weekend, when I put on my uniform, I stopped being a student and I become Officer Cadet Hughes. In my research notes I call this becoming a ‘different me’:

There is also a change that occurs when you put on specific items of clothing. This is something that I first became aware of when I put on a military uniform as an Officer Cadet. I would stand differently, as if the clothes made me become a different ‘me’ to the me that I was when I wore other clothes. Since becoming aware of this I can note in myself this change and feel that the wearing of the hat in some way facilitates me becoming the researcher – another slightly different me.

Research notes, November 2019

As a primary teacher, I had used the drama technique – ‘mantle of the expert’ which was created by Heathcote (O’Neill, 2014). Children put on items of clothing that help them take the role of the expert, so a paper crown makes the child Henry VIII and the child is helped to see history from his perspective. The

concept is simple – by getting the children to dress up and pretend to be someone they get into the role and become empathetic to the character. Other children respond by asking more meaningful questions. Once again, it is the idea of putting on ‘a mantle’ or covering that changes how others see you and in turn how you, as the ‘expert’ act.

I feel that it is very important to have a clear visual sign and this idea of a hat was stimulated from my teaching experience of using a drama technique called “mantle of the expert” to teach history. This is a technique devised by Dorothy Heathcote in the late 1970s and 1980s.

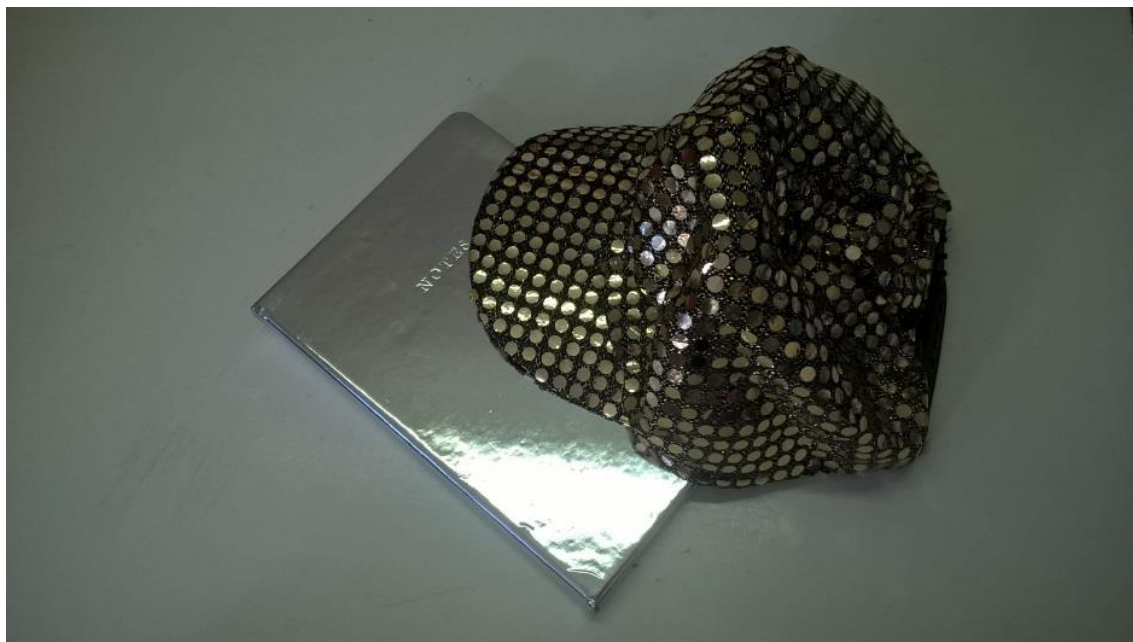
Research notes, November 2019

When I had a student teacher in my room and needed to observe them, I put on my invisibility cloak – a simple black cloak -which I told my class meant that I was not there – that they couldn’t see me. It was a visual sign to the class that my role had changed and that I was no longer in charge as I was not there! So, with all of these experiences behind me, I reflected on the power of clothing to make me feel different and for others to perceive me differently and I came upon the idea of wearing something to show the role. I realised that this needed to be something simple as I didn’t have time to change into another outfit and so the idea of a hat – easy to carry around, store and change between. I Googled “research hats” and nothing came up – I searched online for a hat that said, literally “Researcher” but had no luck with my search. I thought that someone must have had the idea of wearing a hat before and labelling themselves as a researcher. After a few hours of searching, I gave up and decided I’d have to find something else. Then in a charity shop with my son I saw the perfect thing – a gold, sequined baseball cap. This was it – my ‘research hat’! I wonder what the choice of the gold sequins is making me say about myself and if I have grown into that person? Certainly, I was then and continue to be aware of the differing pressures on me from the differing roles I have and how hard it is to make yourself step out of the path that you have already trod and feel comfortable in. As I began my observations in the playground, I wore my baseball cap. The hat itself became part of the research, a symbol, and both teachers and children recognised that I was in a different role when I wore my hat.

4.7 Reactions to the Hat!

Was it my research hat or the fact that I was sitting on the floor outside? Either way the students’ reaction and surprise at seeing me there led me to conclude that I was doing something outside of their expectations. This echoes the findings of Jensen (2018:505) in her study of sameness and difference peer relations in a Danish primary school. Jensen tried to be ‘least-adult’ (even changing her dress and not wearing jewellery so as to not have the outward signs of adulthood) but was still questioned by children from other classes about what she was doing there and was expected to step in as an adult if a child was

hurt or there was a conflict and no other adults were around. When I first introduced my research to the other staff, I showed them the golden hat that I would be wearing as a researcher and the shiny silver notebook that I will be using in the first meeting. I was at this point determined to have a visual indication for staff that I, as a member of the management, was not there in my role of Deputy Head to monitor or control but that I was there as a researcher to learn.



Shiny silver notebook and gold-sequined baseball cap

I wrote in my research notes:

These are visual indicators that I am present in the playground or classroom as a researcher and not as Deputy Head. They were purposefully chosen to be articles that I would not normally be seen with.

Research notes, November 2019

In schools, most adults are known to the children in the school, at least visually. New adults are a cause of interest and speculation. Outside during the observations, the wearing of the cap gave the children a visual reminder of the research. They then felt free to demand a response from me. For example, the child in the playground who told me 'I said 'yes!' who meant she said 'yes' to taking part in the research. This simple statement seemed to imply so much more. The unspoken question seemed to be 'I said yes, so what are you going to do about it?' Although I was and remain committed to hearing the child's voice, I was perhaps naive in my assumption that young children need assistance in claiming power or voice once it has been allowed them. As Hohti (2016b:86-87) states:

The research on child perspective is itself shaped by a methodological commitment to listen to those voices that usually do not get heard. This approach emphasises the productive dimension of power, when children create new knowledge that goes beyond normative conventions, hierarchies, or taken-for-granted types of knowing in school.

Throughout my experience of the research process children surprised me in their awareness of what was going on. The research stretched over a four-month period in 2020 with some long gaps between, three weeks winter holidays and a leave of absence. The children remained engaged and demanding of my attention. The child who told me that she had said yes provoked the children around her to respond and add their own voices. (See the Chapter 5 on Methodology and the Appendix Q for more details.) Not all children said yes. One possible reason for this is that they accepted that my role was an observer not a leader. My research hat was the visual symbol of that role and a prompt to all adults that I was in researcher role. Interestingly, staff who had not been introduced to the research seemed not to react to the hat. Several teachers came to speak to me while I was sitting in the playground. Other members of staff saw the hat and commented ‘nice hat’. The hat is simply a hat unless the significance of the wearing it is understood. As I write I think about the red baseball caps that the Year 5 and 6 children who are ‘play leaders’ with the younger children wear. (See Chapter 7). Seeing children wearing red caps or people wearing uniform has no significance unless you already know the meaning. We are socialised into this understanding without any awareness of this happening.

4.8 The Ethics Process — Introducing the Research

As in all research, there was a process of gaining ethics approval that was undertaken in order to prepare for the research process. This process enabled me to reflect on not only ‘what’ I intended to do but ‘how’ — especially considering the emphasis that I wanted to place on the relationships I had and being respectful. The timeline for my thesis can be seen in Appendix A. In order to be accessible to children and staff I created a PowerPoint presentation entitled ‘Making and Staying Friends’ that introduced my research. All of the Year One classrooms have whiteboards and projectors that are used daily to present information and so watching PowerPoints is familiar to both staff and children. The PowerPoint was designed to be appropriate for 5-year-olds, it covers the research process but is not too long (21 slides) and has large images with a short single sentence on each one. (See Appendix E.) I tested it out with my own children in order to gauge the appropriateness. The creation of this PowerPoint was important as a means of sharing the research idea with the children and providing an opportunity for them to feel some ownership and gain understanding of the research process. The photos of the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) building and my supervisors provided some real and meaningful background. I also detailed what would happen after the research — journal articles, conferences and my own graduation. The PowerPoint features the logo of children holding hands in a circle that I then used on the consent and assent forms to provide continuity. In my research I used ‘consent’ forms for parents and ‘assent’ forms

for children. As a previous Year 1 teacher I have a good knowledge and understanding of children of that age and so was able to be appropriate and adapt my language and formatting.

This might require researchers to adapt their language and other modes of communication to ensure it is appropriate to young participants, and could include, for example, using visual materials with younger children.

Kirby (2020:812)

I felt that it was very important that the children were asked if they wanted to take part in the research and give their assent rather than for me to rely on their parental consent. This is a complex task in a school as they are organisations that often focus on conformity and adults are in clear positions of power (Kirby, 2020). There are three classes in each year group at Mana Barumsa. So, it was decided that it was necessary to repeat the PowerPoint presentation and assent process for each of the three classes individually as there are roughly 75 children in a year group cohort. I did consider showing the whole year group the PowerPoint together in the hall but felt that this may discourage children from asking questions and make the research appear less personal. The three class teachers' chosen pseudonyms are Julia, Naomi and Lucy.

Once I had ethical approval from the university, I first showed this PowerPoint to staff at the school. It was shown to the three Year One teachers, the six Year One teaching assistants (who are class-based Ethiopian trained teachers), the two Year One learning support teachers (who provide academic support to specific children) and several other members of staff who were on duty in the Year One playground all of whom gave consent to take part. After watching the PowerPoint all staff were given the opportunity to ask questions, but most did not ask anything. The few questions raised were about the doctorate itself rather than the research. Staff were provided with an information sheet (Appendix I) and then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix F) to participate in the research.

4.9 Year One Children's Assent

When I went into the room, I wore my research hat and carried the shiny silver notebook (in picture at the start of the chapter.) Children reacted very positively to these items, I noted:

I went into class 1A on Monday afternoon to do my presentation. I wore my shiny gold hat (which the children loved!) and carried my silver research notebook.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

I started the process of gaining the children's assent by going into Julia's class. This decision was made because I was friends with Julia and knew that I could rely on her for support if I needed it. It turned out that this was a good decision as the organisation of getting all the children in the class to complete the

forms turned out to be more complicated than I had anticipated. I started by showing the children the PowerPoint and talking through the slides.

After distributing the forms to the children at tables, I then read out each of the seven statements and asked children to either put a tick to represent 'yes' or a cross to represent 'no' on the appropriate line — next to the statement. Although there were four adults in the room, Julia and two assistants, it was not as simple as I had hoped, as I noted afterwards:

The children then went and sat at tables and there were 3 members of staff supporting them to put their answers in the correct place. Between us we struggled to get all children to complete the right question ... The idea of ticking or crossing proved somewhat problematic. There were a variety of approaches within the class. Some children ticked everything. Some children crossed almost everything. Some children felt that they had to put a cross somewhere as I had emphasised that it was optional and ok to say 'no'. They seemed to interpret this as that they had to say 'no' to something.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

After the process was completed, I discussed with Julia, the class teacher, about what had happened and what her thoughts were. She felt that the process was long and suggested that she would have used a 'more positive response' by first explaining what the research was all about and then saying:

If that sounds ok to you just give it all a big tick!

Julia, 25th November 2019

In my research notes I clarify what Julia meant by this:

This would have been rather than reading each statement and getting the child to tick or cross it.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

This would clearly mean that children would not have had the same opportunity to choose to assent and may not have had the full understanding of the different parts of the research. Although not perfect, I felt that by going through the questions one-by-one I was doing the most possible to give opportunity for questions and explanation and maximise understanding. Reflecting on my discussion now, I wonder about why I only asked Julia, the class teacher for her reflection — was it due to my friendship with her? I can only hypothesise about whether the response of the teaching assistants would have been the same. Would they have felt restricted by the knowledge of my other role as Deputy Head? Were there cultural issues in the playground that I did not pick up? Through my knowledge of the children, I know that those in the sample came from a cross-section of cultural backgrounds although this was not recorded as part of the data.

The lack of numbers of children who had both assent and consent to participate was a real concern to me at the time of the research, perhaps because I regarded larger numbers as being able to produce more authentic information. However, providing children with the freedom to say 'yes' and 'no' is very

important and the loss of a few participants because of this was unimportant as it was ethically the right thing to do. The children were overall positive about participating but I noted:

There was one occasion when it was clear that the child, for whatever reason, felt strongly about not participating. This was accepted and the child was not asked to explain their reasons. My feeling was that the lack of participation was down to how the use of the ticks and crosses for the form filling was presented.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

It was important that the child should not feel pressurised into explaining why they did not want to participate as such a policy may deter children who wanted to say 'no' from doing so. It is important to respect the privacy of children in these matters.

My research notes from the time note two other issues from my first experience at delivering the presentation and completing the student assent forms. The first point was to do with the layout of the sheet and the lack of the space to write their name at the top of the sheet — this is a format that is very familiar to children in Year One. On the assent sheet the space for the name came after the list of statements that needed to be ticked or crossed by the children. I noted:

I should have left a space for children to write their names at the top. The children were used to having to put their name and the date at the top. The fact that it was in the middle confused some of them. The ones who could read well and had initiative found the word NAME and wrote their name next to it before I had started my explanation. Other children just wrote their name at the top without looking at the rest of the sheet.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

The other issue that I noted after my experience in the first Year One class was about the length of time that the process took. Having been a Year One teacher previously, I was very aware of the pressures of time constraints of the demanding curriculum and strongly felt the need to be supportive of the teachers and not add to their 'burden.' This was an important part of me respecting the research relationship. I therefore sought ways to make the research as undemanding on time and as easy as possible to organise within the class schedule for the class teachers. I commented:

It needed the 4 adults to support the task, Julia, the class teacher, was surprised at how long it took. It would be better for me to take a group at a time after the presentation. Teacher enthusiasm was also necessary and I felt that my positive relationship with Julia and the fact that we have known each other for 2.5 years made this part of the research go more smoothly ... Learning from what worked and didn't with Class 1A, I was able to sit at the front of the class and control the presentation in 1B. This made the presentation much smoother. All adults had also seen the presentation before and so knew what it was about.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

As a result of this, I used a small group system for classes 1B and 1C so that the whole class watched the PowerPoint and then I sat with a small group at a time to complete the forms. In the second and third classes, children completed the form in groups of 6 with me. This allowed the teacher to carry on with the lesson and send me the children who had completed learning tasks or of a certain group so allowing the teacher to carry on with the lesson. This seemed to be more effective and less demanding for the teacher and assistants. It also meant that I could support all the children and therefore had a better overview of

children's perspectives — they could make comments to me about the research during this small group time.

Out of the 76 children in the cohort, 7 were absent when the assent forms were distributed and the PowerPoint shown. 6 of these children were shown the PowerPoint at a later date, so that only one child in the cohort had not seen the presentation by the end of the term. There were 40 children who gave their assent and circled yes on all questions, 14 were boys and 26 girls and they came from all three classes: 1A — 12, 1B — 17 and 1C — 11.

Finally, children took home a consent form (Appendix H) for their parents to sign. This form was accompanied by the information sheet (Appendix I). From the 40 children who had given full assent 15 children (12 girls and 3 boys) returned parental consent forms.

4.10 The Children's Responses to the PowerPoint

The reactions of the three classes to the PowerPoint were slightly different. This can be explained by a number of things — the different styles and expectations of staff in the different classrooms, the 'make up' or dynamics of the class, my own confidence with the presentation and in the understandability — I was unsure of what the children's response would be when I went into 1A. Likely a combination of these factors came into play. I noted the response to my PowerPoint from the second class:

1B were very keen to ask me questions and were interested in the fact that I would have to also have to answer questions, they advised me to be honest and not to lie!!

Research notes, 30th November 2019

It is interesting to note that the children picked up on this aspect of the research. It is common for children of ages 5 – 6 to believe that adults and teachers in particular know all the answers to all the questions. There are clear expectations of behaviour inherent in the education system — children are encouraged to conform to these as Kirby (2020:813) states:

An awareness of one's place in the hierarchy and anxiety over delivering on what is expected—including correct answers and behaviour—are not the effects of the classroom, but the means through which children are educated.

The 'question and answer' teaching style is common in Mana Barumsa, as in many other schools, and reinforces this idea — the teacher asks questions that they already know the answer to. Perhaps the thought that a teacher was on the other end of this experience appealed to the children? The advice that they gave me sounds like something that a teacher or other adult may have said to them — not lying. The advice that the children in 1C gave me was also about behaviour. The response of the children in this class was again different.

1C were very quiet while I was presenting and when I asked if there were any questions, they gave me advice about friendship. Such as

“You need to be kind.”

“You need to not hit back if someone hits you but tell the teacher.”

Research notes, 8th December 2019

The different responses of the different classes reflected many things but I also realised that I needed to be careful in my own interpretation of events. Using the small group strategy to complete the student assent forms meant that I needed to return to 1B on another day. I realised that this may mean that some children may not remember the presentation and so I started these group sessions with a few questions to check what they remembered. Children can, at times, be brutally honest:

I followed up with the rest of the children in 1B this week. I asked one group of children if they remembered the presentation that I had shown them last week.

One child replied, “Oh yeah! I remember that. It was really boring.”

Another child agreed. “Yeah! I just wanted to colour my picture.”

1B children, 4th December 2019

So, appearances can be deceptive as they had appeared the most engaged of the 3 classes that I presented to, or maybe they were just the politest audience?!

Research notes, 8th December 2019

Children, like adults, can obviously be conditioned or taught to behave in certain ways — this is learnt behaviour — perhaps my role as a teacher or the Deputy Head meant that I got a respectful silence that hid the real thoughts of the children? Perhaps the children were showing their dissent? (Kirby, 2020) It is clear that my ‘researcher hat’ could only go so far in assisting me to create a role for myself as I remain not a child. Probably all I can aim for is to have a place on the spectrum that enables a more free and honest response. As Atkinson (2019:196) explains:

Thus, I wondered, do researchers perhaps occupy various positions on an inescapable adult-teacher spectrum? And is it our positioning on that spectrum — informed as much by commonality as by difference — that determines the level of access we are granted into children’s worlds?

The small groups gave me opportunities for these discussions but it seemed the children’s responses differed in terms of honesty and I was concerned that they did not feel free to respond as I would have liked. This was an ongoing debate that I had about the student assent forms.

I then took a group, that the teacher gave me, outside to complete the forms. The children all completed the forms with ticks — this made me reflect on whether I had been clear enough about the use of crosses — although I did clearly state to tick if it was ok This needs more reflection.

Research notes, 30th November 2019

Of course, the children putting ticks by each statement was a good thing for me as a researcher as it meant that the children were giving assent to full participation. My hesitation was whether I had emphasised and made clear to them that they had a choice and could opt out and say ‘no’. Once the children had given their assent, the next step was to send home the parental forms.

4.11 Parental Consent Forms

After I had completed the presentation of the PowerPoint and student assent forms in each class, I asked the teachers to assist me in sending home parental consent and information forms. (The information sheet can be seen in Appendix I.) These were distributed to all children in each class — even when, as the child had not given their assent, they would not be able to take part. This was for several reasons but most importantly so that the children's answers remained confidential — not giving out forms would mean that parents, other children and staff knew which children had given assent. It also made the organisation of distribution easier as all children got the same thing. A slight difference was in class B where I gave the sheets to children after they had finished the assent forms and asked them to put them into their bags.

The logistics of the return of the forms was relatively straightforward as the teaching assistants checked the children's bags daily for messages from home and so returned forms were discovered at the same time and put into a pile which was either brought to my office or I collected them when I was in the building. I had some concerns about the low return rate of forms and considered various methods of trying to get more forms back. These included presenting the PowerPoint to the parents at an assembly, sending a reminder note home, putting up a large sign or speaking to parents. In the end, it was decided that the group of initially 12 that became 15 children was a sufficient starting point to allow me to start observing.

4.12 Parents V Children — Power Dynamics

In completing the assent forms (see Appendices G & H for assent and consent forms) the children were given power to decline to participate. There was one child who gave assent to participate in all aspects but not in classroom lessons. She also had parental consent. This child was someone who I had taught the previous year and was repeating the year. It is interesting that they did not want me to research what they were doing in the class with their new teacher. I felt that it was very positive that they could make the distinction between the classroom and the playground and that they felt comfortable to express this and say 'no' when filling in the form. I also had a refusal back from a parent — which I also took as a good sign — as it was an indication that, despite my position of power, parents were comfortable with saying no to me.

The ethics of ensuring that both the child and parent give permission (assent or consent) is important but can sometimes appear as a needless complication. A few issues arose during the process of distributing the forms that made it become clear to me that this was not the case and that it is important to get both the assent of the child and the consent of the parents. The first was an event early on in the process when

I was stopped by a parent and asked about my research. She said that she had already returned the consent form for her son to take part in the research. She was keen for him to participate as he struggled with making friends, unlike her other child. She asked about the school using the research and I answered that I hoped that the school would get some suggestions as to what to do to make the transition smoother in Year One. She then asked when I would start as she was very keen for the research to happen. Around this point in the conversation, I realised that her son had not given his assent to take part in the research. This was a moral and ethical dilemma; I did not feel it right to tell the mum that her son had declined to take part in the research. He had filled in the form in school, as part of a group, I did not and have not asked him why he chose not to participate. I sensed that telling his mum that he had opted out would cause him problems because his mum was so keen for him to take part. I felt contradictory and recognised the mother's wish to help her son and any right that she might have to know what her young son had decided. However, I felt a greater responsibility to the boy and his right to make his own decision. I didn't say anything.

One important indication to me that I was on the right lines with issues of assent was that some of the children said 'no' to taking part in the research. This was a sign that they had felt that 'no' was an option and was hopeful in terms of children having agency and being willing participants. The concept of assent was not always clear cut. One child was very keen to take part in the research (I discuss her participate more in Chapter 5) and was keen to interact with me whenever I was in the playground. However, I felt conflicted because I had not received a consent form from her parents. I therefore felt that it was important to explain to her that to be able to write in my book and help me that I had to have her parents sign the form. In order to do this, I printed out another consent form and explained this to her. The class staff and I then put the form in her bag for her to take home. I did not get the form back. As she was keen to be part of what I was doing, I had hoped that if I got the form, I would be able to ask her to be my research assistant and to get her advice on what is going on in the playground, where to sit and to use her expertise. The ethical procedures provided a useful space and time for reflection on the practicalities of the research process. This was important so that in the midst of the research time had already been spent reflecting on some of these issues.

4.13 Issues of Assent and Consent — An Example from the Sandpit

One example is my encounter with a girl who gave herself the pseudonym Efrata. (Pseudonyms are discussed more detail in 4.13.) As I entered the playground and began the observation of the playground, I was approached by Efrata. She approached me directly as my research notes state:

Efrata came up to me and told me “I filled in the form.” I replied something positive but non-committal and so she followed up with “I said ‘yes!’” She stood expectantly by. Another child also commented about the forms. Efrata repeated herself and so, finally, I checked that she was the same girl I had a photo of on the parental consent photo sheet. As I drew diagrams in my notebook, Efrata asked me about what I was doing and why. She then later on showed me her cartwheels — “Look! I can do this!” and then she herself played in the sandpit.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

In this encounter Efrata is asserting her right to participate and be involved in what I was doing. Her first statement obviously did not get the response she desired as she then stated again with an emphatic “I said ‘Yes!’”. There was an implied expectation from Efrata as she made this statement and then waited for something to happen. Her presence brought another child who also commented about the forms. Their presence stopped me doing what I had planned and rather I checked my research notes to check consent. I was hesitant in case her parents had not provided consent. As I sat down and began my observation notes Efrata questioned what I was doing. Then, perhaps bored or having exhausted that conversation thread she showed me her cartwheels.

When I come back to this now, I feel uncomfortable and embarrassed about how I just wanted to get on with what I had planned and did not seize this moment and interest from Efrata to gain her insight and perspective into the research. I was too caught up in my own plans and Efrata’s presence was an interruption. My research notes at the time pick up on another issue — that of consent and assent.

This exchange with Efrata made me reflect on how aware a young child can be over issues of consent and assent. Efrata filled in her form on the 4th of December. Before the Christmas holidays and exactly 7 weeks before our exchange in the playground. However, she appeared clear about having given her permission to take part in what I was doing and was interested in it. Efrata is six years old. I initially wanted to write ‘only 6 years old’ but when I look at how she tackled her participation in the project it makes me question my presumptions about the abilities of six-year-olds. It seems that we can easily jump to the conclusion that a young child does not have the awareness over issues such as assent but this clearly illustrates that they do. Perhaps it is the fact that Efrata was given the agency or power to make the decision for herself about her participation.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

Efrata’s awareness of having said ‘yes’ and filling in the form surprised me and led me to reconsider my assumptions about what children remember and the meaning that they take from events. She has challenged me as an educator and a researcher. This echoes the findings of Kirby (2020) who looked at issues of consent with children, in her study of agency Year One children, as the children showed great skill at dissent and dismissing themselves from activities in a polite and culturally sensitive way. Efrata was clear that she had a right to participate and she also had an expectation that this meant something would happen — I wonder if I disappointed her when she saw that little did happen. She questioned me about the drawings in my notebook but I cannot remember my replies and only hope that I took her questions with the seriousness and respect that they deserved. I am left with a feeling of regret that I did not make more of this interaction and an increasing awareness of the importance of being flexible enough to come ‘off script’ and be spontaneous in response to the research. Some parts of the process seem familiar and

even simplistic but the practicalities often reveal a deeper level and prompt questions (Gallagher et al., 2010). The use of pseudonyms was certainly one of these parts of the process.

4.14 Pseudonyms

All teachers and children were asked to choose a pseudonym to use for the research. This was introduced during the PowerPoint presentation and children used the term ‘fake name’ to describe this. The members of staff generally enjoyed this process and quickly announced what their name was often choosing a famous person they admired, for example the Ethiopian Queen ‘Taitu’ or ‘Julia’ Roberts.

For the children this is likely to have been their first experience with the concept. However, they generally appeared to find the idea exciting and in the first class a group of four girls wrote their pseudonyms on their assent forms rather than real names — which proved confusing! In response to this, all children were asked to write their pseudonym on the bottom of their assent form. This is one of the reasons for the interesting spellings. The names of the 15 children in the research group who gave assent and had parental consent are below. Children appeared to choose their names for a variety of reasons — some chose the name of a friend or sibling; others chose famous people. There were a wide range of names chosen:

<i>Cool</i>	<i>Dlena</i>	<i>Efrata</i>	<i>Elsa</i>	<i>Free</i>	<i>Maia</i>
<i>Max</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Natna</i>	<i>Ocko</i>	<i>Rayan</i>	<i>Rose</i>
<i>Roseile</i>	<i>Roze</i>	<i>Van</i>			

Although most children came up with a name quickly, not all children found this an easy task. One child had not written a pseudonym on the form and so I had asked the teacher to ask her for one. That didn’t happen so I spoke to Julia, the child’s teacher, when she was on playground duty and, together, we approached the girl and asked about choosing another name. Julia and I made suggestions such as:

“Do you have a favourite girl’s name?”	Julia 16-1-20
“What do you like to watch on TV?”	Me 16-1-20

Eventually, as we had no responses of any sort from the girl, Julia asked a series of questions so that we got to a name. “I think you like Frozen. Didn’t I see you wearing a dress?” and after a few more unanswered prompts “What is the name of the girl in Frozen?” Finally, “Do you like that name?” (Julia 16-1-20).

The girl who we will now refer to as 'Elsa' seemed very confused by the whole process and unsure of what was happening. Elsa does not usually have communication difficulties. This felt like a drawn out and uncomfortable procedure for us all and made me reflect on the damage that we may do in pursuing such things unnecessarily. Should I have stopped? I felt I needed a pseudonym in order to write about Elsa but should I have just chosen one for her rather than subjecting her to this 'procedure'? I felt it was more of a procedure because of the lack of response from Elsa, it was Julia and I 'against' her. We got what we wanted out of the situation but what did Elsa gain and what possible damage did I do? I'm uncertain if there is a way to tell. Perhaps for the future I could create a list of possible names and get the child to point to one. I had felt previously that this was too leading but I feel now that that matters less than creating discomfort of any sort for the child. Perhaps one way forward may be to allow the children either a free choice or a list of ideas for names from which to choose if they need support.

A different issue I had was trying to work out if the pseudonym would be appropriate for the research audience when it was read in a text. I was very careful to allow the children free choice and many children choose Ethiopian names that would be ungendered for the non-Ethiopian readers (as only those with experience in Ethiopia would know whether it is a boys' or girls' name. It is also worth noting that there are many names that can be either as they are in English.) In my research notes I explain my confusion with the issue of a girl choosing her brother's name as a pseudonym:

One of the girls in the last group wanted to use her brother's name as her pseudonym. I said that she might want to choose a girls' name but could use his name if she wanted. I am wondering about whether it was a good idea as it may confuse the audience. However, a lot of the children's names are Ethiopian so many people in the UK won't know whether the name is a boys' or girls' name. In this case the name is a western name. I taught the girl's brother last year and so that has been my main link with her in the past, I wondered if this was why she chose to use his name but didn't ask her. I debated the ethics of feminising the name and in the end decided to respect her choice, perhaps further down the line she will change her own mind about it. Several other children from the different classes have chosen unusual names, for example there is a girl called "Cool".

Research notes, 8th December 2019

The choice of name was perhaps important to the girl. She was the only child not to also write her real name on the form. In my research notes I pondered on the relationship between the girl, her brother and myself and if that was the reason for the association as that was my only previous interaction with her — as her brother's teacher.

One girl only wrote her pseudonym and not her real name. This was the same girl who had chosen the name of her brother to be her pseudonym. This was interesting as her brother had been in my class previously and the previous contact that I have had with her has all been when she came to collect or drop off her brother from the class. I wonder if the reason that she chose his name was that she associates me with him. The same girl was also the only girl playing football with a group of boys, I then wondered if this was another reason for her to choose a boy's name as her pseudonym.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

The other issue with the girl choosing her brother's name was that she would be more easily identifiable. There was another child whose choice of pseudonym I felt would make her easily identifiable by readers who might know the children:

Two of the 12 children do not yet have pseudonyms. One boy did not choose a pseudonym when he filled in the form. The other, a girl, chose a name that is too similar to her real name and would make her easily recognisable.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

The ethics of the pseudonyms led me to consider the importance of being respectful of the choices that children make but also my responsibility for considering the impact of choices that might be beyond the child's current experience and understanding.

4.15 Conclusion

The use of a 'research hat' has enabled me to visually indicate my role to other staff and children. It has made the research more visible because it has prompted a greater awareness of that the research is taking place and taken away the anonymity that may have been present in observation without it. The 'research hat' has provided an entry point or conversation starter that has fed into the research. The impact on me of wearing the hat is to assist me in becoming the researcher and stepping out of my other roles in the school: Deputy Head, colleague, friend and Mum.

In this chapter I have discussed the use of a PowerPoint presentation to explain the research to the children. I have also reflected on some of the ethical dilemmas that I can across in relation to the consent and assent forms and the choice of pseudonyms. I suggest that in the future children should be offered to use their free choice (as they did) or a list of names to choose from to support their choice. It is important not to underestimate children and their abilities. In the next chapter, I discuss in more depth my research methods and give some details about the observations and interviews that the children had assented to.



View from one window of the tukul (playhouse) in the EYFS playground across to the other window.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology or What I Did and Why



The KS1 playground

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my methodological approach and the practical logistics of organising and carrying out the research. I begin by giving some background on my research journey. I then describe the observations which I consider as six critical incidents. I provide a brief overview of original plans that changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss the teacher interviews which were held online. Throughout this chapter, reference is made to my research journal, written at the time to explain not only what I did but why I was doing it. The use of the chosen methodologies that provided the insights from this research (observations, journal, interviews, photos and speculative writing) evolved over time. In particular the use of speculative writing using OOO (as discussed in Chapter 2) which I stumbled upon as a technique and perhaps proved most productive in terms of original insights. This more responsive approach to an accumulative methodology echoes the comments of Rautio (2021:229) that ‘The collection of materials to be called data is identified toward the end of the inquiry, not prior to it.’ In response to this, my research question is:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

5.2 How did I get where I am?



One of the poles for the bars

If you look closely at this image, you can see a foot wearing a pink shoe and a hand joined to an arm reaching up towards the green bar but you need to look hard to see these things. In the foreground and central to this photo is the post at the end of the bars. So, I am here – where the focus of my research is the non-human things in the playground – yet looking at the friendship of children – it seems a slightly incongruous position to be in (MacRae, 2019; Pitsikali and Parnell, 2020) ... so how does the non-human in the playground effect the human-to-human relationships?

At the start of my doctoral journey, I never imagined that a photo such as this one would feature in my thesis.

I see a number of shifts in my methodological position over the lifetime of this thesis. The first of those was in response to collating the literature review and perceiving a paucity of research from within the African continent and also my own changing role in the school which allowed me a different perspective. The second shift was in response to the effects and impact of the pandemic, my departure from Ethiopia, together with the wider readings prompted by a blog post and my own response to leaving the African continent that provoked thinking about the entangled nature of place and positionality. The next section will trace these shifts in more detail.

In my first meeting with my supervisors, I explained clearly how I wanted to look at children's friendships – something that I had been interested in since my Masters in Educational Psychology, many years before, on teacher-pupil relationships. I wanted to use sociograms to do this and to map the relationships between children and I spoke enthusiastically about the work of Prof. Robin Banerjee and the CRESS

research lab at Sussex University — <https://users.sussex.ac.uk/~robinb/socio.html>. I had used sociograms as a teacher to gain insight into classroom dynamics and assist me in helping children in my Year One class to build positive relationships. (See Glossary for Sociogram.) At this point in my research, I had what could be described as a humancentric, realist ontology — taking a qualitative empirical approach believing that I could find out the truth of what was going on ‘in reality’ with regard to children’s friendships in school. I looked at the research on children’s friendship and noted the gap in research with children in Year One which was highlighted by Carter and Nutbrown (2016). I also became aware of the lack of friendship literature produced about, and from within the Majority World as I read some of the research that had been carried out in the African continent (van Blerk, 2012; 2019). The cultural aspects of my own study became more acute and obvious to me as I left Ethiopia due to the COVID-19 pandemic and felt myself pining for the loss of something intangible.

As I started the process of planning the collection of data, I changed my role in the school — from Year One classroom teacher to Deputy Head. As I moved away from the classroom, I needed to change my research questions. The shift in role, and start of the research, coincided with the start of a gradual and nonlinear internal slide in terms of my ontology and epistemology as I began to consider the details of the ‘research’ and my own role. I find this difficult to articulate as the terms seem abstract but I believe that I became more relativist in ontology and constructivist in epistemology as I realised that I was creating my own version of the truth about what was happening. As I discussed in Chapter 3.5, I was heavily influenced in my approach at this point by reading a blog by Thompson (2015) whose writing challenged me to consider my own position within the research and how relationships were key. Although I would have been unable to articulate it at the time, I believe that I strove to develop a relationship where I was ‘treated like the family dog’ (Lareau and Rao, 2020:1978), part of what was happening but not in need of entertaining or speaking to. Because I was in the midst of the research (as discussed with reference to my entanglement in Chapter 3 and different roles in Chapter 4) I had decided to use an ethnographic methodology which fitted more closely with the importance of relationships (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015:4). I wanted to observe what was going on as a participant, and move away from the more rigid checklist or sociogram format that I had first considered, as I had begun to see knowledge and relationships as not neatly boxed but messy, blurred and entangled (Papatheodorou et al., 2013). Prior to leaving Ethiopia I had completed the observations that form part of my thesis. I began the observations with the aim of being a ‘complete observer’ but soon realised that I could at best hope to be a ‘observer as participant’ (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007:60) and I have sympathy with Thomson (2007:490) who commented about her own playground research:

It turned out that it was almost impossible for one person to conduct anything remotely systematic in the scientific sense during the chaotic activities of playtime.

At this time, I started to read more about the entangled nature of place (Barad, 2007) and posthumanism. This was brought about by my observations of the playground equipment as having agency when it interacted with the children. I became aware of the 'what there could be' (Law, 2004:23), as I moved further down the spectrum towards a flat ontology (Harman, 2018) and what Barad (2007:44) might describe as an ontoepistemological approach that leans towards post-qualitativism in particular OOO and new-materialism. As part of the journey, I read about the concept of there being critical incidents (Tripp, 2011) that cause you to reconsider where you are. This was a concept that resonated with me and I was caught by it again in the 'stumble data' that Brinkmann (2014) proposes which is similar to the 'jolt' that (St. Pierre et al., 2016) discuss and the 'murmurations' when data is startled suggested by Merewether (2019); (2020). These moments of gaining a different insight or position theories reflect the 'diffraction' of Barad (2007) and seem to be a reoccurring theme in my reading. I do not wish to undo what was done before and rewrite the thesis as if I was a post qualitative researcher from the beginning because it is not authentic and I was not (St. Pierre, 2023:24) but I do want to try to articulate how a series of critical incidents, stumbles, jolts and murmurations shifted my methodological position, contributing in profound ways to how I was able to engage with, and analyse the 'data' I brought back to the UK from Ethiopia with me.

Back in England, the analysis of my observations began to be more about the entangled nature of human and non-human and the impact of place. I was particularly taken by Seamon's concept of 'place ballet' (Seamon, 1980) this reflects something of what I saw in the playground where the movement seemed like a carefully choreographed dance.

In order to contextualise this much more entangled way of engaging with data, the next section returns me to my time in the playground in Ethiopia where I was assembling my ethnographic approach. I was mobilised by a series of observations to help me pay closer attention to children's relationships as they played outside.

5.3 Ethnographic Observations

I planned to take an ethnographic approach to the observations as I wanted to focus on what was happening every day in the playground on a 'typical' day and not change anything. Ethnographic observations are a relatively common research technique and recent examples from Ethiopia include a paper on children's rights to education in southern Ethiopia (Jirata, 2022), research into the youth protests in Oromia region (Abebe, 2020) and a study on how an Ethiopian church school nurtures patriotism and

pride (T. Kassa, 2022). I positioned myself in a place in the playground where I could be unobtrusive (as discussed in Section 5.6) as I intended to carry out participant observations. As a practitioner-researcher I was clearly crossing between roles and was both an insider and outsider in the research. I have tried throughout the research to be aware of my own self (as discussed in Chapter 4) and be aware of my own 'baggage' and as Madden (2017:19) says:

to remind myself I bring just one perspective to ethnography and that perspective is informed by my own upbringing, education and history.

I chose my location carefully and tried to be as open minded as possible whilst acknowledging that as A. K. Harrison (2018:125) comments:

Ethnographic research is, by nature, inductive, meaning that the accumulated information ultimately determines the principal topics foregrounded in the ethnographic text.

The observations took place on an ad hoc basis – as necessitated by the demands of my paid role at the school. (The schedule can be seen in Appendix L.) At the time, I felt that I was learning things from doing the observations and was reflecting on what I saw but that these things were small, minor and insignificant. I realized that I can at best see only a small part and from my own perspective and was comforted by the comment of Hackett et al. (2018a:493) that 'no one can observe and record everything during every visit.' Or as Madden (2017:57) notes:

In any given social setting, even a low-key and mundane setting, there is too much going on for the ethnographer either to observe or record in its entirety ... So we must consider that ethnographic observation is partial, in both senses of the word (not complete, and framed by personal inclination).

Acknowledging these limitations frees us to look in depth at what we can see. I am conscious that there are dangers in making assumptions about what is going on as each situation is unique. This means that the cohort of children that I am working with is also unique and whilst there will be shared commonalities there will also be differences and it may not be possible to generalise from my findings. So I feel it necessary to state clearly that I would align myself with Hackett et al. (2018a:495) who seek to avoid 'the critique within early childhood education of a generalisable notion of quality that may guarantee universal developmental outcomes for all children.'

Whilst I can acknowledge that there are things that we can take from one situation and apply to another situation the uniqueness of each much also be accepted. When talking about their work involving design of spaces for young children in museums, Hackett et al. (2018b:484) state:

Whilst it is true that young children are frequently unpredictable, surprising and creative in their engagement with places, objects and experiences there is also, we argue, something specific to the geographies of museum spaces that enable us to attend to improvisation and the serendipitous in specific ways.

There is something specific to the playground — place makes a difference to what can and does happen. So, in observing the relationships between individual children the inanimate objects are also of

significance. The children who sat around the sandpit may be one example from my own research of how the design of the playground facilitates and enables certain ways of being. There are two playgrounds in the school and only one of them has a sandpit. (See Chapter 7 for the analysis of the sandpit.) I feel that the sandpit area is an area of specific interest in what it allows children to do. Perhaps of significance is that there is a change in the normal school rules in this area as children are allowed to take their socks and shoes off. There is something about digging or the intra-action of sand and person.

My research notes of the observations highlight the interaction of the things in the playground and the children. It is these hidden pearls or events within the observations that I take as critical incidents (Tripp, 2011) and which are discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. (The observation schedule can be seen in Appendix L.) These observations with the research notes and sketches form the basis of my data analysis on the three different pieces of equipment — the bars, the sandpit and the tricky trail.

5.4 The Use of Sketches as an Observation Tool

I had decided to use observations without recording equipment such as videos, tape recorders or more specialised equipment such as SOPLAY (which has been used by researchers such as Amholt et al. (2022a); McKenzie et al. (2000) and Dymont and O'Connell (2013) to scan playgrounds for location and activity level) due to concerns about how parents, staff and children would react (Fawcett and Watson, 2016:72) and practically because of the lack of access (being based in Ethiopia). As I sat and observed the complex movements of the playground, I spontaneously began to use sketches to show the movement of children and their interactions with the different parts of the space. (These can be seen in Appendices M and N and I discuss this more in Chapter 6.)


I have chosen to use the term 'sketch' rather than 'diagram' (this is term I used in my research journal) or 'map' as they were quick drawings done into my notebook during the observation rather than a more planned out drawing. The benefits of some form of drawing — whatever the label given to it — are, as Wohlwend et al. (2017) realised when they used a multi-modal analysis to show the movements of children, that deeper knowledge and understanding were gained of those children's intra-actions. Knight (2021:44) clarifies that mapping is focused on this intra-action with objects having blurred boundaries and being entangled together.

Inefficient mapping is gestural, drawn marking that takes place in situ, recording affective relations within the milieu in ways that do not emanate from the human but through ethically entangling with, observing, and modestly witnessing the already-movements of matter and/in spaces.

I sat and sketched as I observed in the playground and found as Knight (2021:38) that 'ideas percolated' as I drew the sketches and that somehow the act of trying to put onto paper what was happening made it

clearer and more in focus. Although there is a final product it is perhaps the process, the 'mapping' (Knight, 2021:40) rather than the finished 'map' that is important. Earlier on in her book *Inefficient Mapping* Knight (2021:27) reflects:

Making maps as part of a methodological research practice initiates thoughtful encounters with a place that are mindful of the impossibility of being able to capture everything, or even some things, in their entirety. The marks, symbols, and lines can only create partial visual spatial accounts.

The acceptance that the maps do not show everything is an important part of using this technique. In my sketches I used a  to show the position of a child — perhaps this is a throwback to my original desire to use sociograms (as discussed in 5.2). The advantage of this was the quick notation and the ability to give an overview but this method also meant that I do not have personalised or individualised data on a child but rather a 'partial visual spatial account' (Knight, 2021:27). This anonymity resolved some of my ethical concerns that out of the more than 70 children in the playground I only had consent and assent from 15. Sketches are less obtrusive than either photos or videos and are clearer in terms of ethical considerations and safeguarding.

The use of sketches also seemed a way to be more present, immersed in the situation and have a lived experience. Knight (2021:27) comments that the maps are 'thoughtful encounters' and the sketches of the bars and sandpit that form part of the data are reflective and give one perspective on what is happening and are 'a way to enter into the milieu, to notice some of what goes on without claiming to represent some kind of truthful or whole account of the time-place' (Knight, 2016:22). This reflects my ontological journey to a position where I am more willing to accept and even embrace uncertainty as being the place where there is possibility for something new to happen.

Although spontaneous, the sketches here are not quite 'chaosgraphics' (Knight, 2021:45) as they were redrawn from the original notebook onto the computer and so are not the 'raw data'. This reproduction of the original provides a more sterilised account that allows an analysis that focuses in on the equipment. I acknowledge that by doing this, questions could be asked about what else is there and was anything missed out. Although I began to read the work of researchers interested in movement and place, (Hackett et al., 2018b; Hackett et al., 2018a; Hackett and Somerville, 2017; Procter and Hackett, 2017; Ekman Ladru and Gustafson, 2018), movement remained on the periphery of the research until I came to analyse the data on the three pieces of playground equipment. It was then that I realised that it was key in order to understand how the non-human-to-human interactions facilitate the human-to-human interactions. (This is discussed in detail in the later chapters.)

The sketches capture only one moment and do not claim to show the whole. In order to record the movement, I used sketches in my research in a way that is similar to that of Pitsikali and Parnell (2020); Pitsikali et al. (2020) who also mapped the playground and showed movement and interaction as well as participants. However rather than show the whole playground my own observations are timed and focus on an individual piece of equipment. Pitsikali et al. (2020:152) explain that they used:

“Descriptive diagrams” complemented observations, capturing movement, flows and interactions, thereby placing specific observations in space and allowing the depiction of interaction between the different areas.

The use of sketches or ‘descriptive diagrams’ to capture a single moment allows the scene to be analysed in a different way as it removes all of the background distractions and focuses on depicting what the observer is looking at. The series of sketches used in Chapters 6 (The Bars) and 7 (The Sandpit) allows movement and interactions to be seen. The sketches are similar to the ‘mapping’ used by Knight (2019:6) who explains:

Mapping, rather than other forms of recording (such as a running record or a videorecording), can be a way to enter into the milieu, to notice some of what goes on without claiming to represent some kind of truthful or whole account of the time-place. The graphic orientation of the inefficient mappings allows for visual notation of schizo play activity: overlapping, simultaneous, multiple movements, forms, light, and time.

The inefficiency of sketches and the acceptance that not everything can be captured on paper in that one moment allows for a more accepting and intense reflection on what has been captured — why certain things stood out and so facilitate thoughtful analysis. This is at the other end of the spectrum to the use of the camera to hold capture a specific moment. The camera captures what it is pointed at and can restrict the observer to what can be seen through the lens. Rather I attempted to develop my own ethnographic gaze, to look carefully and to use sketches to assist me to record what I saw. As Molloy Murphy (2021:142) suggests:

One way to disrupt our habitual patterns of regarding our earthly relations is to change *how* we look. Cameras can act as an apparatus of colonizing ways of relating through capture, extraction, and notions of objectivity.

The use of sketches has facilitated meeting the challenge of looking at the play equipment in a new way and the focus on going towards answering the research question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

5.5 Selecting an Observation Viewpoint



View of the KS1 playground from the balcony of the admin block that runs parallel.

The first task that I considered in my preparation for the observations was where I was to locate myself for the observation — what was my ‘viewpoint’ to be? The Year One children play in two different playgrounds — the Early Years (EYFS) playground and the Key Stage One (KS1) playground. Year One and Two have break times together in the KS1 playground and then separate lunch breaks in on rotation between the playgrounds (both twenty minutes). As the children spent a larger amount of time there, I focused initially on the KS1 playground. The photo at the start of this chapter is of the veranda along the side of the administration building which overlooks the KS1 playground. The veranda was the first place that I considered. In my research notes I explained the choice of this location:

I have been considering where I position myself when I start the research and whether I will be in the playground or looking at the playground. I think that I need to experience both as they are advantages to both perspectives. If I stand on the veranda, I can get a ‘birds’ eye’ view that will enable me to see larger patterns of play and identify groups. When I stand in the playground I will be ‘in the thick’ of it and have an on the ground perspective that will allow me to see the details. Due to this I am planning to start on the veranda and then move into the playground area. This will also give the staff on duty an opportunity to get used to seeing me there as a researcher.

Research notes, November 17th 2019

However, once I actually went and tested this viewpoint out, I changed my mind because of the restricted view. The low roof and covered walk-way underneath meant that most of the playground was hidden from my view and I found it hard to see all the children:

On Thursday lunchtime I went to the playground at 12.20. I stayed until the children lined up, at the end of their break, at 12.40pm. During this 20-minute slot the major task was to decide from where to observe. Initially, I stood on the

veranda of the administration building that runs alongside the playground. However, I found my view was restricted and I could not see what was going on.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

I tried various different locations in the playground to see what was going to work best:

I then moved onto the stairs that lead from the veranda into the playground. I checked from several points but also felt that my view was restricted. I then decided to move to the opposite side of the playground. I sat on the stairs outside of the Year 1 and 2 building. I made sure that I sat in the corner with my back to the wall so that I had the best view of the whole playground.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

The decision about where to place myself reflected my desire to be an observer in the playground rather than get involved in what was going on. Reflecting on the classical ethnographic observation styles of Corsaro, Mandell and Sluckin (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988). I recognise now that I followed a more similar path to Corsaro than the other researchers as I interacted with the children. However, this may have been as I felt conflicted in my roles and would have reacted as a teacher or Deputy Head. I felt unable to act like Sluckin who strictly observed and walked around the playground not responding. I also felt unable, due to my concern as to try and disentangle what was going on through my observation, to take on the role of least adult and dig in the sandpit or swing on the bars (as Mandell would have done). Despite that, my presence changed the place that I was observing but whilst acknowledging that I wanted to try to minimise that disruption. It was interesting to note the reactions of the people in the playground to my presence.

5.6 The Reactions of Those in the Playground

As the researcher, being in the playground myself I also have to acknowledge my own impact on what is going on (Pink, 2012). As we are in the research so our own presence makes a difference to the situation: 'We are participants as well as observers' says Tsing in Hastrup (2013:34). We are part of what is going on in the research. My presence in the playground does change things (Pink, 2012).

As I entered the playground for the first time, I felt very obvious — I was wearing my gold sequined baseball cap — 'my research hat' as discussed in Chapter 4 — and in my own mind I stood out and was a new me. I was not sure of how the staff on duty in the playground would view my presence and react, though they had all watched the PowerPoint and given their consent to participate. In my research notes I wrote:

Staff in the playground at this time ignored me. There were initially two members of staff on duty and during my time in the playground these members of staff changed over. However, I found it interesting that my presence was noted by members of staff, I talked to Lucy later in the day and mentioned that I had started my research — she commented... "I know. I saw you."

Lucy, 12th December 2019

Research notes, 15th December 2019

So, although I was seen I was not acknowledged. This appears to be a conscious decision by Lucy to not speak to me, as she normally would have done, as I was in my research role. The two initial members of staff were replaced by two others and none of them spoke to me on this first observation. The children on the other hand had a different reaction and freely came up to speak to me. I commented:

Children in the playground were keen to come and speak to me. At least three different children ran up to me and said....
"Hi! Miss Catherine!"

Year One children, 12th December 2019
Research notes, 15th December 2019

Most children were satisfied with this simple greeting. However, one girl, was interested in exactly what I was doing. I recorded my first interaction with her in the playground:

One girl ... ran straight up to me and asked....

"Can I see what you are writing?"

I then showed her and read her what it said on the page. She then asked if she could write in the book and she wrote her name. She then gave me a sentence to write in the book.

"Rayan's birthday is today so her Mum is going to call us."

... seemed satisfied with this and ran off for a few minutes.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

The girl ran off away but returned after a short time, and when she did, she organised the other children who had also come to see what I was doing and also wrote herself in my research diary:

...first wrote her own name and then organised other children to write their names in a numbered list down the page.

This list also included some other names, including the word 'teacher' and some names of siblings.

Research notes, 15th December 2019

This one girl stood out in her interest in what I was doing and her desire to interact with me and the research book. They may be several reasons for this including a genuine interest, a desire to speak to me as a teacher in order to gain attention or do something different. Her participation in the research added an additional layer and she proved invaluable in later observations in helping me locate children.

5.7 The Use of the Photo Sheet

As a newcomer to the Year One children, one problem that I had not anticipated was being able to recognise the children who had given their assent and whose parents had given consent for them to be observed. I had to ask a child to help me locate the children in the playground by showing them a single photo on the sheet and not the pseudonyms.

The photo sheet (see Appendix P) was produced using photographs taken by the school office for teachers to use to identify children and so I had access to these as a member of school staff. It had pictures of the 15 children with their pseudonyms underneath. Due to issues of privacy and to ensure anonymity for the

children this photo sheet was kept locked away in a cupboard. I explained the use of this photo sheet and the safe storage for it and the data file in my research notes (see Appendix Q).

I did need to use the photo sheet for longer than the first observation although I did get better at recognising the children. After the Christmas holidays, some of the photos proved less useful, for example, I had great difficulty recognising May whose complete change of hairstyle seemed to make her look totally different to the photo I had. The difficulties in identifying the children were complicated by various factors including the almost constant movement, the changes in appearance (different clothes or hairstyles) and absences or late arrivals. During the research period Van broke his arm and so was absent for some of the observations — the cast on his arm did make him easier to identify when he returned though!

5.8 First Impressions

On my first day observing I did not spend time identifying individuals as the aim was to get an overall feel for the playground and what was going on. As I had been a Year One teacher myself previously the location and organisation were not new to me. On occasions I had been an observer in the playground, for example, to check how a new child was settling in I sometimes observed a particular child, or if an individual appeared to be having problems playing with other children, I would go out to check what was happening and observe for some time. However, I had not simply sat and watched what was happening in order to get a feel for the whole group. This type of ethnographic observation felt different to me and was made more so by my lack of knowledge of the children as individuals. Rather I was seeing bodies moving about and focused on the patterns of behaviour and activity — a choreography or place-ballet (Seamon 1980). The movement of the children appeared to be like a choreographed dance as Yuniasih et al. (2020:7) comment in their paper on the intra-action of stones with children in traditional games, 'This looked like a dance performance, which became a flow of movements'. The movements of the children were varied but all seemed part of the choreography as Ekman Ladru and Gustafson (2018:95) explain in their paper on mobile preschools:

While performing the learnt choreography in the collective, moving body, the children engage in multiple bodily improvisations, such as jumping, bumping, speeding or lagging behind.

The activities that I recorded happening were not unusual — football, chase, small group games and some children in pairs. I described:

The playground seemed a busy and chaotic place as I sat still. It seemed that everyone else was on the move. There was a game of football that seemed to dominate the playground. I was surprised to discover that when I counted only 11 children (10 boys and 1 girl) were actually playing football. There were several other groups of children doing different things. There were 7 children who seemed to be 'parading' — marching up and down along a route down the side of the playground. Then there were 10 children including the birthday girl (Rayan) who seemed to be chasing her around the playground. There were some children playing in smaller groups and pairs, these included Cool and her friend.

This first observation provided a foundation for me to carry out the remaining series of observations throughout the end of the first and at the start of the second terms. (The school year at Mana Barumsa runs from late August to the end of June. It is split into three terms — the first being very long and the last short as the holidays are around the Christmas and Easter holidays.) In Ethiopia, the end of the first and beginning of the second term are during the long dry season, it rarely rains and children can play every day outdoors. So, I was fortunate in being able to almost guarantee the weather and rely on the fact that I would be able to observe. I was, however, restricted by my role at the school as at this time I became Acting Head due to the Head being absent. Although the number of observations was limited by this they made a profound impression on me and have a ‘lingering odour’ (R. Holmes, 2014:783).

5.9 Notes in a Journal

During the entire research process, I took notes in a journal which I then wrote up into a weekly write-up email to my supervisors in the UK (see Appendix Q). It is these notes that I refer to throughout my data analysis as they highlight my reflections at the time, next steps and ideas. The use of a reflective journal or ‘field notes’ is quite commonplace in research and, as Coffey (1999:119) explains, they ‘describe places and people and events. They are also used as textual space for the recording of our emotions and personal experiences.’ During the observations I used the shiny journal that I showed to the children during the presentation as a place to make my notes — so it was gold baseball cap on and shiny notebook in hand that I entered the playground.

5.10 The Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the data collection and the time in the playground and at the school. The school switched to online learning and I, like most international teachers, left Ethiopia. I returned to the UK and so wrote and reflected on the data from a distance. At times this created an air of nostalgia, as I discussed in Chapter 1, as I grappled with a sense of loss and seemed to mourn for the place and people. My relationship with Mana Barumsa, and Ethiopia in general, is entangled and complex as I acknowledge elsewhere and there were also practical demands (having three children to home-school, teaching online and living for a month in a tent in my parents’ garden) as well as the emotional ones – perhaps it is a wonder that anything got written at all. However, I can thank an extended stay at one of the quarantine

hotels in London (two out of three children and myself with Covid and all four of us restricted to two adjoining hotel rooms) for the completion of a whole chapter!

Before the pandemic, it was planned to invite the six Year One student council representatives to join a creative focus group. (This would have been a new and separate group – distinct from the group of children who I already had both consent and assent from and new ethical permission forms would have been distributed.) The creative task was initially planned to be to make something for sale at the December ‘mini-bazaar’. Due to a delay in starting the research, this was moved to make something for the annual school fete in March but, because of the switch to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this did not go ahead. The creative focus for these groups was planned to provide the opportunity for children to engage in a practical task whilst the discussion was taking place and so provide a more natural forum. Both parental and child consent would have been obtained prior to this so as to allow the discussion to be recorded and enable later analysis. Reflecting on this now, perhaps ‘go-along’ focus group interviews may have been more suitable as they combine observation with quality in depth discussions as used by Amholt et al. (2022b); Hayball and Pawlowski (2018). The focus group interviews were planned to gain more child voice and perspective on the research and further research may focus on filling this gap.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the planned format and direction of the research as it restricted the amount of participation by the children. In the reflections in Appendix Q, I discuss ideas around opportunities to engage children as co-constructors of the research (Clark and Moss, 2017:33) and the importance of recognising children as experts (Hanna, 2018:553). Although the children were central to the observations, and my interactions with individuals were recorded in my research notes, I was unable to pursue research in this direction. I was restricted to participation by teachers only for the interviews, as this could go ahead, although it took place under lock-down and so online rather than face to face.

5.11 Year One Teacher Interviews on Skype

It was originally planned that each of the three Year One teachers (Julia, Lucy and Naomi) would be part of individual informal face to face discussions. This was to gain a different perspective and ensure representation from each class. On reflection, it would have been interesting to get the input of the teaching assistants as they usually cover more duties than teachers and often have a different type of relationship with the children. However, at the start of the international COVID-19 pandemic myself and

all three Year One teachers left Ethiopia and returned to their homes (London, Wales and Scotland). So, the decision was made to use semi-structured online interviews. I realised that I needed to think carefully about timing and use of software so that the teachers are also familiar and comfortable, so that the surrounding are as minimally distracting as possible. I wrote some questions as starting points and these can be seen in Appendix R. Following the university procedure, I used Skype for Business to interview the teachers and record the interviews so that they could be transcribed and analysed. The teachers were contacted and asked to complete an additional ethics form (Appendix J) to enable this to take place. All three teachers were willing to be interviewed and responded enthusiastically to email requests. They all gave detailed and thoughtful answers and the interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. The recorded interviews were all transcribed and then returned to the teachers with a further consent form (Appendix K) requesting consent to use the email communications as part of the research.

The interviews used a semi-structured approach to provide some flexibility in responding to the individual teacher's comments. A list of prompts was used to ensure that the three interviews covered roughly the same content. These prompts were:

- Can you describe some of the different children's friendships that you have seen this year in Year One.
- Can you share your thoughts on how Year One children make friends.
- What about how children maintain those friendships?
- As you know, my observations were done in the playground, I am currently interested in the role that the equipment in the playground plays in children's relationships. Can you share your thoughts on this?
- How reflective is what happens in the playground of what is happening in the classroom and so what is the impact on learning of what happens in the playground?

This structure of interviews, the open-ended questions and time enabled the teachers to create ways of expressing their thoughts and experiences about friendship and the playground in new and creative ways.

As Pink (2009:86) says:

The interview creates a place in which to reflect, define and communicate about experiences. It is indeed a creative place where representations and understandings of experience rather than objective truths about what has been experienced are intentionally produced (and, moreover, often audio-recorded for analysis).

The ideas as articulated by the teachers seemed to reflect but also develop my own understandings. The interviews happened at a point in my research when I had begun to grapple in more depth in using a posthuman perspective; the interview questions hover and suggest this — as I tiptoe tentatively around it. I started with asking more child development type questions about how the children made friendships and then shifted focus to the role of the playground equipment. Interviewing colleagues that I respected as teachers I now reflect that I wanted some validation of what I was seeing in the playground and an understanding of my growing sense of the importance of the things in the playground. At the end of the interviews, I asked each teacher to give me some information so that I could introduce them in the thesis. The names that are here are used throughout this thesis are the pseudonyms they chose (as discussed in Chapter 4.10). This is the information they gave me:

Julia

“middle aged — teacher ... I would say — chatty, positive, someone who probably the best part of teaching is chatting with kids ... rather than teaching them, but, don't, you can't put that! I say, a sense of humour, in the classroom and ... I am very caring and I don't know what the word is ... when you are, like their, the children's wellbeing is something that will go home with me — I am very committed to all, the all, not just their academic progress, their emotional needs and ... is something that is really important to me as a teacher, like all of it ... This is impossible!

Julia Interview Transcript, Wales, July 2020

Lucy

“I've been class teacher since 2011 and I've taught from Primary 3 to Primary 7, which is like, age 7 to age 12. And since then, but, this was my first year in Year One and most of my teaching has been in Scotland. But I have also worked in other places. But this is the first time I have worked in an international school ... I think I'm quite calm and ... quite organised....”

Lucy Interview Transcript, Scotland, July 2020

Naomi

“I have been teaching for seven years ... in London, Thailand and then Addis ... I've always had an interest in education and helping people to learn and understand things ... when I was in school myself, I was always like, the one who would help everybody else in the class ... at the expense of my own work.”

Naomi Interview Transcript, London, July 2020

I was fortunate that the quality of the recorded interviews was good and that almost all words were intelligible. I decided to transcribe the recorded interviews myself and used a nonstandard literary system (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014; Kvale, 2007) so as to record use of the words as they were said, including slang, and I also include the utterances such as 'um'. To get a sense of the speed of the discussion one-minute intervals are marked in the transcripts in brackets. Note is also made of background noises or slightly longer pauses that may indicate missing words — such as in the case of Julia where there was heavy traffic noise at several points and to show thinking time. The transcription process allowed me to start reflecting and analysing what the teachers were saying as I became very familiar with the interviews through listening to them so many times echoing the experience of Earl Rinehart (2021:307). (Transcripts of the interviews for all three teachers can be seen in Appendices S-U.) The teacher interviews were not coded but a more abductive approach was used, that is neither data or hypothesis driven (Brinkmann, 2014), to identify what stood out to me. These reflections, of the teachers' ideas and experiences, are drawn into the analysis in the next three chapters. In addition to the observations and teacher interviews, and in order to deepen my understanding of the equipment as an agential force, I created pieces of writing based upon the concept of Object Orientated Ontology or OOO as discussed in Chapter 2 and throughout the process used photographs to illustrate.

5.12 Ontological Slide

The final part of my ontological slide can be seen in my methodological move towards the flat ontology of OOO and the ontoepistemology of new-materialism. As discussed in Chapter 2, these are not the same thing – whilst there is a boundedness to OOO, new-materialism as Barad (2007:184) explains, emphasises our entangledness:

We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity.

I have moved towards an acceptance of blurring and intra-action, initiated through the observations. It is important here to clarify that I have used OOO as a method in the same way as I have used observations and interviews. The flat ontology of OOO necessitates an understanding of human-objects without the specificity of individual differences and situatedness of knowledge (Burger, 2022). As highlighted by Oral (2015), OOO accepts objects as complete and unknowable and does not attempt to unpick the entanglements (Lemke, 2017). Whilst acknowledging this has obvious limitations, it is a useful perspective from which I have created pieces of speculative writing about the individual pieces of playground equipment. My justification is that the speculative writing, in the style of OOO, produces provocative data that together with the observations, research notes and interview comments enables the intra-actions in the playground to be seen in a new way. In coming to this post-qualitative approach, the surprise of data appearing, as the speculative writing did is fitting with Rautio's balancing acts (2021). It would seem to be logical to avoid in my analysis the ontological realism involved with the codification of data (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). A tentative and abductive approach to the data analysis was taken (Brinkmann, 2014; Earl Rinehart, 2021) and so the next three chapters are informal and suggestive.

5.13 Conclusion

The research process is not a clear straight line but a winding and often poorly marked path and along the way there was a significant shift in my ontological and epistemological approaches. The phases of research are equally blurred as Clark and Moss (2017:111) say:

Although the gathering and reviewing are described here as two distinct phases, in reality these stages become to some extent blurred. ... Reflecting on meanings and reassessing understandings took place throughout the whole study, but this second stage allowed a concentrated period of reflection.

This chapter has outlined the changes in approach that I underwent during this journey and the process that I went through practically in order to prepare for the research. The next three chapters each take a different piece of equipment — the bars, the sandpit and the tricky trail — and provide an analysis that

combines the observation notes, teacher interview comments and pieces of speculative writing based on 000.

This view shows the three pieces of equipment in the EYFS playground:

- *The Bars*
- *The Sandpit (in the corner by the tree and behind the Tukul).*
- *The Tricky Trail*



Chapter 6: The Bars ጠንጠልጠያ (pronounced Mentelteya)



Turning Bars in the KS1 Playground

There are bars in both playgrounds at Mana Barumsa — the bars in the photo above are in the Key Stage One playground. Both bars have horizontal green metal poles, vertical wooden poles and black cushioned mats underneath them. In this chapter I will focus on the bars as a piece of equipment and look at how the bars and children intra-act. I will discuss research on play equipment that includes on the bars and then analyse my own research notes and observation sketches. I will reflect on the teachers' comments on the bars made during their interviews and finally I will write as if I am the bars using Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) (Bogost, 2012). The use of OOO is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter on Methodology. This chapter is the first of three chapters of analysis each focusing on a piece of playground equipment. The bars are a common piece of equipment internationally and so are a good place to start. They are also, as commented by Julia, one of the teachers in her interview:

'very popular.'

Julia (0:21) 14.07.20

6.1 Research on Bars

The 'bars' in their simplest form consist of two posts with a bar between. There are a wide range of different bars used in playgrounds: monkey bars, horizontal ladders, horizontal bars, parallel bars, chin-up bars and turning, somersault or roll-over bars. Existing research focuses on the popularity of the bars, the educational value, the associated risks and the impact of bars in facilitating behaviour.

A New Zealand participatory case study by Greenfield (2007) set out to collect young children's and parents' views about outdoor play and used a mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2017) of photographs, drawings and conversations with the children about the playground equipment. (My own research uses a similar mosaic of observations, interviews and descriptive speculative writing.) Greenfield's analysis of the 'photonovella', observation and child conferencing revealed the monkey bars as the most popular piece of equipment and she states 12 out of 14 children identified the monkey bars as their favourite piece of equipment (Greenfield, 2007:31). In her playground observations, Greenfield (2007:32) also noted that the monkey bars (high horizontal bars that you dangle from) had the highest usage. She suggests, following discussions with children and parents as well as her observations, that the reasons for their popularity seem to be the challenge and risk-taking. The bars encourage children to use them to develop their coordination and can be adapted by individual children to provide a challenge — a way to make it harder for themselves. This echoes Swedish research by Jansson (2015:173) who stated that children were looking for three things in playground design: manipulation, place-making (the opportunity to make the place their own — this is similar to Chatterjee (2005) friendship with place) and challenge. Greenfield (2007:32) states that the monkey bars are unique as 'this equipment facilitates the integration of three main areas of movement - locomotion, balance, and manipulation' and that children are seeking the opportunity to 'engage their bodies in more complex configurations'. (This range of movements is something that I reflect on in my speculative writing in section 6.4.)

The perceived educational value to having the bars in the playground is related to usage supporting the meeting some of the curriculum goals (in New Zealand, the UK and at Mana Barumsa which follow the UK curriculum) in terms of physical development. Greenfield (2007:33) goes on to note that it is the opportunities:

for physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges that seemed to draw the children. These opportunities included risk taking, the need to move in ever increasingly complex ways, pure enjoyment, creativity, stretching, and the "look what I can do" factor.

Greenfield (2007:35) reflects that the children in her study have highlighted the significance of the monkey bars in meeting the curriculum goal and concludes that in her New Zealand context:

the monkey bars provided a unique opportunity for holistic growth and development and are, therefore, a vital component of an outdoor play environment.

More recently, Graham et al. (2022) researched barriers and facilitators to promoting physically active breaktimes in three UK primary schools and as part of their data collection they asked children to put an item on a wish list to make the playground better and them more active. The monkey bars, slides and swings were all chosen by multiple children which is a possible indicator of the universality and popularity of the bars in the UK. Graham et al. (2022) research suggests that children choose pieces of equipment or play areas because they facilitate their friendships with other children. From this we can infer that children regard the bars as a piece of equipment that facilitates friendship.

It is clear that Greenfield and Graham both regard the monkey bars as a 'useful' piece of equipment because of the health benefits of keeping active or as it can support curriculum goals. Aside from this there is also the fact that the bars can be fun and used in imaginative games (this is discussed more in section 6.3). There are no monkey bars at Mana Barumsa — the bars in the Key Stage One playground are turning bars and in the EYFS playground there are parallel bars. The variety of bars at Mana Barumsa seems to have been an ad-hoc decision based on who was purchasing equipment at any specific time rather than a well thought out plan. The turning bars are a series of single bars and can be used differently to the parallel bars. The parallel bars were invented in the 19th century by German gymnast Friedrich Jahn as a means to improve upper body strength. They are now an Olympic sport (Britannica, 2010).

There is a lot of research about the dangers of the bars as they are associated with fractures from falls. Recently Australian paediatricians Curnow and Millar (2021) called for changes to monkey bars as they are the 'most dangerous' type of playground equipment. Curnow and Millar (2021:6) conclude:

The authors recommend trials of a reduction in the height of monkey bars to no more than 1.8 m, or alternatively redesigning monkey bars into less dangerous yet equally engaging pieces of playground equipment.

Playground equipment design is heavily regulated (Knight, 2016). For example in their study on playground design in Indonesia the four assessment criteria used by Ristianti et al. (2020) were: security, safety, leisure and accessibility. Despite, or perhaps because of, the risks involved, bars remain very popular with children as Pitsikali and Parnell (2019:724) mention in their research on three playgrounds in Athens that 'Children themselves tended to simply prefer challenging spaces'. Recognising this, Curnow and Millar (2021) suggest that the monkey bars could be replaced with something that is 'equally engaging'. Although they do not suggest an alternative, the authors do indicate that one of the reasons that the bars are so popular is the challenge and risk factor that they offer. The desirability of play equipment that has elements of risk or danger or is challenging has been highlighted by many researchers as summarised recently by Jerebine et al. (2022). Bars have been used by children for many years and they were certainly more dangerous in 1900:

This photo is of children playing on the iron pole playground equipment in Trinity Play Park (Dallas, Texas).



<https://dallaslibrary2.org/dallashistory/photogallery/images/parks/pa87-1-19-59-210-10.jpg>

PA87-1/19-59-210-10

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Similar iron poles or bars are used in playgrounds around the world and there are a number of more recent pieces of research about the bars in playgrounds. William et al. (2019) carried out research in Indonesia on play provision for ‘vertical housing’. They refer to the monkey bars as part of the equipment that is unusable during the day because the metal and fibre become dangerously hot. This is not often the case in Addis Ababa as the temperatures are not usually so hot but this highlights the importance of the whole environment and reinforces that you cannot just put a piece of equipment in a place to create a playground — this echoes back to the research of Woolley and Lowe (2013) who have correlated play value and design comparing KFC playgrounds to more natural ones (as discussed in Chapter 2.5).

A research study by Mahony et al. (2017) set out to examine the effect of playground design on the social learning that takes place in the playground. The researchers compared two playgrounds — both primary schools (for 5 to 12-year-olds) in Victoria, Australia — one with fixed equipment and the other moveable playground equipment. The researchers used video recordings of the playtimes and coded types of play. One of the pieces of equipment in this study was the monkey bars. Mahony et al. (2017:171) mention how children moved between pieces of equipment and may come, interact with the equipment and then move on:

In the school with fixed play equipment, children talked in pairs, or small groups whilst walking from one part of the playground to another ... One day, a group ran to the monkey bars, did flips and returned to the asphalt quadrangle.

The conclusion of Mahony et al. (2017) is that the design of the playground is critical and that it should meet the different needs of the children. Similarly, a study by Barbour (1999) on how the playground design impacts behaviours of children with differing levels of physical competence highlights again the importance of playground design. The research is a case study focusing on eight children in two different settings. Commenting on one child Barbour (1999:85) describes how when he was not playing football, he used the equipment to create challenges or 'feats':

When not on the soccer field, they did "tricks" on the overhead ladder, uneven bars and swings. The boys challenged and dared each other to perform feats.

The bars in this study were used by the children imaginatively to create appropriate challenge. This is one study where the bars are not monkey bars — but 'uneven bars'. There seems to be little to no research on the different types of bars. The research highlights the popularity of the bars with the children as a piece of play equipment and suggests that this may be because of the risks, challenges and openness to being used imaginatively in play. In my observations and the teacher interview these themes are echoed as I map children's intra-action with the bars.

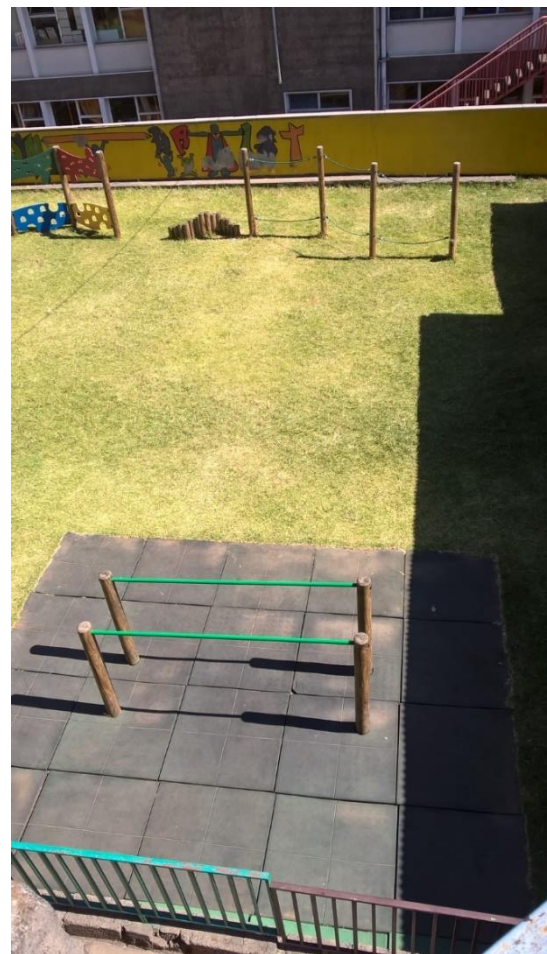
6.2 The Bars at Mana Barumsa

The parallel bars, in the EYFS playground, are located in one corner. They are bordered by the metal fence, the ICT room (the blue to the left in the top photo) and the grass area that is often used for football. For ease I will be referring to these as 'the bars' throughout this chapter. Photos of the bars in location can be seen below and on the next page. Safety is a theme that is discussed at several points in this chapter — the black under the bars are thick rubberised mats — similar to the carpet in the KFC playgrounds (Woolley, 2008) in the UK.



The photo above, was taken one day after school when the bars are being used to dry a carpet. This raises the issue that the bars and playground have other roles outside of the regular school day. You can see the location and height of the bars in this photo.

I took this photo (on the right) from the Year 4 building that overlooks the playground. From this height you can see the bars area clearly and its location in relation to the other pieces of equipment.




6.3 The Research Notes and Sketches

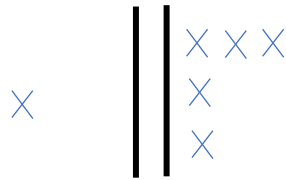
At the time of the research, all three classes of Year One children had lunch inside and then came out to play for twenty minutes. The playtime should end at 12.40 but sometimes the whistle goes slightly after that. The decision to observe the parallel bars was not planned — in fact on that day I had planned to observe the sandpit but there was a tarpaulin over it. I had not anticipated this but the tarpaulin was placed because of the rains (by the maintenance workers) and so I left the sandpit for another day. (During this season it often rains at night and then is again warm and dry enough for t-shirts during the day. There are four seasons in Ethiopia: short rains, long rains, short dry, long dry. Although with climate change these are now less predictable.) As I looked around the playground, I was drawn to the bars area. As I explain in my research notes:

As I observed the playground it became clear that there were different groups of students gathering around the bars. Both different children and different numbers. I later mentioned to Julia my observations and she said that it is a very social area and she mentioned a girl in her class who rarely played elsewhere. My observations from a distance seemed to indicate that different groups of children passed through the area, some moving away and then returning.

Research notes, 17th January 2020

Julia was one of the Year One teachers and so familiar with the playground and the equipment that the children used. As I watched, I sketched down what I saw in my shiny research journal. I drew a sketch showing the bars as simply two thick black lines and used an  to represent each child. This was not a considered decision but a quick response to the situation. It was chosen as I did not know all the names of the children and I wanted to look at how the children moving and interacting with the bars. One drawback of using this method is that you do not know who the children are or if it is the same child reoccurring in each diagram. However, this anonymity, the visual nature of the sketches and the use of the five-minute time intervals allows you to see the flow of the movement of the children on and around the bars. These sketches can be seen in full in Appendix M. As discussed in Chapter 5, this use of 'mapping' differs from that of Knight (2019) whose drew the movement without looking at the paper but is more similar to the research of Pitsikali and Parnell (2020) who use symbols and arrows to show movement. The series of sketches below are at time intervals. I only drew in the sketches children who were on the black mats. (All names mentioned in the research note transcripts are pseudonyms that the children choose. The use of 'Xyxz' indicates that the name of the child could not be understood.)

In the first sketch there are six children in the bars area. Here you can see that the children stood next to and behind each other.



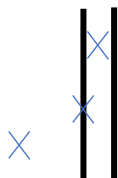
Sketch One – 12.10 pm

The children are lining up for a turn on the bars. They spread out along the bars and use the full length — three children can use the bars at the same time. The other child is in the area of the bars but alone on the left-hand side of the diagram whilst the five other children are in a close group. This first sketch was a trial and was the impetus for producing a series of sketches at regular timed intervals as I realised that what I was seeing was changing rapidly. The use of timed intervals was something that I had used to observe in the classroom as a teacher at various points in my career and so was a method I used spontaneously. I explained in my notes:

In my first sketch of the play area there were 6 children. There were other areas in the first sketch including a group of children sitting in a circle. As I decide to focus on the bars. I then sketched the bars only and indicated the position of the children as a X. I made these 6 sketches in my research notebook at 5-minute intervals.

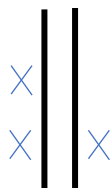
Research notes, 17th January 2020

The decision to focus on the bars was made due to the number of children and the high level of movement on and around the bars. The next sketch was ten minutes later and showed three children interacting with the bars. The use of the cross on the line showed that the child was on the bars — either hanging or sitting on them. Here the children are on, between and next to the bars.



Sketch Two – 12.20 pm

This range of movement continues and in sketch three there are children on opposite sides of the bars — probably facing each other — although this is not recorded. It is as if there is a dance going on as the children move around and together — in and out of the bars — reminiscent to me of some form of country dancing.



Sketch Three – 12.25 pm

The next sketch identifies one of the children who I had received both assent and consent forms from — Roze. (I will refer to this group of children who I had received both assent and consent forms from as in

the 'research group.' The pseudonyms of these 15 children are listed in Chapter 4.12.) In my research notes I mention that Roze was on the wall and then moved to the bars and that Van and Natna (also children in the research group) were in the bars area. I mention that:

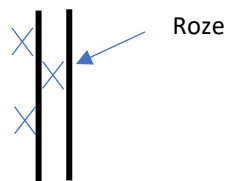
Van was around the bar area at the start of playtime. He had his arm in a sling but still managed to lay on the grass and roll around with his friends, go to the wall area. The wall maybe another area that children use as a social base. There is a narrow ledge that the children are small enough to sit on in relative comfort.

Roze was on the wall before moving to the bars. Natna was also near the bars at one point.

Research notes, 17th January 2020

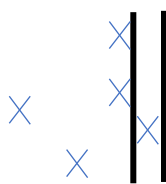
This reference to the wall being 'another' social area implies that the bars are a social area. The children congregated around the bars using it as part of their games. The concept of the bars as a social area is discussed later on in this chapter in relation to the comments made in the teacher interviews.

In Sketch Four I label the position of Roze. She is the only one of the 15 children in the research group who appear in my observation sketches of the bars. Here she is between the bars with two other children on the left-hand bar. The small group make a triangle of three children.



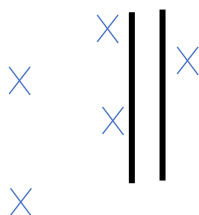
Sketch Four – 12.30 pm

Five minutes later and there are now five children. Once again, most children are on the left-hand side of the bars — between the bars and the fence. This may be for the practical reason that the other side borders the grass area where football is often played. The five children are a group of three who are closer together and two children slightly further apart.



Sketch Five – 12.35 pm

In the final sketch there are also five children but they are now more evenly spread with one child on the right-hand side of the bars and the others being in pairs on the left.



Sketch Six – 12.40 pm

The sketches seem to reflect the comment by Mahony et al. (2017) referred to in Section 6.1 as children come into the area of the bars, interact and then leave the area — there is a flow to the movement. I finish my observation sketches with the comments in my research notes that note although in the sketches there were a maximum of 6 children, I saw 8 children on the bars at one time. Over the course of the observation there were many more than 8 children who used the bars as children came into the area and then moved to other areas of the playground. The number of children and the types of movement led to a move away from focusing on the ‘research group’ of only 15 children to look at the patterns of interaction of the whole year group cohort with the pieces of fixed equipment. In the observations the children ‘hung’ ‘chased’ ‘lent’ ‘stood around’ the bars. This range of interaction with the bars prompted me to question the significance of the equipment in the playground.

The largest group of children that I saw on the bars was 8 but this was not recorded. In these sketches the largest group was 6 children. The children hung on the bars, chased under and through the bars, lent or just stood around the bars and talked. I wondered again about the significance of the inanimate objects in the playground and whether my future suggestions for the school may be around the use, layout and possible purchase of play equipment to facilitate friendship. This was not something that I had predicted to find. Once again, I fall back to post-humanism....

Research notes, 17th January 2020

It was in January 2020 that I first began to look at the fixed playground equipment as more than a piece of equipment — as more than things. The use of sketches seems to reflect the work of Ingold (2015) on lines and blobs. The crosses are blobs that indicate a child and the bars are shown by the lines. However, I feel that the call of Ingold (2016) is to look forward rather than retrospectively at data and so improvise and take a speculative approach to the data. I hope that I do this through the creation of pieces of speculative writing using OOO (See Section 6.4). The observation of the bars prompted me to consider the children’s interaction with the equipment. I concluded my research notes:

There are clearly more questions to be asked about the bars and it seems that this activity is worth replicating. It seems unlikely that this is a one-off, especially as Julia’s remarks seem to echo my own findings.

Research notes, 17th January 2020

This reference to Julia — one of the three Year One teachers — indicates that I was at this time seeking confirmation of my observations from others. The teacher interviews provide some insight into the thoughts of other adults who know the playground and children.

6.4 Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews took place when teachers were geographically and perhaps also mentally distant from the playground, as discussed in Chapter 5.13, the teachers were all in the UK due to the pandemic and the term and school year had finished. All three Year One teachers were interviewed, Julia and Lucy

explicitly mentioned the bars, whilst Naomi referred to ‘the poles’. (The full transcripts of the three teacher interviews can be seen in Appendices S — Julia, T — Lucy and U — Naomi.) Both Julia and Lucy describe how the bars are used by children who are alone or ‘Independent’. Lucy first discussed the way that the outside space provided opportunities for a different kind of play and how that enabled children’s relationships to develop:

And so, somehow, the (0:11) outside space and that opportunity for freer play seems to have an impact on how they include people or not and how their friendships develop.

Lucy (0:10) 15.07.20

When I specifically asked Lucy about the fixed, standing equipment and the impact that this had on relationships she first mentioned the bars:

there are some children who, seem just quite happy to do, maybe they want to go and play on the monkey bars, or whatever you call those bars that go across, and so they will go across and dangle off them for a while and they seem to do that quite (0:12) ‘independently’, not necessarily engaging with other children when they are on it.

Lucy (0:11) 15.07.20

Lucy is uncertain about the use of the term ‘monkey bars’ and different members of staff will refer to the bars in different ways — such as Naomi’s use of the term ‘poles’. The teaching assistants and maintenance staff do not have a specific word for the bars but rather use a general term ሞንጠልጠያ (pronounced Mentelteya) meaning sports equipment. This may be due to the limited exposure of these staff to similar equipment or the multitude of languages spoken in Ethiopia. This lack of a specific name may indicate a lack of regard or value of the equipment. This is something that reoccurs in Chapter 8 when the focus is on the ‘tricky trail’. Lucy uses the term ‘dangle off’ for how the children interact with the bars. Lucy clearly recognised that children play in different ways and the importance of the role of the equipment in facilitating this. She comments that the children using the bars are doing so ‘independently’ and so seems to dismiss the use of the bars as a piece of equipment that supports relationships between children who she states are ‘not necessarily engaging with other children’. She suggested that some of the equipment was there for when the children needed or wanted to do something on their own. This comment seems to contradict the observations where children were at the bars in groups — there are no sketches with only an individual child. In the observation there was a minimum of three children in the bars area. Children came in and out of the area and so one child staying at the bars would be interacting with another individual, groups or pairs of other children as they came and went in and out of the area. This may be the role of the bars — as a place to ‘hang out’ or ‘dangle’ as Lucy says. She contrasts this to other pieces of equipment which she states ‘becomes part of their games’ (0.12).

A methodological issue with not identifying the children in the sketches is that there may be children who stay on the bars whilst others pass in and out, or the children may all be part of a group, but this detail is

not shown. Julia also shares this opinion of the bars. In her interview, Julia discussed how she watched children at the start of the year to see who they were playing with and to check that they were not playing on their own. She mentions that there are different ‘types’ of children in terms of how long it takes them to form relationships with their peers:

Julia: And then there is type of (kid?) that just seem to be on their own for quite a long time and then maybe around Christmas, it doesn't always happen but I will see them in the playground, quite happy like, so, can I use kid's names?

Researcher: Yeah, I will change them. (0:03) So yeah.

Julia: Okay, someone like Jol will play on the bars, for the whole of the first term on her own, and seemed okay. I just noticed that her and I think Xyz was one. You know, when you are watching to make sure that kids are playing with someone. So, there's always a few, I can think of someone else, Roseile actually, who are often alone and they look happy at playtime and I am not worried about them but I suppose I often, help them to join a group, which isn't necessarily what they want but I suppose we all think that everybody wants a group of friends.

Julia (0:02) 14.07.20

Julia observes some children playing on their own until the end of the first term of the academic year — ‘Christmas’ and this seems to be then a cause of concern — if they are playing ‘alone’ beyond this time. However, she also mentions that some children who continue to play by themselves appear happy to do so — such as Roseile. Julia is suggesting that children take some time to establish friendships and play relationships with other children and appears to consider the bars as a place where children can play alone and may choose to do so. The observations in the playground took place after Christmas — the time mentioned by Julia as when there is a shift in the children's play — ‘maybe around Christmas I will see them in the playground, quite happy’. (Christmas is significant at Mana Barumsa as it is almost halfway through the school year and within Ethiopia as it is celebrated twice — once at ‘ferenji’ Christmas and once at the Orthodox Ethiopian Christmas — at Mana Barumsa this results in a three week break from school.) This is significant as it breaks up the school year – dividing it into two parts. The bars may have then a key role in providing a safe space for children to go to in that in between time while they are not playing in a group with other children. Julia comments that these children are ‘few’ and so marks them as unusual with the cohort. At the end of this part of the transcript Julia seems to reflect that perhaps, as adults or teachers ‘we all’ presume that children want to play with other children and this may not be the case.

Later on in the interview, I asked Julia specifically about the role of the equipment in children's relationships. Julia clearly thought it was very important — she stated that it was a ‘huge thing’ and ‘the more the better’. Julia raised the issue that the fixed equipment had some sort of ‘shelf life’ with children — that they are only interested in using it for a limited period and that they would prefer loose play equipment as ‘they're having themselves to do something more’. When I asked Julia what she thought was the role that the equipment plays in children's relationships she replied:

Yeah that is a huge thing, I think, in the playground for us — (Loud siren in background) if they have got something they can, have or do together, it helps promote their chatting or anything like that ... The more the better, I would say, the more equipment. Not, you know, not, it's funny, I feel like the standing equipment, the sort of climbing frame stuff, has almost with different children a shelf-life they will (indistinguishable) — to go for the hoops, the skipping rope or the things that they're having themselves (0:20) to do something more than just climbing on it....

Julia (0:18) 14.07.20

Julia's concept of the children wanting to manipulate and use the equipment in their own way echoes the research of Pitsikali and Parnell (2019); Curnow and Millar (2021) state that children want to engage and play in such a way that they can control and change their interactions to make them more interesting or challenging. This is something that is echoed by the third Year One teacher — Naomi. Naomi uses the term 'fixed equipment' and refers to 'the poles'. She first mentioned that the equipment gave 'structure' to the play:

The fixed equipment is good because it gives some structure but also the space is (0:08) good because then they're free to create whatever kind of imaginary play they would like to and then it's testing those friendships....

Naomi (0:07) 16.07.20

This seems to imply that the equipment can be used as a place to play and a starting point from which to create their own play. She stated that this is important as it will help them to make friends and 'play nicely' with other children:

like a jungle gym kind of thing, is good because it is very reminiscent of the park and I think it gives the children already you know, it builds on these ideas that this is a place to play and they have already formed. Some of them will already have ideas on how to play in a park and take turns in it — or if they haven't been to a park then they can learn at school and then transfer those skills you know into a park and things like that and help them to make friends and play nicely with potentially new children. But I think also it is important to have equipment in the playground that is not too, not too two-dimensional. Like a slide and everything is good because you can make up games with your imagination on a slide.

Naomi (0:09) 16.07.20

The bars are certainly part of 'a jungle gym kind of thing' and Naomi comments on being 'reminiscent of the park' echoes the findings of Greenfield (2007) on the popularity of the bars. It may also highlight Naomi's background as British and perhaps having her own background experience in mind when making this comment. (There are an increasing number of parks in Addis and children at Mana Barumsa are likely to be familiar with parks as discussed in Chapter 3.2.) Naomi goes onto say that it is important that equipment is 'not two dimensional' and referring to the slide that 'you can make up games with your imagination'. It can be interpreted that the bars also have this capacity to be used for imaginary games and perhaps this is one reason why children come in and out of the bars area. This observation echoes research from Australia (Darian-Smith, 2012:274) where in one school:

it was a deliberate policy to have only one set of play equipment, such as monkey-bars, installed so as to encourage children to use their imagination in developing free play activities.

Naomi however valued slides and bars and similar equipment as they support imaginative play. She also mentioned the role of the equipment in teaching turn taking and other social skills that children may learn at a park — 'help them to make friends and play nicely'. The phrase 'playing nicely' is reminiscent of the

‘sitting beautifully’ which Jones (2013:605) discusses in her article on ‘schooling the body’ where she looks at the intra-actions of things to shape what goes on in an early-years classroom. It also echoes a study by (Gallagher et al., 2017:1249) on listening walks for EYFS teachers that highlights the expectations of a ‘docile body’ position to demonstrate listening. These studies link to research by Thomson (2004:74) who after carrying out ethnographic observations in three UK primary school playgrounds suggested that schools impose control and restrictions on play and she comments that:

one can see how the environment of the playground is used for both the explicit and implicit controlling and monitoring of the bodies that occupy it.

At the end of playtime at Mana Barumsa the children line up. Although I did not focus on these during any observations, I know from experience that children are encouraged to stand in lines, facing forward and in silence. Thomson (2004:83) mentions the use of the phrase ‘tidy lines of two’ in one school she observed. Throughout the whole of the breaktime, playgrounds remain controlled places for children where they are still restricted by rules — Lucy’s use of the phrase ‘freer play’ seems a more accurate description. Naomi compares the bars with the tricky trail (discussed in Chapter 8) which she says is more about ‘physical development’. This is an interesting comparison as we know from Greenfield (2007:132) that the bars offer children a chance to develop movement skills in ‘locomotion, balance, and manipulation.’ Naomi explains that the children ‘swing — and then start to make up games’:

...versus the poles. Where the children can swing — and then they start to make up games — and each one, sometimes they are trying to be animals on there, sometimes they are trying to be gymnasts, sometimes they’re trying to be ballerinas. It’s more imaginative play that kind of combines with the equipment.

Naomi (0:10) 16.07.20

She emphasises the role of the bars in facilitating imaginative play — the children are ‘animals’ ‘gymnasts’ or ‘ballerinas’ and that the play ‘combines with the equipment’. This seems a significant phrase as it indicates an intra-action between the equipment and the children in what would otherwise seem to follow a more humanist theoretical perspective. Naomi clearly sees imaginative play as important and goes on to suggest that the school purchases a mud kitchen which she thinks would open up other opportunities for creative play:

I think a mud kitchen or something like that would be a better use, a better toy stimulus to put in the playground. Because from there, you know, (0:11) it could be a home, it could be a shop, it could be a café, it could be many things and mean and translate in different ways to the children.

Naomi (0:10-0:11) 16.07.20

Overall, the bars are an important piece of playground equipment and are well used by the children. They provide a place for children who choose to be by themselves but also provide interaction with other children who maybe passing through. They are a place to step into imaginative play as they become something else. The bars intra-act with the children and create possibilities for play.

6.5 Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) — Speculative Writing

The observations and teacher interviews led me to consider the intra-actions between equipment and children. Bogost (2012) asks us to consider what it is like to be an object. In order to do this, I have tried to write as if I were the bars. In this piece of speculative writing, I retell the story told pictorially in the observation sketches. My aim was to try to gain an alternative perspective that assists me in valuing all ‘things’ and recognising that each piece of equipment also has agency and changes the environment that it is in. This requires a leap into our imagination.

I stand near the multi-coloured painted metal fence. My wood is the colour of honey. It is worn smooth by the repeated touches of small hands and faded by the strong African sun. Vertical cracks show my age, my wood has begun to split but I still stand strong and firm. The four bases of my four poles are buried into the ground deep enough to make me secure. I need to withstand not only the weather but the weight of the small ones as they hold onto my poles and spin around or hang from my bars.

Between the poles are the bars that I am referred to by. I have heard my name ‘the bars’. These bars are smooth steel painted a bright green. These bars are part of me but not who I am. Under my bars and around my poles are my thick black rubber mats that cushion the feet of the small ones. They spring back against their weight when they drop from me or run across and under my bars. My mats lie in squares with gaps in between for the grass to grow up. I am in the ground, planted here under the bright blue African sky. I am my poles, my bars and my mats.

Once a day, when the sun is highest in the sky, I am surrounded, loved. Small ones — individuals and groups swing on me, go round me, under my bars, through me, in a beautiful dance. Let me take you to a Monday in January. January is hot, the time before the small rains and the sky is almost always that particular clear deep blue that you only find in Africa. I know the days by the pattern. Monday is the day after the two quiet days and on Mondays the smaller of the small ones come.

Today there are 7 of them to start with, they have organised themselves into lines, the first line has 3, then, next to that, 2 small ones make up their own lines. Another small one stands a little away on the edge of my mats — alone but connected through being on my mats and so part of things.

The children run around me, under me and swing on my poles. One of the small ones has his arm in a bright white bandage — a sling. It was not an accident that I know about but the game is one that I am part of, being held, the slipperiness of my smooth worn metal bars gripped by small hands.

Ten minutes later, the 7 are long gone, now there are 3 small ones. Two on top of my bars and one standing, a little away, on the edge of my mats. Four rubber soled trainers push, muscles taut, against my bars and I push back, so legs straighten and we balance for a moment. A second of silence before the movement — the small ones tumble, drop and run off.

Five minutes later, while some of the small ones make bridges on the grass next to me, there are three small ones, two dangling on one bar and another one facing them on the other bar. They talk, they laugh and play. Their laughter reverberates echoing back from my bars to them as the sound carries through the air.

Now, five minutes later, the small one called Roze holds both of my bars, arms at full stretch as she picks up her legs and my bars hold her weight. She sways whilst her two friends hang off one of the bars near her — a triangle linked through my bars. They leave after only a short time.

Another five minutes, now there are 5 different small ones — two on one bar, one on the other and two small ones on my mats. The two on my mats squat, whispering a conversation and sharing a secret that only I can hear, their weight compacts my rubber causing indents that spring back when they leap up shouting and run off.

Finally, just before the bell is rang by the big one there are 5 small ones — not on my bars now but under them — one under one and two under the other. Then two on the mats.

My time is in constant motion, there is a beautiful unspoken choreography to the movement of the small ones towards me and away. Different groups, different small ones, different numbers, at different times. Sometimes one small one will stay with me — holding on, hanging, dangling, touching and interacting with me. How am I perceived by them? Solid? Immovable? Huge? — I tower over them ... I am steadfast, dependable and to be trusted. I am part of the games and the laughter but also part of the solitude and loneliness. As I am held onto so I hold them.



Writing as if I were the bars has enabled me to consider more about the tangled interactions that children have with this piece of equipment. This speculation has enabled me to have several insights. The first is about the different components that make up the bars — the wooden poles, the black rubber mats and the green steel bars that all make up the unit — ‘the bars’. Each of these components has a different intra-action with the children. In particular the poles seem to have a distinct role as something that fix the bars into the ground and provide something solid and a sense of permanence to the equipment. The poles are something to hold onto, to hug and be hugged by and this came to light through this writing. Whilst the mats provide the boundary of the unit. The bars are a unit that includes the poles, bars and mats and so there is a sense that anyone ‘on’ the mats (standing, sitting or anything!) is part of the intra-action. This seems important as children who may be on the outskirts of the play are connected and part of the intra-action. Perhaps giving a sense of belonging that is recognised as important in friendships and well-being.

The second insight is that the bars are an area of transition of passing through — the children playing here change regularly as they move onto other parts of the playground. In the speculative writing this comes across clearly as at each timed interval the children change. The bars are part of many different games that the children play. This is a distinctly different type of play to other pieces of equipment — for example in the sandpit (discussed in Chapter 7) some children spend the whole playtime in one place.

The third insight is that the bars enable different types of movements and ways of being — ‘dangling’ ‘hanging’ ‘twisting’ ‘turning’, the variety in numbers of children and their positions. The children form lines and take turns to use the bars. These are all reminiscent of a highly choreographed dance and create patterns in the data or a place ballet (Seamon, 1980). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.4 and refers to the movements specific to a place. In the teacher interview, Naomi describes how the children may pretend to be ‘animals’ ‘gymnasts’ or ‘ballerinas’ and it is some of these movements that we see on the bars. The children ‘dangle’ ‘swing’ and ‘climb’ like monkeys, ‘twist’ and ‘turn’ like gymnasts and ‘balance’ like ballerinas. The bars and the children intra-act in a messy and entangled way that demonstrates that the complexity of the intra-actions.

Finally, the speculative writing provides some insight into the bars being part of the playground in a permanent way that becomes clear through the description of the position of the bars within the playground and the sense that if the bars were not there then there would be a hole or gap. The use of worn smooth and the cracks caused by time under the sun give a sense of the bars being important to the creation of the place of the playground in that space.

6.6 Key Themes Discussion

In this chapter I have reflected on the bars as a piece of equipment and how they intra-act with the children. The bars are a common piece of playground equipment and there are several types — at Mana Barumsa there are turning bars and parallel bars. Research from Greenfield (2007) and Graham et al. (2022) shows the popularity of the bars as a piece of equipment. There is also research citing concerns about the safety of the bars (Curnow and Millar, 2021). Whilst the possibility of the bars providing challenge and opportunity for imaginative play was reflected by other researchers (Mahony et al., 2017; Barbour, 1999). My observations in the EYFS playground focused upon the parallel bars.

What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

The bars provide an opportunity for children to use them as a place of transition for their games. This is shown in the observation sketches which record varying numbers of children, positions and suggest different types of play and in the teacher interviews as Naomi said, provide ‘a structure’ for the children.

In the speculative writing this idea also came through with the changing numbers of children every five minutes.

The bars also provide opportunities for different types of play. The teacher interviews reflect the popularity of the bars and also the use of the bars as a place that children play in groups as part of a game but also as a place where children can play independently, as noted by Julia and Lucy. The bars allow different interactions and movements and the piece of speculative writing mentions ‘dangling’ ‘hanging’ ‘twisting’ and ‘turning’.

Finally, through the speculative writing the importance of the different components, particularly the poles and the bars as a place of permanence and security — something to hold on and this is also reflected in the comment individually ‘hanging around’ which features in the teacher interview. The mats provide a unifying function allowing children and equipment to be connected within the place of the bars.

How can schools use these findings when reviewing playground design?

The bars facilitate imaginative play, different types of movement and give a fixed point in the playground. Schools might wish to anticipate that the bars will be used in this variety of ways rather than anticipate one or two children to stay there for any length of time. In this respect location in the playground could be considered as children ‘run to’ the bars — some of the possible questions to consider might be:

- Where do the children pass through on their way to and from the bars?
- How are the bars located in relation to other pieces of equipment?

6.7 Conclusion

The bars are a common piece of playground equipment and so were a good place to start. The bars observation and my subsequent reflection was the impetus for a more post-humanist approach to the research. The research on the bars indicate that they contribute to the building of relationships and types of play by enabling children to join in with existing play, and so build on relationship and also create a sense of belonging as children who are on the mats are somehow included the play that is occurring. This can be seen visually in the photograph below where the outline of the mats are clear and the unit of mats, poles and bars can be seen as distinct to the grass around — the boundary enables a sense of belonging to those within the area. In the following chapters I write first about the sandpit and then the tricky trail.



The Bars — children in EYFS use the tyres to climb onto so that they can reach the bars.

Chapter 7: The Sandpit የአሸዋ ሣጥን (pronounced yeashwa saten)



The sandpit and sand toys

This is a recent photo of the sandpit at the school and shows the setting of the sandpit within the EYFS playground. As discussed in Chapter 2, the children at Mana Barumsa come from affluent families, the school is well resourced and similar in many ways, including the curriculum, to a UK primary school. (This form of colonisation is not discussed in the thesis but will hopefully appear in future publications.) You can see the sandpit sits alongside the fence and has the steps to the blue metal slide at one end (in front of the wall) and the tree at the other end (behind which is an entrance to the playground down some steps). To the right in this photo is the small playhouse that is called ‘the tukul’ (the name for a traditional Ethiopian house). The other side of the fence is a well-used walkway along the side of the building. The sinks on the side of the building were installed for hand washing at the start of the pandemic and after the research period. The pile of toys for the sand was also not there when I did the observation.

In this chapter I will comment on work from other researchers on and in the sandpit, analyse the observation of the playground using my research notes, interview comments from the teachers and a speculative piece of writing using OOO (object orientated ontology — see Chapter 5) where I write from the perspective of the sandpit. I begin with some historical and research background on sandpits — which now conjure up for many an iconic image of childhood play.

7.1 Research on Sandpits

Sandpits were first used to encourage play in Germany in the 1850s when ‘Sand Bergs’ were built in Berlin. The growth is thought to be tied to the Kindergarten or ‘children’s garden’ movement created by Froebel (Hermann, 1926). The idea was exported to the US and by the end of the century there were sandpits in Boston and New York¹. Today sandpits (or sandboxes as they are known in the US) are a common feature of playgrounds around the world. Sandpits continue to change in design and inspire — one example of this is the Fukushima Sand Story (Sand-Story, 2021), a project formed in 2013 and led by Dr Kasama (2021) to reintroduce sandpits and has led to the introduction of indoor, all-year sandpits in Japan.

Sandpits are mentioned within several research studies (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Jarrett et al., 2010; MacRae, 2020; Olowe et al., 2015; Stephenson, 2009; van Schijndel et al., 2010; Ristianti et al., 2020). The research by Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) uses a photograph of a young girl in a sandpit as an illustration of how research focuses on the human rather than things. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010:527) comment:

This division is asymmetrical in terms of value, that is, the girl playing with sand is given a far greater value and is seen as superior to the sand, the bucket and the sandbox. She is active and the sand is passive.

The article uses the photographs of the girl in the sandpit and of a climbing frame to illustrate the anthropocentrism of research and challenge us to a different approach — a relational materialist one — where we acknowledge the agency of things. The study of MacRae (2020) focuses on the use of touch as a way of feeling and knowing that is as powerful as words. The study draws on data from an episode in the sand tray at a nursery school. The study uses the slowing of video film to show touch and small movements of children who are playing with sand wheels and other small toys in a sand tray. MacRae (2020:98) takes a post-human approach to the intra-action between human, object and the sand and notes:

The scooping, scraping and pouring actions of hands in response to sand was also a reminder that sand moves hands differently to toys, or other hands.

This response and intra-action between the sand and the children is something that I saw as part of my observations. MacRae (2020) and Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) both approach the sand as something that has agency.

¹(<https://www.biggamehunters.co.uk/acatalog/History-of-Sandpits.html>)

In contrast, Jarrett et al. (2010) value the sandpit as an educational tool, their study was a facilitated action research project with questions created by a childcare centre. They sought to answer who played in the sand, how to make sand play more creative and constructive (Jarrett et al., 2010:225). They give a background to other research on sandpits and then set out to answer questions about who uses the sandpit (boys or girls and age) and the types of play. Their results were inconclusive but seem to indicate differences depending on the moisture of the sand (as this facilitates different types of play); the equipment available such as trucks, spades etc.; and social factors to do with proximity of an adult and groups who arrive at the sandpit first. Jarrett et al. (2010:234) conclude:

Sand has myriad uses. Children use it to fill containers, to form cakes for pretend birthday parties, and to force water wheels to turn. They jump into it. They make castles, roads, tunnels, caves, and mountains with it. They add cars, twigs, stones, and figures to it to create miniature worlds. Sand attracts a single child and groups of children. When children play in the sandpit, they learn about sharing and kindness to others. Sand play has the potential to affect children's social development, their imagination, their coordination, and their confidence. Sand play may affect the way they approach learning, that is, how persistent they are and how much problem solving they do.

This study is important in showing the range of types of play that take place in sand and suggesting the importance of sand play as an educational tool. Olowe et al. (2015) present a study about the knowledge that preschool teachers in Ondo West (Nigeria) have of using sand and water play as teaching tools. The authors identified a gap in the knowledge of teachers who were not trained Early years teachers and call for training to be available for all teachers on the use of sand and water play because they are important educational tools. This is relevant as it gives merit to the sandpit as a piece of equipment that should be valued by schools.

The other research used the sandpit as the location but don't focus on the agency of the sand. The study by van Schijndel et al. (2010) was a 'sciencing' experiment (Science related activities for young children) where adults worked with children in the sandpit to encourage exploratory play using the sand as a material. The study concluded that the intervention increased the exploratory play in the sandpit. The study of Stephenson (2009) is about using photos in research and, despite the title, mentions only in passing about the preference of one child for playing in the sandpit but with a toy horse. Support for sandpits varies; Ristianti et al. (2020:9), redesigning play spaces in Indonesia, state: 'it can stimulate sensory and motoric development'; whilst Australian research by Dymont and O'Connell (2013), on how playground design impact play choices and behaviour, questions whether children play in the sandpit only when there is limited access to other natural areas (for constructive or symbolic play). They suggest children are bored of sand play because of how ubiquitous it is and, in their conclusion, call for reflection on the 'assumed popularity' of sandpits. For my own research the sandpit was chosen as one of the locations for observation due to the large number of children who play there and its perceived popularity. Perhaps the location of the school in Ethiopia and the relative rarity of availability of sand play means that

children at Mana Barumsa do not have the same boredom with sand. In my analysis, I focus on how the sandpit facilitates relationships between children. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) come closest to seeing the possibilities of the sandpit as having agency and being a facilitator — this is what I explore within my research.

7.2 The Research Notes

The observation of the sandpit took place at the end of January (see Appendix L for the schedule of observations) — this is the end of hot and dry season in Ethiopia and the days are usually sunny. The observations took place at the start of the data collection part of the research and this observation was the fourth in the series of seven observations in the playground. My research notes explain that I chose an observation point that was somewhat hidden as I did not want to attract attention to myself.

Today I decided to focus on the sandpit. I therefore sat near the edge of the sandpit and almost behind the tree. This meant that my view of the remainder of the playground was obstructed. It also meant that I was really only visible to the children around the sandpit.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020


The location of my position was important to allow me to see and hear but not intrude into the play and what was happening in the playground. I wanted to take a more observational stance and not get too entangled in the activity of the playground. Of course, my presence itself altered the situation and just by being there I made things different. In every observation, I found that my presence attracted some children who wanted to engage and interact with me which was not something that I had anticipated before the start of the research, though I naturally as a school leader wanted to encourage this and so I was again challenged by my differing roles.

7.3 Observational Sketches

It was a spontaneous response to the demands of recording during the observation of the bars (see Chapter 6 for more detail) that led me to using sketches to try to capture the essence of what I was seeing in a quick way and to have something to reflect on later. Part of my own reflection on using this methodology has been to look at how different researchers use mapping (Knight, 2021) or descriptive diagrams (Pitsikali and Parnell, 2020). This is discussed in greater depth and the methodology explained in Chapter 5.4 and also mentioned again in Chapter 6.2 on the analysis of the bars. Hence it seemed logical to use the same method to record the observation of the sandpit. My research notes explain the layout of the sketches (referred to in my notes as 'diagrams') and the detail of what I did:

I had observed previously that the sandpit was a centre of social activity. Today's observation backed up this. The first drawing of the sandpit was at 12.15 and shows that there were 6 children in the sandpit. This is the smallest number of children that played there. In order to try and capture the rapidly changing play of the children I drew sketches timed at 2-minute intervals. I used a rectangle with a thickness to indicate the fact that the edge of the sandpit acts like a seat. The children are marked with a X. Xs over the edge of the sandpit were either sitting on or standing on this edge. No names were put on the diagrams, although some of the research participants, such as Efrata, did play in the sandpit. The diagrams show the change in play patterns to a scenario where there was a competition to build the biggest pile of sand. This was largely orchestrated by one of the Year 5 play leaders.

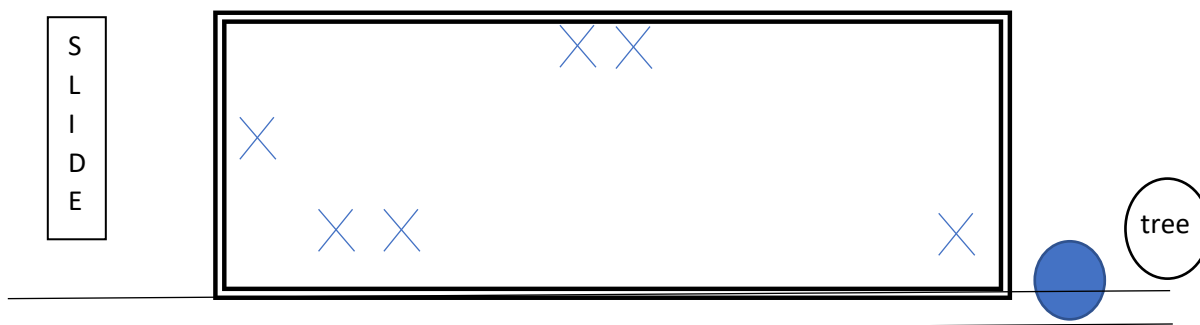
Research notes, 22nd January 2020

These sketches can also be seen in full in Appendix N. There are 13 sketches and then a photo of the empty sandpit after the playtime. The sketches were drawn at two-minute intervals and the children are anonymised through the use of  to mark their position. Two- or three-minute intervals were chosen here, rather than the longer five-minute intervals of the bars, as the movement around the sandpit seemed to be changing much more rapidly. The use of the X symbol for my notes meant that the movement of the children could be focused on and the data recorded quickly. The use of the symbol does not provide information about which individual children are involved and so rather than getting caught up in issues of the gender of the child, or particular friendships, broader generalisations can be focused upon. This is useful as my research question focuses on the kinds of relationships that emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment. Through the use of such anonymised data patterns and movements — the place ballet (Seamon, 1980) of the playground can be seen. (The concept of place ballet is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.4 and refers to the movements associated with a specific place.) Alongside the sketches I wrote some research notes and also totalled the number of children in the sandpit area. At the start of the observation period there were only six children in the sandpit. These comprised of two pairs of children and two individuals. The children were spread out throughout the sandpit. This small gathering doubled in size within the first three minutes to a group of 13. The humans in these observations are the Year One children, the Year 5 children who were 'play leaders' and the teacher on duty.

The sketches do not reflect the intra-actions in the same way that the chaosgraphs of Knight (2021) do (see Chapter 5) but rather are more anthropocentric as my initial research question was focused on the relationship between the children and so I sought to show interactions. The initial use of sketches was a spontaneous and unplanned method and the sketches in the notebook moved onto the computer, so they show rather a sanitised version of what I saw at that time and there is no claim that the sketches are whole, complete or works of art. The later use of OOO as a research method (see Section 7.8) draws specifically on the aim of shifting the perspective away from the children to the relationship between the children and the fixed play equipment. In these sketches I draw the same fixed objects the sandpit, slide, fence and tree. I am also in the same position for the whole observation. It is worth mentioning that I am

aware that this level of analysis is at some level superficial but reflecting on the sketches in their thwarted and incomplete form it is possible to see interactions between humans and objects.

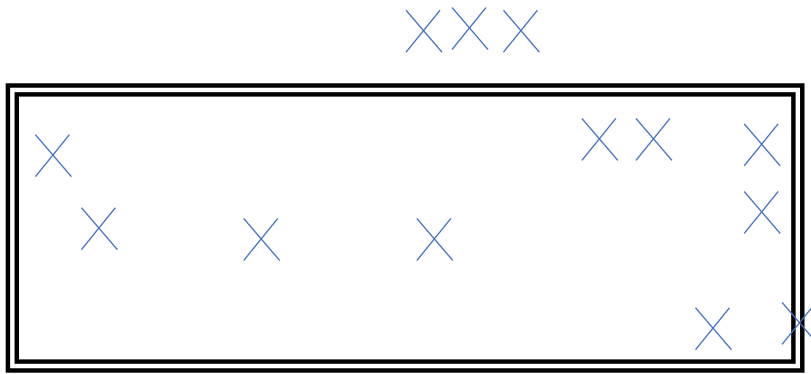
Sketch One — 12.15 pm — My position is shown by the blue circle. Total of children = 6.



The sandpit seems almost symmetrical — there is an order to it as the children spread themselves out occupying the full length of the pit. What happens outside of the pit is not recorded. Inside the children appear to sit side by side or be in groups although one child is there in front of me (I am the blue circle.) The movement communicated by these images is one of the most striking things about the sketches that somehow between one drawing and the next it is like a 'flick-book' where there is a blurring of movement but also of boundaries between things.

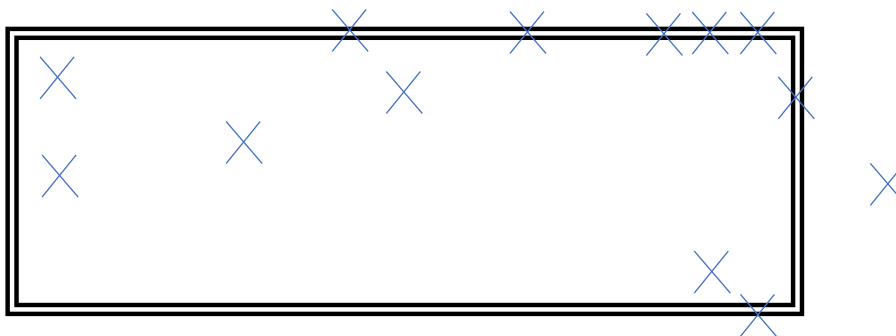
In the next sketch, three minutes later, the number of children increases to 13. The children continue to be spread out across the sandpit but now there are children sitting or standing on the wooden bars that surround the sandpit and make up the edge or border. These children are represented by \times being placed on the double line. The closeness of the \times means that the children were in a group and interacting together — in Sketch Two there is a group of three children sitting together. At this time there were also two children very near to me. There are approximately 75 children in a year group at Mana Barumsa (three classes of 25 children).

Sketch Two — 12.18 pm Total of children = 13



Two minutes later, (below) the children have moved position there are now seven children on the edges. The times of these observations are somewhat erratic — sometimes being two and sometimes three minutes. This was due to the length of time taken to record and what was going on. In Sketch Two, there is a group of four children in the corner with two children opposite them and one child slightly outside of the sandpit. Looking at the sketch I am most struck by the empty space that is in the middle. Only one child stands actually within the sand.

Sketch Three — 12.20 pm Total of children = 13.



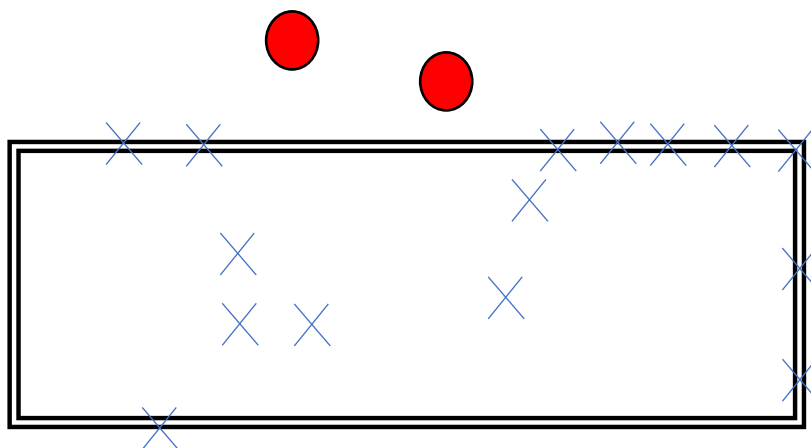
At this point, children in Year 5 or 6 who have the role of being play leaders (discussed in Section 7.5) came to the sandpit area. These are represented by red circles (as they wear red baseball caps). As well as the play leaders the number of children slightly increased to 15, 10 are around the edge of the sandpit. Most children are in groups or pairs with the exception of the child on the opposite side near the railings. The child on the railings and outskirts of the sandpit seems to be an observer to the action in the sandpit. In both sketches four, five and six there is a single cross on the railings perhaps indicating that the same child is there — moving up and down the railings. It is possible to imagine the child hanging off the railings and leaning over the sand — watching, listening and feeling the strength and permanence of the railings as they shift their weight and balance. The railings form a boundary and limit the area available to the

children and the interaction of the children with the railings is an area for research that is not considered here but is reflected in recent research in Greek playgrounds of Pitsikali and Parnell (2020) who conclude that the fences are an extension of play areas and that the materiality supports expressions of play. In their research the fence takes on a surprising role providing a place for children and adults to interact and play as Pitsikali and Parnell (2020:662) note:

Our observations showed that the fence was one of a very limited number of areas in the playground that fostered intergenerational interaction. The presence, physicality, and indeterminate nature of the function of the fence challenged the norms that prevented adults from playing in the playground and provided an intergenerational play area.

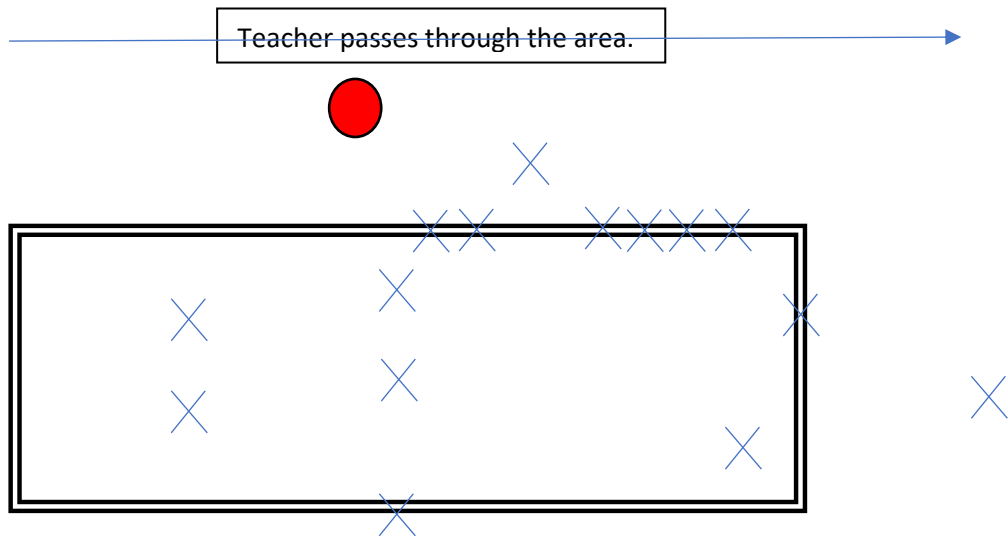
In this observation the fence provides an area for children to observe and still be part of the action — as they are on the inside of the fence, they are part of what is happening — whilst those on the other side are excluded by the physical boundary and not part of what is going on. The interaction between the fence and the children then builds a relationship of inclusion with those children leaning on the fence being pushed back into the playground and so included. (Chapter 8 about the tricky trail discusses children who are alone.)

Sketch Four — 12.21 pm Total of children = 15. The red circles are the year 5 play leaders.



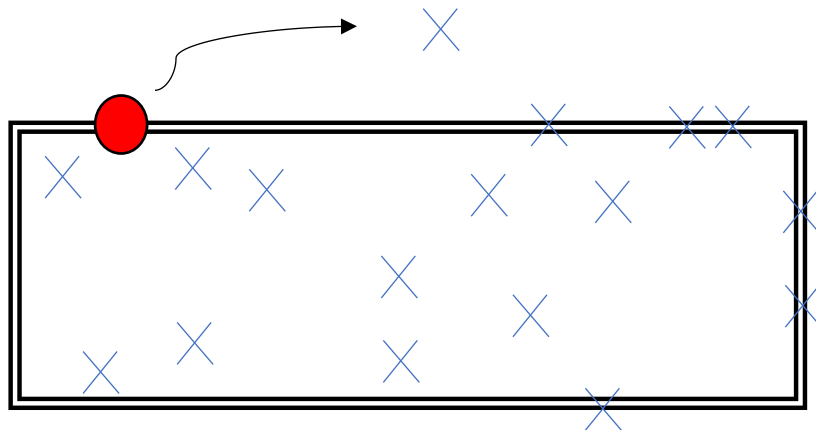
Another two minutes later and a teacher passed through the area — walking between the sandpit and the tukul (playhouse). One of the play leaders is still there. Again, the majority of children are on the edge of the accessible side of the sandpit.

Sketch Five — 12.23 pm Total of children = 15.

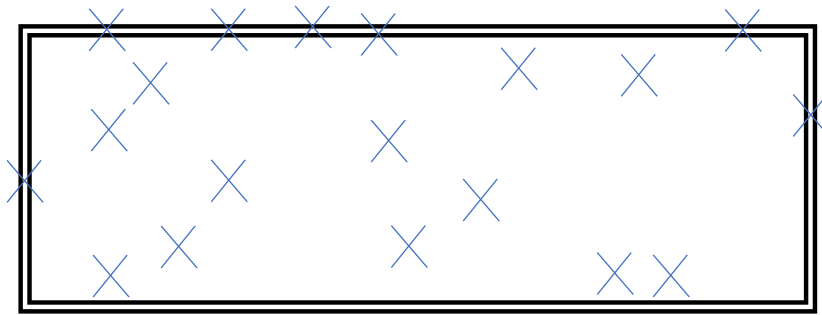


The next three sketches form a build up to the main event in the sandpit during my observation. This was a group of children who came round to build a pile of sand together. The number of children increases steadily and the children who in Sketch Six are spread out, moving gradually inwards until they form themselves into a circle as in Sketch Eight. The children in Sketch Eight scoop and pour the sand and my research notes state that at the same time call 'Yeah!'. There are more than 20 children in the sandpit at this time — almost one third of the year group.

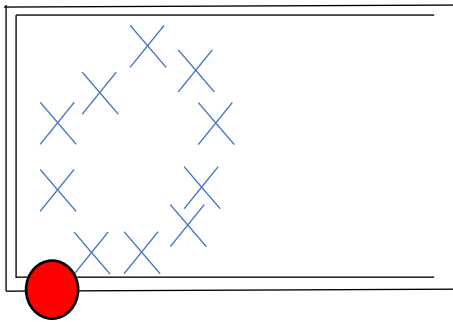
Sketch Six — 12.25 pm Total of children = 17.



Sketch Seven — 12.27 pm Total of children = 19.



Sketch Eight — 12.29pm — 10 children join in and pour sand at the same time — they call “Yeah!” as they do it.



At the time, I remember being surprised at how ‘well’ the children were collaborating and playing together although they had no tools or toys to play with. This comment is reminiscent of the ‘playing nicely’ concept discussed in the discussion about the teacher interviews in Chapter 6.3 and perhaps reflects the difficulty with being both a researcher (trying to write ethnographically and problematise what is going on) and a teacher in the school (as discussed in Chapter 4). The group of children used their hands to scoop and pour the sand to create a mound — a mountain of sand. In my research notes I wrote:

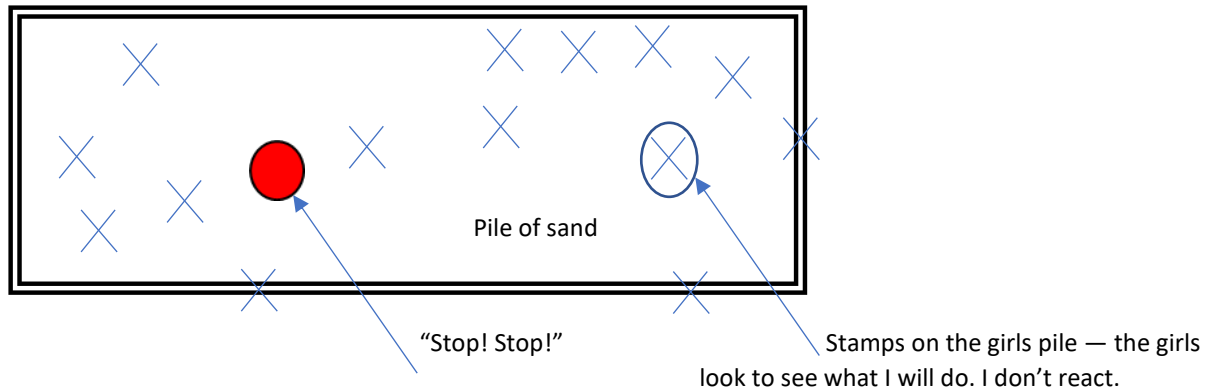
I did not make any comments about what was going on. However, one of the teachers, Lucy, came past, she spoke to the group and then said to me “They keep getting it into people’s eyes.”

The group then became more organised. One of them announced “This is a competition! Whoever has the biggest mountain will win!” One of the play leaders then stepped in and shouted “Stop! Stop!” She then tried to create a competition between girls and boys.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

This is illustrated in Sketch Nine. The play leader interrupts the play and leadership of the Year One child who came up with the idea of a competition. This may have taken the play in a different direction to that intended as the play leader introduces a gender dynamic.

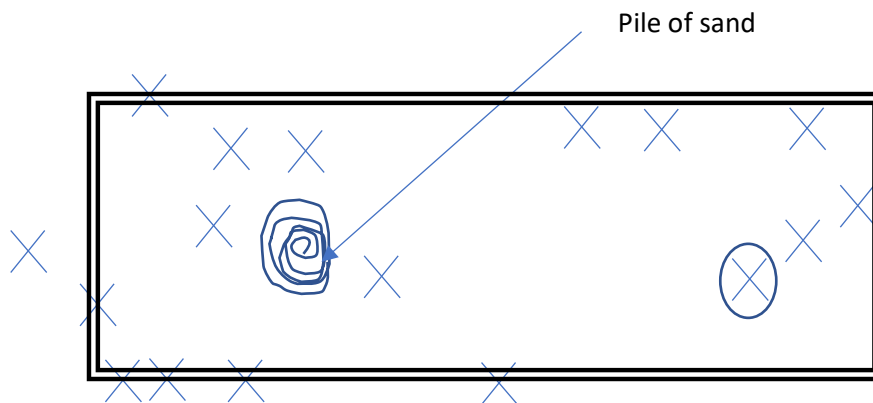
Sketch Nine — 12.29 pm Total of children = 14.



At the same time as the play leader steps into the play at the one end then at the other end of the sandpit there is an event happening involving a boy stamping on the sand pile of the girls. As my research notes state as the boy stamped onto the pile the girls automatically looked at me to gauge my reaction and see what I would do. I intentionally did not react — this was a purposeful decision because as a teacher I would have felt the need to speak to the boy about his behaviour. This is then a key moment for me — recognising that I was wearing my researcher hat and perhaps for the children, as their expectation of me as a teacher was that I should react, so this may have been a moment when the distinction between researcher and teacher became clear for them. Unfortunately, I did not follow up on this, and discuss with the children this idea, so I cannot confirm this either way. I am aware that I am putting my own interpretation on this event and perhaps giving it a significance that it didn't hold for the children. For me as a researcher it was a moment of realisation.

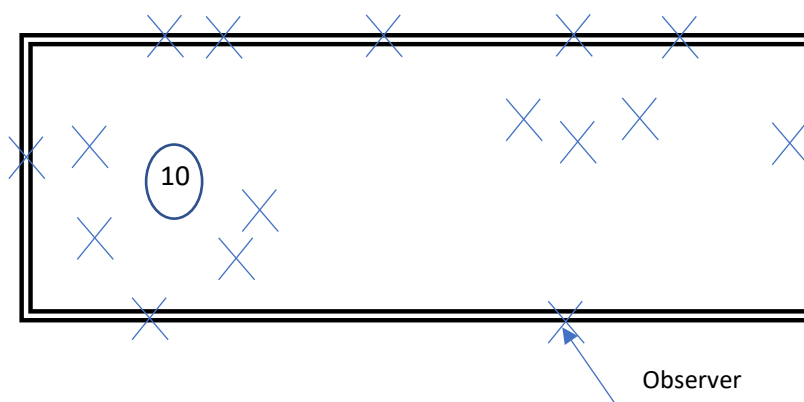
The children continued to work collaboratively to create a large pile of sand. This activity drew the children into the actual sandpit although there are still lots of children around the edges. As the activity grows it is interesting to note the Xs by the fence which represent children observing the action. The strength of the activity and the excitement is suggested in the swirl that was scribbled into my journal. Here it should be noted that it is not conveyed with the same feeling way in the computerised version and that this may be one of the limitations of this method.

Sketch Ten — 12.31 pm Total of children = 17.



The number of children continued to increase and became hard to count. In Sketch Eleven you can see that a group of 10 boys were working together. In my research notes (as below) I explain what happened when a boy wanted to join the girls' team and how he was rebuffed by the girls. The competition at this point became gender orientated as the comment "The boys are winning!" shows.

Sketch Eleven — 12.33 pm Total of children = 16 — 21.



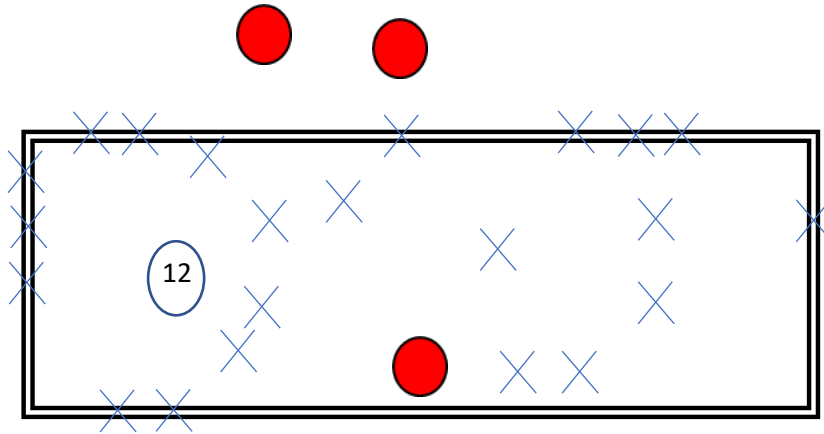
At this point, the Year 5 playheader shouted "Start!" and 10 boys started shovelling the sand with their hands to create a pile. One boy broke away from the group and approached the girls. He asked "Can I play?" One of the girls responded with "You're on that team!" and pointed towards the boys. One of the boys then shouted "The boys are winning!"

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

It may have been the excitement of the competition that drew other children to the sandpit area. At this time there were approximately 30 children (40% of the year group) in the sandpit area. The children moved to form an inner circle actively involved in building the sand mountain and an outer circle of participant observers. Three play leaders also came into the area and once again the input of the play leaders interrupted the play as they introduced the concept of children 'getting out'. In my research notes I suggest that this may have been in response to one of the children throwing sand. (Naomi also discusses

this in her interview.) The play leaders were found at the edge of the sandpit and the one play leader inside the sandpit seemed to be taking the role of referee and so is near the action but not part of it.

Sketch Twelve — 12.35 pm Total of children = 22 — 34.

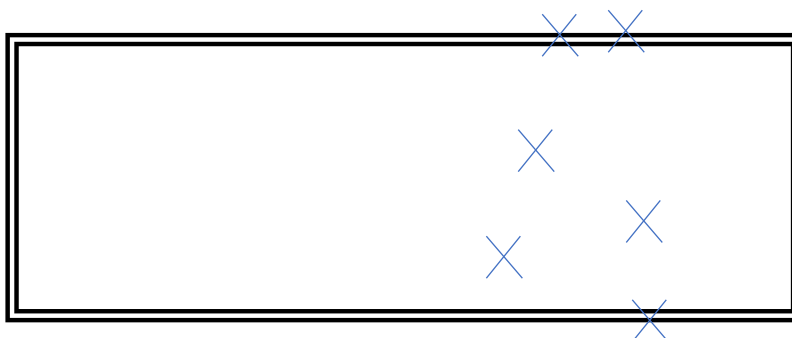


As can be seen in the sketch, at this point the sand competition became very large and involved roughly one third of the year group. The Year 5 play leaders then introduced the idea of being out. This may have been in response to the Year One children starting to throw sand. One play leader said “You’re out!” as other children used the play leader as referees or someone to appeal to “He’s just destroying ours!”

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

In the next couple of minutes the sandpit and the area cleared quickly. Children became aware that the bell was about to ring — the sign for the end of the breaktime and they moved to clear the area before this actually happened. The final sketch shows the near deserted sandpit with six children — the same number at the start of the observation period.

Sketch Thirteen — 12.37 pm Total of children = 6.



My research notes reflect on the starting and ending with six children, as I was not identifying individuals apart from those with consent, I do not know if they were the same children. My observation lasted only just over 20 minutes but within that time there was huge variation in the use and movement within the

playground — it seems like a wave — a crescendo of activity that crashes and then returns to the slow steady lapping waves ...

At this point children could see that the bell was about to ring and so started to leave the sandpit. Although some children did go back in the sand, most children left the area quickly and by 12.39 the sandpit was completely empty. One boy, who was later reprimanded, ran back into the sandpit and then back out again. He was spotted by one of the Year 5 play leaders who told the teacher.


Research notes, 22nd January 2020

The quickness of the emptying of the sandpit of children — the leaving struck me as I note that how quickly it was ‘completely empty’. The running back into the sandpit is a comment that I had overlooked but is evocative of the strong pull of the sand — the call to return and the interaction and bond between the child and the sand. He does not seem to have run in for any reason — he had not forgotten something and didn’t need to empty his shoes of sand — he just ‘ran back into the sandpit and then back out again’. Suggesting perhaps that it was somewhere that was hard to leave.

The anonymous nature of the recording means that we can’t tell if this boy was one of the ones in the sand at the beginning and end. In my research notes I try to suggest how I could follow who the children were and suggest that wearing bibs may help.

As I look at this final sketch I realize that the playtime started and ended with 6 children. I wonder if they are the same children? It was very difficult for me to follow who the children in the sandpit were. I wonder about asking the children to wear coloured bibs (such as worn for PE) so that I can follow them more easily but this seems as if it may intrude on the freedom of playtime. Perhaps I could ask the children who have opted in to chose to wear a bib if they wish.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

Whilst the identification of individuals would facilitate analysis at a different level, the anonymity of the  allows an undistracted view of the movement of the children and sandpit together interacting. As I reflect on this movement I see how the sandpit has facilitated the children to come together in a large group activity. The communal space and joint activity created out of nothing — the sand and an idea — made possible a task that actively engaged children in a way that many teachers would be jealous of. The activity was in the sandpit built to a frenetic point in a similar way to that described by Hackett et al. (2017:67) in their writing about den-building who use the phrase ‘the cusp of chaos’ and go on to note that:

Just when we were beginning to think we needed to step in and stop the action, things would simmer down, the children would disperse, leave the structure, perhaps wander over to sit at the drawing table for a bit.

In the sandpit there was the same sense of dispersal as the children ran off to other areas of the playground. My research notes end with a photo of the empty sandpit and some notes that can be seen on the next page. As well as the children actively involved in the sand play there was a number of children who were on the periphery. In my research notes I comment:

Not all the children in the sandpit area were playing. There was a significant number of children who simply stood or sometimes sat and observed what was going on. Most often these were single children but there were also pairs and

groups. It leads me to consider the different roles that are carried out by children at playtime — the organisers, observers and the joiners-in! This is something to think more about!

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

Certainly children have different activities in the playground and this may change for an individual child throughout the course of the playtime. The children also have their own peer culture (Corsaro, 2000). The sandpit facilitates play activities for many children — it is not all digging — there is a large amount of social interaction and relationship building happening around the activity. This seems to tie in with the research of Amholt et al. (2022a:6) with older children (tweens) and the creation of a play category of ‘talkative’, which is equipment or places that allow for children to have opportunity of including talk in their play. The sandpit certainly provides this and I would suggest that the two or three children marked on the top right in the sketches of the sandpit may be involved in this type of play.

Another type of play that is seen in the notes and Sketches 9 – 12 is that of the role of observer. This echoes research by Hackett et al. (2017:69) where children and adults watch a boy spinning around from just outside. The children in the sketches are stood against the fence and around the playground edges as the activity of building the sand tower reaches a crescendo. They are involved and included by being present and so part of the activity — this inclusion seems important.

At the end of the observation, after the playground had emptied, I took a photo that appears in my research notes.



This photo was taken at 12.43pm – after the sandpit emptied.

At this point I spotted a small green truck. I had not seen any of the children playing with this, although it was where a small group of girls was based for most of the playtime.

The children played in the sand without any equipment. I did not notice this until after the sandpit had emptied.

The edge of the tukul can be seen in this picture and the slide at the end of the sandpit. In the foreground is the tree that is shown in the first sketch.

7.4 Play Leaders

Play leaders are children in Year 5 or 6 who assist with the younger children during the lunch break. This is a voluntary position and there is no selection as all children who offer to take part are accepted. In the playground on the day of this observation there were three play leaders — this is the usual amount. At Mana Barumsa, there is very little instruction given to the children as to what their role is and so what they do in the playground depends on the individual child's interest and also the teachers on duty who may give some guidance. In my research notes I comment:

This was the first observation where I saw the Year 5 play leaders in action. This is a voluntary role that was created within the school to give the older primary students an opportunity to take some responsibility as well as having the chance to play with the younger children some of whom are younger siblings, cousins or friends. The Year 5 children wear red hats with the words Play Leader on them — this is why I represent them with red circles in the sketches. The play leaders appeared to really enjoy the organisational part of the role. At the end of playtime they were shouting "Get out! Get out!" and then "Clean your shoes!" I wondered if the sand pile game would have been gender based if the Year

5 play leader had not made that decision. I also wondered what other stereotypes the Year 5 children are inadvertently teaching the Year 1s.

Research notes, 22nd January 2020

As I state, one question that arose at this time was what the Year 5 children are unintentionally teaching the younger children. The main example of this is during the sand pile competition when it is one of the play leaders who introduced the concept of competing 'boys v girls'. It is not possible to know whether this is something that would have happened anyway. The other concept was the idea of 'being out' that seemed to be introduced by the play leaders in Sketch Twelve. I note in my journal (Research notes, 22nd January 2020) that they seem to be regarded 'as referees or someone to appeal to 'He's just destroying ours!'

Reflecting on the sketches it seems that the red circles dominate the landscape of the sandpit. They are present from Sketch Four on but particularly in Sketch Twelve where the three play leaders may have been drawn from other parts of the playground due to the amount of Year One children there — more than one third of the cohort. The interactions and power dynamics between the play leaders and Year One children would be an interesting topic for future research.

7.5 Teacher Interviews

As well as the Year One children and the Year 5 or 6 children who were play leaders the third group of people present in the playground are the teachers on duty. Lucy (one of the Year One teachers) was on duty during the sandpit observation and passed through the sandpit area. In the Year One teachers interviews the sandpit was mentioned by all three teachers. (These interview transcripts can be found in Appendices S – U and the teachers' chosen pseudonyms are used throughout – Julia, Lucy and Naomi.) Both Naomi and Julia spoke about the popularity of the sandpit with the children.

The sandpit is very popular; the children really enjoy the sandpit. Naomi (0.11) 16.07.20

The sandpit is so popular Julia (0:21) 14.07.20

This confirmed my own observation about the popularity of the sandpit as a choice of play space for many of the children. Julia went on to try and quantify the number of children and her estimates support my own observation and indicate that there are a significant number of children using the sandpit on a daily basis. This is important to support that the observation day activity was not just a one-off event. Julia also suggests that the sandpit should be bigger to create more play space:

...there is just usually 20 children — up to 20 sometimes, ok maybe not that many, it's probably between 10 and ??, it's not the biggest sandpit but, in the other playground, I think more would if they could.

Julia (0:21) 14.07.20

In Julia's final comments, she reflects on how the children are using the sandpit:

...I wonder how much chatting they do there? I haven't passed but sometimes I wonder are they playing on their own in there? Or are they chatting? Probably a bit of both.

Julia (0:21) 14.07.20

My observations suggest that Julia is likely to be right that children are sitting 'chatting' as can be seen in the sketches (Sketch One, Six etc.) where there are pairs or groups of three children indicated as next to each other. Although the sketches do not show what the children are doing, I recall that they were sitting next to each other. Lucy spoke about how the sandpit could facilitate relationships as it is a place that children can go to play on their own and then end up playing alongside and perhaps with another child. In the sketches the child hanging on the railings seems to be watching and might be one of these children. (Children playing alone is a theme discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.) Lucy perceives the role of the sandpit as similar to the playhouse in providing a place that children can go on their own and then link up with other children.

...if they want to play in the little house or they want to play in the sandpit, then they might just go and do that themselves, but then other children will also want to play in the sandpit or in the little house and then they will end up playing together and building things in the sandpit together (0:13) or having a game in the house together.

Lucy (0:12) 15.07.20

Lucy concludes her explanation with a comment about the equipment in the playground:

So, some of the equipment they seem to go to more to do things on their own, and other things seem to be more part of their games and other things they seem to mix more.

Lucy (0:13) 15.07.20

Lucy is clear that the different pieces of play equipment are used for different types of play and have different roles. Although Naomi agrees that the sandpit is popular with the children, she has concerns about the value of the play that goes on there:

It could be ... used as more purposeful directed play, I think the sandpit and I think if it was used like that it would give children opportunities to explore different types of play because in the sandpit it's a lot of the (0:12) same - filling. It is either filling sandcastles, filling buckets to make sandcastles or they put cars in there for a track. So, there are different ways to use the sandpit. And so, you do get the same type of children going there regularly. And not a lot of PSED* and not a lot of sharing happens in the sandpit. So, it could, I think it has the children's interest already but I think it could be used in a better way.

Naomi (0.11) 16.07.20

* PSED is Personal Social Emotional Development — one of the seven EYFS Framework Goals. (DfE, 2021)

Here Naomi's comments seem to indicate the hidden curriculum in terms of the sandpit and sand play having a strictly educational purpose — as linked to the EYFS curriculum. They are reminiscent of the research by Olowe et al. (2015) and Jarrett et al. (2010) discussed in section 7.1, on the value of the sandpit as an educational tool. However, I would suggest that the playing with sand is, like all 'Children's

engagement with the natural world autotelic, bodily, and intuitive, and it shapes construction of knowledge' (Tilhou, 2022:864).

Naomi suggests that the tukul in front of the sandpit be removed so that the area can be monitored more easily.

Yeah, because it is behind that shed, so if the shed was maybe, the shed is a bit nothingness anyway, so if the shed was knocked down you would be able to view the sandpit easily from wherever you were in the playground. Just to ensure, you know, nobody is throwing or (0:13) keep a better eye on it. (*Background noise*) — or because I think, when I am on duty in that playground, every time without fail, there are at least two incidents from the sandpit.

This seems to support the findings of Thomson (2004:78) about the perceived need for constant monitoring of what is going on, she comments that 'there is as much surveillance — both explicit and implicit — as that of the classroom, in some cases more so.' This is replicated at Mana Barumsa perhaps caused by the sense of responsibility that schools must be a place of constant safety, where nothing untoward happens, or perhaps fear of reactions of parents if something did happen, or a general fear that if children are not closely monitored then something that should not be happening will happen. When asked 'what kind of incidents?' Naomi continues her comments by explaining the types of incidents that she has to deal with as a teacher on duty in the playground with the sandpit:

It'll be, so-and-so is not sharing, so-and-so is snatching, or took my toy or it will be oh so-and-so threw something in my eye but then it's not, because you can't see, when someone is telling you when someone threw something in their eye may it is not you are trying to ascertain, maybe it wasn't on purpose because you are playing with sand and that's what happens with sand. (*Background noise ongoing*) But, yeah, there's those kind of problems. Or then it will be the children that need help to take shoes off because they have got sand in their shoes, in their socks. Um, (0:14) or can we have some equipment for the sandpit because there is nothing here. Or can we have more because there is just one spade in there. (*Pause*)

Naomi (0.13) 16.07.20

The agency of the sand can be seen from some of the comments that Naomi makes. For example, she comments that she has to explain to the children who say that someone has thrown sand that 'maybe it wasn't on purpose because you are playing with sand and that's what happens with sand.' The sand is going into people's eyes because that is what it does. The sand also is 'in their shoes, in their socks'. This stickability of sand — the going everywhere like glitter (Coleman and Osgood, 2019).

Naomi is the only one of the three teachers to mention the practical and negative points of the sandpit as a piece of equipment within the playground. It is often teachers who have the biggest say in designing playgrounds or deciding on the equipment to be put in them. Julia and I had an informal conversation about the value of sand play and the possibility of also building a sandpit in the other playground.

7.6 A Conversation with Julia

My conversation with Julia took place after the observation of the sandpit and the fact I recorded it in some detail indicates that I thought it was important. (The full notes on the conversation can be seen in Appendix O.) The conversation was a discussion about the Julia's idea to construct another sandpit in the other playground and her analysis of the pros and cons of such a move. She raised three issues:

The first was that some staff had said that only having one sandpit made it something special. The implication being that if there was another sandpit it would not be used in the same way.

Conversation with Julia 31st January 2020

The idea that the second sandpit would distract from the first seems an unusual reason not to have another sandpit — I suggest that the implication is that children would not use the sandpit as much when they played in that playground as they could use it every day. It is not easy to predict whether this is true. However, it does seem to echo the idea of 'boredom' from over-familiarity raised by Dymont and O'Connell (2013:276). The next concern was more practical:

The second issue was the quality of sand as the current sandpit is filled with builder's sand. I spoke about the fact that many schools are now using mud and that the most recent Hope Education catalogue I looked at was full of mud play equipment (for example, p.139-140). The quality of sand was one reason why the school had previously had 4 small sandpits in the playground. Julia said that they were useless as they only fitted 3 children in and you couldn't sit down in them. Indeed, it did appear that the size of the sandpit allowed a different kind of play.

Conversation with Julia 31st January 2020

The sand used in the sandpit does appear to make a difference to the type of play (Kasama, 2021) but the cost of buying sand of the quality used in Europe and North America means that builders sand (which tends to be coarser and treated with different chemicals) is used instead. The mud kitchen was also discussed by Naomi in her interview as they are becoming increasingly common in the UK. The size of the sandpit and the change to the type of play was an interesting observation — Julia suggested that the fact that you couldn't sit down in it made a difference to how children played. Bearing this in mind, the next part of the conversation was about us locating a possible site for a new sandpit to be built.

We then looked around the playground and identified a possible site for a new sandpit. It is on a raised concrete platform, next to one of the playhouses. Julia commented that it would be easier to clean up this area and that she had previously bought dustpan and brushes so that the children could sweep up and put the sand back in the box when they had finished.

Conversation with Julia 31st January 2020

The possible location of a new sandpit was on the raised concrete play area at the side of the playground. Location of equipment is regarded as important by other researchers too, for example, Amholt et al. (2022a:13) comments that the 'utilization of one piece of play equipment depends not only on the type of equipment but also on the context and placement of the specific piece.'

Julia suggests that this is suitable as the children can sweep the sand up and return it into the box. Implied in this is that the sand is not cheap and so needs to be looked after and that the children will get the sand

out of the box. It is also interesting that she is suggesting that the children themselves do the sweeping — not one of the ground staff. Most of the children at the school will have workers at home who do things like this for them and something that many teachers struggle with is getting the children to take responsibility and do things for themselves. Julia and I had worked as colleagues at the school for two and a half years at the point of this conversation and I talked freely to her:

I reflected to Julia that I was surprised that my research had led to me suggesting the purchase of equipment. However, the research coupled with my new leadership role puts me in a strong position to make improvements to the play facilities.

Conversation with Julia 31st January 2020

So, the suggestion of a new sandpit in the other playground was made by Julia who then left the school at the end of the year. The other Year One teachers did not follow up on this idea and neither did I — even though, as I note, my new role put me in a stronger position to act. Lucy has mentioned the idea but neither her, nor Naomi, have made any move to make this idea a reality. Writing three years later, there is still no second sandpit — the barriers are cost but also perceptions of value of the sandpit. It is hoped that my thesis will help this be reconsidered as I discuss in Chapter 9.

7.7 Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) — Speculative Writing

The third part of my data on each piece of equipment is a speculative piece of writing that uses the approach of OOO (as discussed in Chapter 2). The aim of this piece of writing is to help me consider the equipment in the playground from a third perspective — the others being my research notes and observation sketches; and the teacher interviews. The writing is based on the observation notes and sketches and so some of the same themes occur but additional background information is also included. The aim is that by trying to write as if I were the sandpit, as Bogost (2012:10) who considers what it is like to be a computer, micro-processor or ribbon cable, a deeper understanding of the interactions occurs.

The tree provides me with some shade but the sand under the African sun is hot to touch. The rough grains flow freely through the fingers of the small ones when they are this dry. My sand is not full of chemicals but comes straight from the ground — coarse, gritty and full of life. I can pause now that the small ones have left, there is a stillness but the dents, holes, bumps and piles are a reminder of the frantic play that took place only here a few minutes ago.

The last of the small ones sits alone on my wooden edge and bangs out its shoe onto my wooden edge. The sound vibrates and the sand slowly trickles out forming a small pile. The small one pushes its foot into its shoe, plonks both its feet into the sand and jumps up and out, over the edge and across the grass. Bouncing as its runs to answer the call of one of the bigger ones.

The bigger ones themselves rarely enter my sand, sometimes they touch me tentatively to grab and remove something that should not be there. The exception is the one in green. He comes every day,

he tenders and cares for my sand — smoothing the bumps, levelling them and dosing me with water that makes my sand cling together. He lovingly nurtures me.

The clanging of the bell is the sound that rules this part of my day. When the sun is at its height the small ones come. They slide the rusty bolt and push open the metal gate then charge through and across the rest of the playground, feet thudding, to get to me. I'm hidden from view of the gate, at the far end of the playground and I sit along the multicoloured metal bars that form the fence.

Some of the small ones will jump straight in — feeling the sand give under their feet. They may sit and scoop and dig. There are sometimes plastic tools to help them but often, as today, they use their hands. The sand goes everywhere — under their nails, into their pockets, filling their shoes and clinging to them. The activity starts with just one or two but soon there is a group, a circle of small ones all digging, scooping and piling the sand, letting it go so that it cascades down, like a waterfall to form a mountain. As the pile grows so does the excitement and the number of small ones increases as they are drawn to the sand like moths to the light and are caught up in the feeling of being part of something bigger, more than themselves. Around the diggers stand another circle of small ones, observers, also caught up in the moment and sometimes breaking the ranks to join in themselves. The numbers swell and reach a climax and then as a wave breaks and crashes the activity is over — the pile is flattened or another interruption comes and it is over. The movement is relentless as the tide and does not cease but carries on, starting over, small again and building.

Other small ones are more tentative, and don't join this activity, they sit on the edge. Feet resting on top of the sand, positioned gently and carefully, they bend down to scoop and filter the sand through their fingers, letting it slip slowly through. The movement is calming, gentle and seems to facilitate their conversation, they speak in low hushed tones and whisper their secrets to each other.

Sometimes a small one comes into the sand with heavy feet and I feel the pressure increase. The anger inside them seems to pulse through me as they stomp down and the pressure of their heavy feet leaves the sand flattened and dented. There is a sense of relief as if the wave has passed through.

So, the different movements pass through the sand and as the time for the bell draws near the small ones leave. Sometimes trailing sand behind them, groups and pairs remove their shoes and sometimes socks and pour the sand out — banging and brushing — a separation, a leaving, an ending to the activity. But still the sand clings to their hands, legs, arms and even hair — the small ones have been in the sandpit and as they leave behind their imprint, they take some small piece of the sand and me away with them.



In attempting to write from another perspective I feel that I gained insight of different aspects of the sandpit including the physical nature of the sand. The 'coarse grittiness' as it is a natural material, not processed in Ethiopia in the same way as it may have been in the UK, reflects something deeper about the place and hints at cultural aspects in as much as a difference in priorities is revealed. The strict regulations around the quality of sand to be used in playgrounds is not echoed here. This is something that came up in my informal conversation with Julia about the sandpit.

The description provides insight into the movements within the playground and how the sandpit enables these. In the sand the children ‘scoop’ ‘dig’ and ‘filter’ as they play. The sand has its own agency and movement as it ‘cascades’ and ‘slips’ through their fingers. The sand sticks to them — it ‘clings’ so that they and the sandpit are both changed by the experience. The sand has the same stickability as glitter (Coleman and Osgood, 2019), although, the process of separation, removal of shoes (and socks) banging and brushing, is more physical and involved. In the teacher interviews, Naomi (See 0.14 on 16.07.20) seems somewhat negative about these interactions as the children ‘need help to take shoes off because they have got sand in their shoes, in their socks.’ Implying perhaps that the sand is simply causing additional ‘work’ for the adults involved.

The description of the ‘give’ of the children as they jump into the sand indicates again how the sand responds to the children and the feeling that the children receive back from the sand as they interact. The different interactions of the adults with the sand are also mentioned those who are ‘tentatively grabbing’ as they are almost afraid to touch the sand or the maintenance workers who ‘lovingly nurture’ with rake and water the sand. This provides an insight into the differing value placed upon a piece of play equipment that is not evident from the observations and sketches but perhaps hinted at in the teacher interviews when there are comments on the popularity or usefulness of certain pieces of equipment.

The movement in the sand as a group of children work together builds like a wave that crashes, crescendos and then the process starts again and repeats. Meanwhile small groups of children are at the edge and intra-act in a slower way — letting the sand ‘slowly slip’. A child with ‘heavy feet’ enters the sandpit and the pressure from the ‘stomp’ of their feet is a release that reverberates throughout the sandpit. This writing shows that the children and sand are entangled in play and that the relationship is one that continues over time as the process repeats. The relationships are between individual children and the sand as well as a group — so are unique to that moment — the child who stomps angrily one day may be the one who lingers the next.

The sandpit provides opportunities for different types of activities — solo play, pairs, small and large groups in a way that other pieces of equipment are not so easily able to do. The physicality of the sand and the openness of the space present possibilities for creative and imaginative play for the children who choose to use them. Finally, the sand ‘clings’ to them and perhaps that is why the boy ran back ‘into’ the sand pit — not to the edge but in the middle of the sand before running back out to line up. Somehow

there is boundary between this freer relationship and the formality of the school day — lining up to go back into class.

7.8 Key Themes Discussion

What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

One of the main conclusions from this chapter is that the sandpit allows the children to play in a variety of ways — solo, pairs and in groups. It is the last, group play, that perhaps was the most surprising to me and also to the teachers as it seems to go against what Naomi (See 0.12 on 16.07.20) mentioned in her interview that ‘not a lot of PSED and not a lot of sharing happens in the sandpit.’ The observation sketches clearly detail the build-up of a pile of sand by a large group of children that we can consider not to be a one-off unique occurrence. Such group work and cooperative play would be the goal of many class teachers who would have been jealous of its success. Yet when the teacher in the playground at the time came past the growing pile her comment to me was that “They keep getting it into people’s eyes.” Suggesting that her focus was on the health and safety aspects of the play rather than the development of social skills that was going on or that she thought that I might be more interested in that aspect — perhaps as I was a manager? The sand play was not without conflict, as I noted in my research journal, in Sketch Nine there is a boy who ‘stomps’ on the building of other children. This conflict is overshadowed by the build-up of action as the group of children continue to build their tower of sand. All of these different actions and interactions with the sand are part of supporting the social development of children.

My own research seems to echo that of Jarrett et al. (2010) who suggests that sand play has a role in developing imagination, coordination, confidence, persistence and problem-solving skills. The intra-actions that I observed in the sandpit echo back to the writing of MacRae (2020) and Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Sand play helps challenge the mind/body binary separation that continues to dominate understandings of child development within the field of education and calls us to understanding learning as embodied.

How can schools use these findings when reviewing playground design?

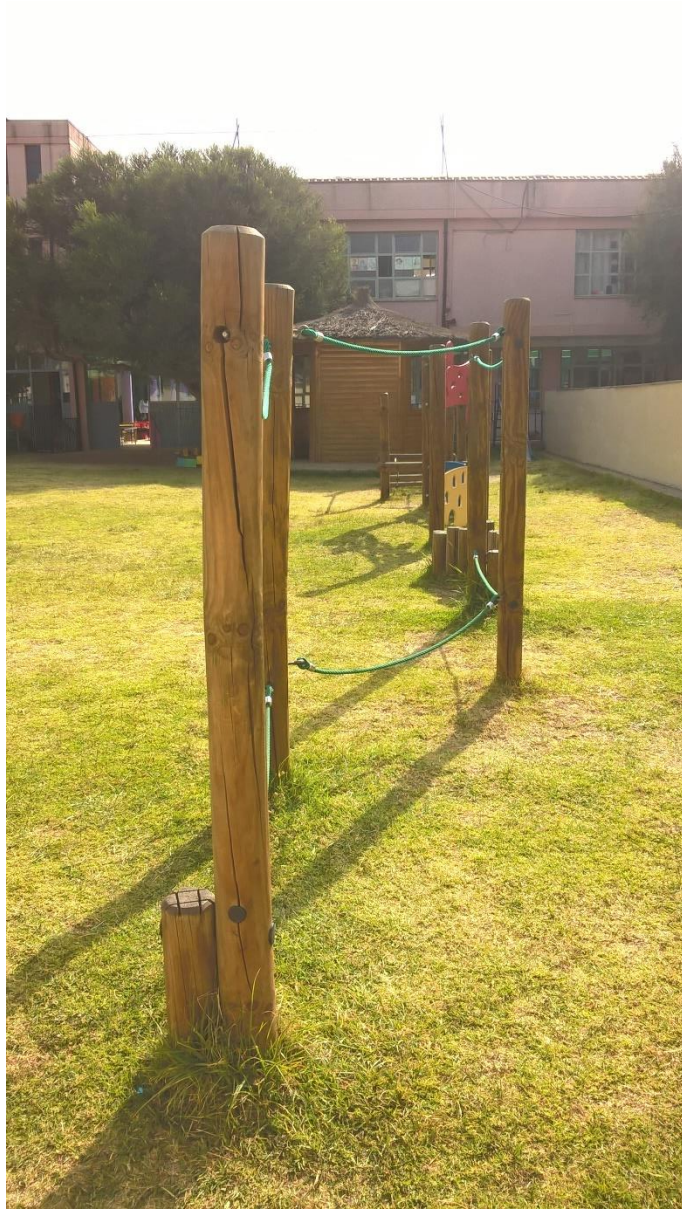
It is evident from other research (Jarrett et al., 2010) as well as my own that the sandpit has value as a piece of playground equipment and the sandpit at Mana Barumsa is perhaps more novel than may be regarded in Western countries as playgrounds and sandpits are not common in Ethiopia. The agency of the sand and the affordances it offers are striking. It is important that children are allowed to play freely in the sandpit. This is not always the case, both at Mana Barumsa where concerns about safety and time (as mentioned in the teacher interview and comments made about sand in eyes and the implied extra work when children have to take off their shoes) and in research by Jansson (2015:175) who gives the example of the children digging very large holes in the sand as being regarded as vandalism by the park workers. As discussed with Julia (Chapter 7.7), one implication of these findings about the role of the sandpit may be for the school to install a second sandpit in the other playground. This is a particular recommendation for Mana Barumsa School but other schools may consider the availability of sandpits in their playgrounds.

Throughout Ethiopia, sand is a readily available material as it is used for in the building trade and so can be found easily and relatively cheaply. In schools where funds are very limited children could (and often already do) play in the dirt or mud in the outdoor spaces. These materials intra-act in a similar way to the sand, sticking to clothing and clinging but also enabling different movements by children who use their hands to filter, funnel, gather and scatter the small grains.

7.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the data from my sandpit observation — sketches and accompanying research notes. I have looked at the teachers' perspective on the sandpit as a 'popular' piece of equipment and finally I have used an OOO inspired approach to produce a piece of speculative writing where I position myself as the sandpit. My research indicates that the sandpit has great value, although often seen as simple, and it is certainly less expensive than many of other pieces of fixed equipment, it has obvious merits and has stood the test of time.

Reflecting on the research it can be seen that the sandpit offers children the experience of building a community, as they work together cooperatively on a joint project, as well as time and space for individual contemplation. These are key features of the types of play that can occur in the sandpit and aid the building of relationships. In the next chapter I will go on to look at another piece of playground equipment — the tricky trail.



The Tricky Trail

Chapter 8: The Tricky Trail മഥന (pronounced Mewetacha)



The tricky trail in the EYFS playground

This piece of equipment (above) consists of several separate pieces that form a series of challenges, it is in the Early Years playground and is known at the school as the 'tricky trail'. There is also another tricky trail in the KS1 playground as pictured below:



KS1 Playground Tricky Trail (the wall was put up after my observations when there had been a metal fence)

The term tricky trail seems to be one specific to Mana Barumsa School where the research was done. These pieces of equipment are referred to by most manufacturers as a 'trim trail', 'fitness trail' or 'parcourse'. They have a series of obstacles that children have to follow and are designed to encourage physical fitness. Children are expected to move along the trail going from one part of equipment to the next. The trails were inspired by the assault courses designed to promote fitness for soldiers in the military

and attributed as being first introduced by Frenchman Georges Hébert in the 20th century. As explained on one play manufacturer's website:

Trim Trails were originally created as a training resource for the military — with assault courses involving running, jumping, climbing, crawling and balancing over a series of obstacles designed to improve fitness, build strength and coordination, and develop a host of important life skills such as teamwork, motivation, resilience and self-confidence.

(Pentagon Sport)

With the interest in keeping children active these trails have been put into many playgrounds with the aim of raising activity or fitness levels. In the previous chapters I have analysed the sandpit and bars. In this chapter I will focus on the 'tricky trail'. I will first comment on other research featuring 'trails'. Then I will analyse my observations and research notes of the tricky trail. I will reflect on the comments about the tricky trail made by the three Year One teachers in their interviews. Finally, I will present a speculative piece of writing where I try to write as if I were the tricky trail.

8.1 Research on Trails

The history of the trail makes it clear that they are chosen to be built in playgrounds and other areas as a way of promoting physical activity. Worldwide there is a concern about the growing obesity rates. In 2018, the WHO estimated 40 million children of under 5 years old were overweight (Wei et al., 2021) and Kassie et al. (2020) state that obesity is a growing issue in Ethiopia. The installation of these trails is often a reaction to such concerns. This is a distinctly different aim for a piece of equipment compared to the other fixed play equipment in most playgrounds and makes trails quite unique. It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of the research is on the question of the effectiveness of the trails in encouraging children to be more active and hence improve their fitness. At Mana Barumsa the tricky trail is not used in PE lessons but is sometimes integrated into science lessons.

In a participatory research project, de Rossi et al. (2015) investigated the role of active play in improving physical literacy. A group of Year 6 children were given cameras and asked to take photos to create a 'play diary'. These photos were then examined together with the children during focus group interviews where the researchers tried to elicit the story behind the photographs and children's input on the role of active play. Analysis showed that the trim trail and the trampoline were two of the activities that featured most in the photographs. de Rossi et al. (2015:42) explain:

One of the main attractions of those activities is the children's perception of their "malleability", their infinite possibilities. The trim trail consists of a course with different activities mostly focused on developing balance and hand-eye and leg-eye coordination skills, giving to the individual motor problems to solve ... They liked it "because it's fun, you can do lots of things on there, and you don't get bored because you can play in all different ways. You don't have to do the same each time". Using the same material in a different way: "there are logs and you crawl under the logs"; making it more difficult by the intervention of the other players: "someone is in there we swing around they have to hang on and

jump off”; testing your level: “a friend has a stopwatch we see how fast we can go”; or experimenting new skills: “when someone does it in a different way it looks quite fun and you try to copy it”.

This popularity is backed up by research by Powell et al. (2016) who researched activity levels of 7 – 11-year-olds during break and lunchtimes at five primary schools in the UK. Four out of the five schools had fixed equipment and ‘trim trails (obstacle courses)’ are specifically mentioned (Powell et al., 2016:85). The research mentions that trim trails are amongst the popular pieces of equipment (Powell et al., 2016:91-92) and this is explained by one of the children as being due to the variety in the equipment:

I like the trim trail because it’s different stuff, at first you’ve got to hang on and then you give your arms a break and you’re balancing and it’s all sorts of different things (male, school 1)

The research (Powell et al., 2016:93) also highlights the use of the trim trail for experimental play or adapting by children to create their own game or make it more challenging, as another one of the children explains:

I like playing on the trim trail because we try and play this game and we hop all the way across (female, school 1)

Trails provide the children with agency to decide how they are going to play. Although they are designed to be used in a structured way, they can be adapted to allow choice or create challenge. The way that the equipment is used is not always what the designer had intended. Howells and Coppinger (2021) carried out research into the actual and perceived physical activity levels of primary aged children at a UK primary school which had a ‘trim trail’. Howells and Coppinger (2021:4) comment that as well as providing fitness the trails can help children to develop other important skills:

a balance trim trail (similar to an obstacle course), in which the children could practice developing their balance, control and coordination skills.

This is a common theme in the research. Wainwright et al. (2018:438) carried out a mixed method study into Year 1 children’s development of physical literacy and they comment that the trim trail provides opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills:

the obstacles of the trim trail meant that children were running, climbing, leaping and jumping, demonstrating the type of activities that Fjørtoft (2004) highlights as vehicles for motor development.

Within the field of education and new-materialisms, there is also a significant body of literature on bodily knowing or ‘learning with their body’ (Hackett, 2014); in particular the creation of assemblages when a child intra-actions with an object such as cube or calculator and acknowledging that: ‘human thinking involves various parts of the body rather than just the Cartesian ‘mind’ (de Freitas and Sinclair, 2013:454). Such research suggests that the value of the trail may be in these intra-actions. Parker and Al-Maiyah (2021) (from the disciplines of Health Science and Built Environment) have created the Play Park Evaluation Tool (PPET) which assesses a variety of factors including the play value of equipment. In their research a trim trail was introduced in order to create more play type options. Parker and Al-Maiyah (2021:19) note:

Final scheme revisions (current provision) add balance as a play option via a trim trail. Its 10 linked activities: ground-level 'bridge' with railings, fixed balance beam, single-strand rope-bridge, suspended balance beam, and stepping stones demonstrate how different designs offer varying levels of difficulty. Children can select activities based on current ability with opportunities to master more complex items.

The range of types of use, here ten different activities, is considered a strength of the trails as they offer variety to children so meeting the needs of children of different ages and abilities. In my observations, children used the trail in groups, pairs and also on their own. One of the aspects measured by PPET is the playtimes. Parker and Al-Maiyah (2021:10) record five types of play:

- Solitary play: equipment effectively used without others (slide)
- Social play: equipment promoting socialisation during play (climbing frame with platforms)
- Cooperative play: equipment requiring two or more users (seesaw)
- Parallel play: two users concurrently complete the same activity (swings)
- Linear play: equipment requiring turn-taking (traditional slides, tunnel)

Reflecting on the tricky trail it is a piece of equipment that can be classified as for 'solitary play' but also 'parallel play' as children may interact with the equipment on their own or side by side with a friend. When on the log bridge children can use 'linear play' as they need to wait for each other to have a turn. The use of the trail to create imaginative play can be classified as 'social play'. These play classifications are very human-centred and fail to recognise the agency of things which I observe in my research. It is the interactions of people and equipment that creates the play possibilities and hence facilitates child to child interaction. However, they express in terms perhaps more palatable to educators the importance of providing a range of equipment so as to enable different types of play.

8.2 Why choose the Tricky Trail? Focus on children who were alone.

The tricky trail was the third piece of equipment that I spent time observing. However, the observation did not start with this focus but rather reflection on the previous observations led a question about children who were alone in the playground. I had decided to focus on the number of children who were not interacting with other children (on their own) rather than any specific equipment or activity. I went into the playground to try to gain a better understanding of children who were alone. In this observation I looked for children who were on their own and so were alone in the playground. This decision was made on the rather dangerous presumption that:

these may be children who are having difficulty making friends.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

As I observed I realised that several of these children were on or near the trail and this led me to watching the trail. Clearly there are many reasons why children may be 'alone' in the playground and it is unhelpful to make assumptions on the reasons. The children who were on their own may have chosen to be on their

own for any number of reasons. In Clarke (2018:17) ethnographic case study on a school buddy bench she states:

Playground supervisors Mrs. Ludke and Mrs. Marks both mentioned some children like to play alone. Mrs. Ludke adds, the presence of the bench ensures their independent play is by choice and not by default.

The distinction here is that the children are on their own by 'choice' rather than 'default'. Carter and Bath (2018:341) note in their research on object-friends that some children chose to play alone with their object-friends 'rather than establishing 'so-called' real friendships.' The dismissal of relationships and intra-actions with objects as not being 'real' eludes to the object-person dichotomy that is present. My research notes from this day focus on a series of individual children who were mainly observed on or near the tricky trail. In my notes I comment that things are not always what they first seem:

As with all observations a moments glance may present one picture whilst continuing to watch for a longer period indicates something else.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

The first child that I noticed on their own was upset and clutching his stomach. He was spotted first by two girls who hugged him and then a teacher who sent him to the nurse. My assumptions as an observer were challenged almost immediately and I ended my reflection with a comment that I may have been too hasty in making a decision about why he was 'alone'. This observation also reveals the concern of the other children in the playground — coming to check on him when he started crying and offering physical comfort in the form of a hug. (I feel drawn to comment here that this was pre-COVID-19 so no social distancing!) I did not at the time ask if he usually played by himself. The other child who I observed 'alone' was a boy who chose the pseudonym Ocko. Ocko was sitting on the ledge of the wall that ran around the playground behind the tricky trail. I observed Ocko to try and see if I could work out why he was on his own.

Another child who may be considered to be alone for a reason was Ocko. I observed a boy named Ocko for the last five minutes of playtime. I first noted Ocko making owl eyes with his fingers. At this time, he was sitting on the ledge by the wall alone. A minute later he was approached by the Year 6 play leader, presumably to see what was wrong. Cool and Ella listened to this conversation and the play leader then left. Ocko remained in the same place. Other children approached him, including a boy who came several times. However, Ocko stayed on the wall, only shifting to move position and hug his legs. When the bell went for the end of play Ocko remained where he was (rather than moving to line up). When he did move, he walked slowly with his hands hanging down. It appeared that Ocko had had a disagreement with one of his friends and that was the reason for him choosing to be alone.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

So, it seemed that Ocko was on his own because he was upset and so wanted to the space and time away from the other children. He was approached by an older child (the Year 6 play leader) and also other Year One children. I note that one boy came back to Ocko several times. I'm not clear why at the end of my research notes I conclude that he had had a disagreement with one of his friends. This seems plausible in particular in regard to comments made by his class teacher — Lucy during her interview with me. At the start of the interview, Lucy was describing some of the different relationships in the class:

And then there were other ones where, it seemed like, children were trying to, work out, things, and they changed a lot. So, for example, there was, there were two boys called Mikel and Ocko and they were both together from Reception, and maybe Nursery, and kind of best friends when they started in Year One. And then, but then that changed quite a lot over the year. And, like at first, there was one of the new children, called Natna and he, kind of joined in with Mikel and Ocko, but he was quite laid back and just kind of joined in. And then later in the year, a couple of, one of the new children, who was called Max, he wanted to be friends (0:02) with Mikel and then also another one of the children wanted to be friends with Mikel. And Ocko just, would get very unhappy if anyone else was, wanting to be a partner with Mikel, or if he felt that he was not getting his way when they were playing outside. So, that one changed quite a lot of the year and kind of caused them some upsets and things, I think. And, one of them, Max, was, I think, more in control when they were in the playground and Ocko would get upset and those sorts of things. So, there was quite a lot of dynamics in the class with those boys. And some of the other ones who seemed to be a bit more easy-going with who they played with and seemed to play with different people a lot at different times. Um. (0:03)

Lucy (0:01) 15.07.20

Lucy gives some background information on Ocko and his friendship with other boys in the class — stating that Ocko got ‘upset’. Whilst we cannot know for certain it seems feasible that he was upset. This part of the interview, a full transcript can be seen in Appendix T, details the different types of relationships that Lucy observed as a Year One class teacher. Looking at my research notes and the interview transcript, it may be that the other boy who returned several times to Ocko was Mikel or one of the other boys mentioned by Lucy. It is interesting here to see that my observations are highlighting issues that the class teacher also raises. Ocko was likely ‘alone’ during this observation due to friendship issues. My research notes of the observation then go on to give other examples of children spending time on their own:

Children have the same right as adults to choose to be alone and indeed with sometimes, like adults, feel the need to be alone. I noted several children alone at different times but this usually only lasted for a minute. For example, Roseile cartwheeling; Van wandering; Rose looking for her friend (she then linked arms with her and walked off); Natna sitting on the wall; Van crawling on the grass (and then was joined by others) and Roseile sitting in the pirate ship and putting something in her mouth.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

I choose the focus on children who were ‘alone’ because the research question was looking at relationships between children and how the equipment facilitated these. So, if the child was on their own then they were not interacting with another human but were interacting with the non-human equipment. The children mentioned in this part of my research notes had all given their assent and were some of the fifteen children that I also had parental consent to participate in the research and so I had looked for them during the observation. There are four different children mentioned here and all of them are ‘alone’ for a few minutes. Most of glimpses show the children are moving — ‘cartwheeling’ ‘wandering’ ‘looking’ and ‘crawling’. The children’s movement on the tricky trail appears to act as a ‘mask’ for them being alone as they are engaged and interacting with the equipment and so do not stand out in the same way as ‘Natna sitting on the wall’. The idea of the ‘mask’ is something that I refer to several times in my research notes and does also indicate that being on your own may be something that is perceived as culturally unacceptable and questioned by staff. The reason for this is likely to be concerns of development as socialisation is seen to be a predictor. (Coplan et al., 1994)

8.3 The Tricky Trail as a Mask to Being 'Alone'

During the next part of the observation, I focused on children who were not interacting with other children but intra-acting with the tricky trail. I have chosen to avoid the word 'using' here as it seems to imply that the child is the only actor and that the trail is being acted upon. This does not seem accurate of the relationship. Being on the trail hides their 'aleness'. It does seem that being on your own in the playground is a problem for the adults. This is discussed in Section 8.6.

Another child who was on their own in the playground is a girl who I refer to as PR. PR was hanging on the ropes and there was an interaction between the rope which flexed and stressed — as PR pulled down the rope pulled back. The initials PR refer to the colour of her clothes — P for Pink and R for Red. This was a system that I devised on the spur of the moment to identify an individual child in my notes. All Year One children chose a pseudonym but as I did not know the name of the child, I was unable to use their pseudonym. I did not wish to stop to ask the name as this would have interrupted the action that I was observing. PR was hanging on the ropes that are part of the tricky trail when I first saw her. I recorded her movements around the playground and her interactions with other people. PR intra-acts with the equipment but seems mostly ignored by the other children — present but not acknowledged. There is a dance to her movement such as when she approaches YG (a boy wearing yellow and green) and he moves away as she moves forward and moving in and out of the playhouse.

I first noted her alone on the hanging ropes. She is passed by other children but they do not interact with her. PR then walked along the edge of the playground on the wall that forms a ledge. She moved towards a boy called YG but as she did YG ran off. PR continued along the wall, she approached the teacher and Year 6 play leader. There were several children in the playhouse and PR went in. PR observed the other children. She made no attempt to interact. She hovered around the door, moving in and out.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

PR's interactions with the equipment appear to support her playtime movements and prevent her from being identified as being on her own. Teachers are, rightly or wrongly, on the lookout for children playing 'alone' as there is a perceived need for children to build social relationships and be with other children. The issue of children being on their own needing help is something that is beginning to be challenged as children may choose to be by themselves for a range of reasons. PR's movements and interactions with the equipment camouflaged her 'aleness'. She hung on the ropes of the tricky trail by herself and other children came in and out of the space — they were near here but not interacting with PR. In my research notes I comment:

Watching PR on the edge of the circles of play that were occurring I realised that she would have been hidden if I was to do a momentary glance around the playground. PR was near the other children but not interacting with them. Her use of the play equipment like the hanging ropes, which is an individual task, and hanging around the door of the house, both seemed to mask the reality of her aleness. Once again, the interaction between the play equipment and the child seems crucial.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

In the research notes I state that the interaction is 'crucial'. As I reflect on this comment, I wonder if I meant that it is of importance and so worth further discussion. Another child who interacted with the tricky trail individually in a similar way was the boy YG (who PR approached). In my research notes I comment on the individual nature of the parts of the tricky trail that YG used and the fact that although other children were in the area, like PR, he was on his own. YG's interaction with the equipment seemed to be a 'mask' that hid his aloneness:

YG also seemed to use the play equipment in some ways as a mask. He was on the edge and alone for most of the time. He used the hanging rope, balancing logs and climbing wall. All activities that are individual and that he did alone although there were other children around.

Research notes, 2nd March 2020

In my research notes I comment that the focus on children on their own 'brings to light a different dimension of the playground' and 'It may also help me identify children to participate in the focus group.' These focus groups unfortunately did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school closure. Children being friends with the play equipment and the masking behaviour discussed here are topics for future research.

8.4 Teacher Interviews

During the teacher interviews, all three of the Year One teachers (Julia, Lucy and Naomi) made reference to the tricky trail. Some of Julia's comments were about which playground equipment was well used or popular. Julia states that the tricky trail is not well used and then lists other pieces of equipment or areas that are:

..... So that the long piece of wood, sort of stretch where you carry along a pathway kind-of-thing on the right hand side of the Key Stage One playground*, and that doesn't seem to get used much, um, the climbing frame does, the slide does, I would say that area in the middle for football.

* She is describing the tricky trail.

Julia (0:21) 14.07.20

Julia is describing the Key Stage One playground. There are two playgrounds at the school that are used by Year One for lunch playtimes and the children alternate playgrounds each day. My observation was in the other playground — the EYFS playground (see photos of the pieces of equipment in the introduction section to this chapter) but there is a lot of similarity between the two pieces and so I feel it is safe to presume that Julia also feels the same about the equipment in the other playground. She states that the tricky trail is less used and that the climbing frame, slide and grass area where the children play football are all well used. This is contrary to the research of de Rossi et al. (2015) and Powell et al. (2016); who state the popularity of the tricky trail with the children. Julia's description of the tricky trail and her use of the terms 'long' 'stretch' and 'pathway' all convey the sense of the journey in the equipment. It is also interesting to note the lack of the name of the piece of equipment. Lucy spent several minutes reflecting

on the different ways that children play in the playground, how the space gives them agency and how that play facilitates children's relationships. Below is an extract from her interview transcript (see Appendix T for full transcript).

And the chances that the space outside gives children to opt into something and then opt out of it and join in with different groups, probably has an impact. And also, I suppose, when children have finished playing outside, at lunchtime or something, and they might come in and say 'Oh, those children didn't want me to play with them today.' or 'That person included me today.' And so, somehow, the (0:11) outside space and that opportunity for freer play seems to have an impact on how they include people or not and how their friendships develop. (Pause)

Lucy's Interview (0:10 – 0.11) 15.07.20

Lucy also discussed how the different pieces of equipment allow the children to play in different ways on the equipment when they are alone or with others and summarises this:

So maybe some of the equipment seems more like — what they do maybe when they are not with other children, or need something to do on their own, or they just want to do it, and other equipment becomes part of their games.

Lucy's Interview (0.13) 15.07.20

The comment 'other equipment becomes part of their games' evokes a sense that the equipment has agency and intra-acts with the children to be 'part of the game'.

Naomi echoed a similar positive approach in her interview but puts her views in stronger terms saying that the outdoor space and fixed equipment 'plays a big role' (0.07) and that the outside is important as 'it frees them like, physically and mentally' (0.07 – start of second paragraph). This concept of the playground being a place of freedom is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 and it is interesting that Naomi also talks elsewhere in the interview about the management of the playground and some of the rules. Naomi discusses some of the ways she sees play as important for children in developing their relationships – she compares it to 'learning a skill' (0.07) and explains that the playground allows a relationship to be tested 'to see if it is going to work in practise' (0.07). She continues to explain that the relationships are tested in the different types of play – 'on the slide', 'playing Mums and Dads', 'imaginative' and 'physical' and states that there are 'different levels' of friendship and play.

The first piece of equipment Naomi mentions is the slide and, after I asked her about other equipment, she mentioned a swing with a 'jungle gym' as allowing for more imaginative play. Naomi sees that the fixed equipment 'gives more structure' and the space as facilitating 'imaginative play' and she was dismissive of the trail as 'not much play you can get out of it – it's merely just physical development' (0.10). This echoes the research on physical exercise in the playgrounds, where trails are mentioned as ways to promote fitness and gross motor skills. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, she does see that the bars have a role in imaginative play.

Naomi, similarly to Julia, doesn't know the name for the trail and refers to it as 'the long balancing course' (0.10 – last line of paragraph). There is similarity here with the names of the different types of 'bars' as discussed in Chapter 6 which have technical names that are unknown to and not used by the teachers. Below is an extract from her interview transcript (see Appendix U for full transcript). It starts with the question that I asked:

Researcher: So, I am interested in the role that the outdoor space and the fixed equipment in the playground has on the children's relationships or ... (0:07)

Naomi: Okay. I think it, um, it plays, it plays a big role, in actually, it is almost as if you could compare it to learning a skill discretely so that's when they are like put together in class. For example, maybe you have put two kids together that wouldn't usually play together but they are working well and they are thinking 'Oh! Alright, maybe this could be a new relationship.' And you put out into the playground to see if it is going to work, in practice.

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: So I think they do need that space because I think as soon as you take a child outside it frees them like, physically and mentally. They go into their own imaginative play. The fixed equipment is good because it gives some structure but also the space is (0:08) good because then they're free to create whatever kind of imaginary play they would like to and then it's testing those friendships. Okay, so maybe today we are playing on the slide, let's see how well we can play on the slide together. Tomorrow we are playing Mums and Dads and babies, let's see how well that imaginative play goes well with the physical play. And then it kind of helps them to explore the different levels of their friendship and the different levels that they can play at.

Researcher: Yeah. (Pause) So, do you think, um, like you have just mentioned that, the slide. Do you think certain pieces of equipment are kind of better and more effective than others?

Naomi: Yes. I think some,.... yes. Yes, like a slide (0:09) with the kind of set up of, like a jungle gym kind of thing, is good because it is very reminiscent of the park and I think it gives the children already you know, it builds on these ideas that this is a place to play and they have already formed. Some of them will already have ideas on how to play in a park and take turns in it – or if they haven't been to a park then they can learn at school and then transfer those skills you know into a park and things like that and help them to make friends and play nicely with potentially new children. But I think also it is important to have equipment in the playground that is not too, not too two-dimensional. Like a slide and everything is good because you can make up games with your imagination on a slide. Whereas I think, the, um, the jungle gym thing (0:10) that runs along, the long balancing course ...

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: I think that's more, it's kind, more of 2 D – there is not much, play, that you can get out of that it's merely just physical development – I haven't seen a lot of, especially because I'm in the upper playground, on those pieces of equipment they don't get the most, kind of, use,

Naomi's Interview (0.06 - 0.11) 16.07.20

Naomi spoke in an interested and animated way about the equipment in the playground and its role in facilitating relationships between the children and the different types of play. It was clear that Naomi strongly favoured imaginative play and so, for her, successful or effective play was creative and imaginative. This hierarchy of types of play is important to note because the opinions of teachers on play will influence which materials and equipment are available to children. An example of this can be seen in

the research of Powell et al. (2016:95) (and which was discussed in Chapter 8.1) who were investigating physical activity levels, they cite school 4 where equipment was removed due to health and safety concerns:

The qualitative findings highlighted that the school was poorly resourced because of health and safety fears and a high number of accidents (e.g. female, school 4 'We used to have equipment where all that grass is, we used to have monkey bars and stuff like that but then they changed it into a grassy area because people kept on being silly on them').

The complete removal of play equipment because of health and safety fears seems an extreme case. In the interviews Naomi does talk (as discussed in Chapter 7) about the removal of the 'shed' to allow easier viewing of the sandpit. Overall, the teacher interviews indicate that the three Year One teachers did not regard the tricky trail highly in terms of play value. Julia stated: 'that doesn't seem to get used much' (0.21) and Naomi that it was for 'merely just physical development'. My observations suggest that the trail does have a role but the teacher interviews highlight that the teachers do not have clarity on how children interact on the trail and the different types of play that it can facilitate. This is underscored by the fact that the teachers used different names to refer to the piece of equipment.

8.5 Object Orientated Ontology (OOO) — Speculative Writing

The trail is the third piece of equipment that I focused on in my observation and now write speculatively about. It comprises of four distinct sections and I have tried to recognise this but also look at the trail as a whole.

As the sun begins to shine directly overhead, I know that the small ones will come soon. Every day, they come as a group, a herd, their small feet thudding along the concrete path and then the grass. I stand tall, near the entrance. As the small ones come into the playground most run past me and into the larger grass area. A few go down the side between me and the brightly painted mural on the wall. One or two hold loosely onto my first pole and swing round me. Other small ones go straight to my bridge where they bounce and sway.

I am the tricky trail, the trim trail, I am a journey, a place for movement. I have four sections each with a gap between them — spread out like a path along the side of the playground. My first section has four large wooden poles and between them run three green ropes both top and bottom. On this section the small ones reach and grasp my top ropes and place their feet on the bottom rope — some tentatively, I feel their nervousness and uncertainty as they jerk unsteadily. Others plonk their feet down hard, muscles stretching and they yank my top rope. I am taut, as they let go, I spring back and the small ones lose their balance and fall off onto my grass. Some small ones stand their feet across my ropes side by side bouncing on the ropes together we move in rhythm with each other — one — united in movement until a hand lets go. Others move cautiously along my ropes, foot next to foot scraping and dragging along, clinging tightly to my top rope and trying to keep off the grass. I twist and flex, my fibres tighten, as they walk and sway from side to side. The brave ones will jump off me, stretching, knees bent, pushing down and flinging their arms up. Whilst other small ones step more cautiously down and clumsy ones trip over my rope both land on the grass around me. My grass is

cut by hand by one of the big ones. There are patches of yellow that show the paths that the small ones tread. My grass is tenderly and lovingly manicured and watered, treated as royalty — a patch of green in the concrete.

My next section is a line of vertical wooden logs. They are in pairs in the ground, two at a low height, two slightly higher and then one taller than the others. Crosses etched in my wooden tops like blank noughts and crosses boards ready to play. They go up and then down again the other side — a staircase to move along. My wood is worn now, cracked by the strong African sun and weathered by the rain and feet of the small ones treading on me day after day. My wood is not native to this country. I am an economic migrant, an immigrant, imported with the rest of the trail. The small ones sometimes walk one foot on each log, up and down, hands stretched out and taking care. Sometimes they linger, they sit on me, quietly surveying the other small ones play. Fingers holding my edges, caressing my wood. Sometimes they climb on and jump off, pushing off my timbers and landing with a thud — two feet and often two hands as they fall forward onto all fours. Laughing as they do so. Joy, fun and excitement reverberate and the sound bounces back from me — reflected back to them.

My third section is two climbing walls, green, blue, red and yellow thick curved plastic panels attached to three vertical wooden poles. The coloured panels were once bright but now my colours are sun bleached — almost white. Worn by the sun and the love of the hands and feet that come every day — I have hand and foot holes that are the perfect size for the small ones' feet and hands. Here the small ones stretch and grasp, they hang, dangle, shift from one foot to the other as they climb up, along or just hang over. Whispering, giggling to each other — I am cushioned between them — or shouting to another small one further away. They clasp, grab and hug me as they push up, stretching towards the clear blue sky.

Finally, as the small ones move along, they reach my bridge. With two vertical wooden poles either end and long lime green metal bars that stretch between — rails for hands to hold. The bridge itself is made of wooden logs with thick green ropes between so that it swings and sways and shifts under the slightest pressure. The small ones bounce on me, standing at opposite ends and jumping up and down. I creak as the timber in my logs shifts and they clasp tight hold of my green metal bars for fear of falling. They sway — we move together from side to side or they run, bouncing and chase over and across me — racing through. The sound of their excited screams echoes across the playground.

I am a journey, a trail to follow but as with all journeys you can take different routes. Some small ones will go from section to section as the designer had in mind, racing on and not stopping but others will hop between — running on the grass from here to there. Some small ones linger, hanging on my ropes or wall, lost in thought as they observe the others from my steps or swinging back and forth on the bridge. I am a journey to be travelled. Each day I interact with the small ones until the metal school bell clangs and after the rush, the hustle and bustle, there is silence and I rest.



By writing as the tricky trail, I was enabled to look at each section of the trail in turn and see the types of movement and interaction that occurred there. The metaphor of 'the journey' came as I tried to recall my observations and replay the images in my mind. The trail is, like the other pieces of equipment, surrounded by movement, but the broad lengths of movement that the trail encourages are distinctly different to that of the bars and sandpit. The writing does not mention children who are alone and when I

reflected it seems that this is fitting as those children are camouflaged by their movement and interaction with the trail. Anyone of those children may be alone — not playing with another child — but they are playing with the trail.

I start the description with the children entering the playground and the words ‘most run past’ indicate that the trail is not the piece of equipment that the children head straight for — it is not the most popular piece of equipment. Those children who approach the trail may ‘hold loosely’ and ‘swing’ or ‘run to the bridge’. The trail does have two ends, but children can begin and can access the trail from anywhere along its length and though they do sometimes stay in one place they still move as they bounce or climb or hang on the structure — a complex choreography of movements in which the children ‘grasp’ ‘yank’ ‘cling’ ‘jump’ ‘hang’ ‘dangle’ ‘clasp’ ‘grab’ ‘hug’ ‘bounce’ ‘sway’ ‘run’ and ‘chase’.

There are four distinct sections to the trail and describing each separately in detail has enabled me to reflect on the different movements and intra-actions that occur as the parts of the trail respond to the children’s movements — there is a reaction for each action — this is what can tip a child off the equipment — they fall off when they bounce on the ropes as they had not anticipated the response of the trail. The different approaches of the children — ‘cautious’ or ‘clumsy’, those who ‘linger’ or ‘racing through’ hint of the range of ‘intra-actions’ and the individual and personal nature.

The range of intra-actions includes the children who ‘sit and quietly survey’ to those who ‘thud’ and children may intra-act individually, in pairs or groups with the trail. This supports the flexible nature of the trail as discussed in the research of Powell et al. (2016) (see Section 8.1). There is also a strong positive relationship that comes from the intra-actions described — the trail is ‘caressed’ by fingers, the grass is ‘manicured’ and in movements they become one as they ‘sway’ or are in ‘rhythm’ with each other — equipment and children.

The use of bright colours for the trail as described emphasises the meaningful design of the trail so as to make it attractive to children — ‘green, blue, red and yellow’ and ‘perfect for small hands’. Although now worn by the sun to white as is the cracked, imported wood — the colonisation of the playground seen in action. The trail is a piece of equipment whose design has been planned and thought about.

The ‘fear of falling’ and the risk taking encouraged is also seen as a reason for the popularity of the trail with the children and result in the ‘excited screams’ and laughter that is reflected back. Risk taking and challenge is a topic that I discussed in more depth in Chapter 6 as the bars are traditionally regarded in that

category — more so than the trail. Perhaps one way that the challenge is curtailed is due to the standardised gaps that are part of the design of the trail so that the space between the logs in the bridge, the gap between the ropes and the spaces between the climbing logs are all standard across the pieces. There is recent research from the Netherlands (Jongeneel et al., 2015; Sporrel et al., 2017) on the preference of children to play on jumping logs that use non-standard or varied gaps that could be applied to the trail design — would a more non-standard and potentially more challenging design mean more children play here?

The ability of the trail to cope with the range of small ones who intra-act with it in different ways and the different way that the trail responds became clear to me only through this type of speculative writing. It has also revealed to me latent understanding of the trail from my observations over a long period of time. The power of the writing is that it uncovers things about the trail that are unspoken.

8.6 Key Themes Discussion

What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

The tricky trail is a place of excitement comprising of four different linked sections or activities that are connected together to form one journey but a path that can be joined at any time. The children's intra-action can be seen more explicitly in the trail than the other pieces of equipment — it is the trail that bounced back at them, allows them to sway and be in rhythm and tips them off. It is also one where the care of the equipment and positive relationship can be seen strongly — the children are able to linger, observe and move at a slow pace as they intra-act or race, chase, stretch and bounce as they feel the tightness of the fibres intra-acting. This freedom and variety is demonstrated through the independence in relationships that the trail supports by masking being on their own because the children are 'busy' playing — they are engaged in an activity. I was able to observe this because I was focused on looking for it. A casual observer or busy teacher would likely not have seen this behaviour. I suggest that it is the interaction with the equipment that masks being alone and so the trail therefore has a destigmatising ability.

How can schools use these findings when reviewing playground design?

The tricky trail facilitates independence in relationships between children by enabling children to intra-act and play when they are on their own. There will always be children who for a variety of reasons choose to play alone — the trail destigmatises this play. This is powerful as children who do not need other children to play with become more attractive playmates to other children.

The colonisation of the playground through the use of an imported piece of play equipment that could instead have been made locally, in country from local materials is something that schools should be aware of. Play equipment could be designed and manufactured locally. Within the playground at Mana Barumsa there is a mix of imported and locally made equipment — the bars discussed in Chapter 6 are also imported but the sandpit is made from pieces of local timber and filled with local sand. The colonisation of the playground raises a number of interesting questions for future research.

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed some of the literature referring to trails and discussed the fact that trails are often installed to promote physical fitness and gross motor skills. I have used my observation and research notes to discuss some of the ways that children interact with the trail, in particular children who were on their own. The opportunity for individual play or independence is an important feature of the tricky trail — especially compared to the other pieces of equipment. I then reflected on comments made by the three Year One teachers about the playground equipment and trail, noting that none of the teachers knew the name. Finally, I used OOO to assist deeper reflection on the movements of the trail and the different forms of interaction that the tricky trail facilitates.

In the next chapter, I will draw together the reflections on the bars, sandpit and tricky trail to suggest some implications of the research.



Views of the Tricky Trail



Chapter 9: Implications or So What?!



Dusk over the playground

In choosing to follow the professional doctorate route, I wanted to remain grounded in practicality and the everydayness of my situation as first and foremost a teacher and school leader and so make my research real and meaningful. In the course of this research, I can recognise several changes that have happened to me — changes in my thinking and approach — but I feel that the call to be authentic and genuine in what I am doing has remained an anchor in my journey. In this chapter, I hope to answer the big question of ‘So What?’ or what are the implications of my research for other practitioners? I also explain my contribution to knowledge. I set out to address the research question:

- What kinds of relationships emerge from the entangled play between children and fixed playground equipment?

The research observations focused my attention on the entangled nature of relationships in the playground and the interactions between children and equipment. Through my research notes, reflection on other authors, teacher interviews and the speculative pieces of writing on each piece of equipment I am able to draw some conclusions about these relationships. The observations of the types of play that took place on each piece of equipment have value in providing us with some insight into the contribution of each to supporting the development of positive relationships as ‘the way children play can determine social acceptance and the development of friendships in early childhood’ (Coelho et al., 2017:818). These insights or contributions to knowledge are detailed in the next sections of this concluding chapter.

9.1 Emerging Relationships — A New Typology

The methodological shifts, as discussed in Chapter 5, created a new way for me to consider the data. In particular, the use of speculative writing aerated the 'data' and breathed air into the observation sketches, journal and photos to generate different insights into the question of relationships in the playground. In considering the types of relationship it is necessary to go back to each different piece of equipment and look at how that particular piece of equipment interacts. Through the observation sketches, interviews and pieces of speculative writing the following aspects or types of relationship are indicated:

- joining-in
- belonging
- building of community
- contemplation
- independence

These five areas form a new and alternative typology of relationship with playground equipment. This is significant because other typologies regard the equipment was inert rather than lacking the agency that was observed during the research. However in aim it is similar to the work (discussed in Chapter 2) of the Playworker's Typology by Hughes (2012:99) 'to ensure that what the playworker offered in terms of accessible play experiences was comprehensive'. School staff are encouraged to use the five headings to reflect on the comprehensive nature of the equipment in their own playground. The Howes Peer Play Scale (Howes and Matheson, 1992) which was used by Mahony et al. (2017) (discussed in Chapter 6) focuses on identifying the types of play that the child is involved with and is marked on a scale that makes the presumption of the desirability of a child moving through these types of play – a progression through the stages towards socialisation. This seems to fail to recognise the need for some children to have time alone which is acknowledged by the category of 'independence' on this new typology. Dymont and O'Connell (2013:266) used five categorisations of activity: Functional, Constructive, Symbolic, Self-focused/looking on and Talking in their analysis of playground activity. This typology seems to lack an acknowledgement of the agency of the equipment and rather focuses on activity in contrast to outcome. The Play Park Evaluation Tool (PPET) was developed by Parker and Al-Maiyah (2021) (discussed in Chapter 8) and uses data to produce an infographic of the quality of play as the sixth section of the evaluation. PEET is ideal for use by developers planning new play areas and provides a range of quantitative data – in contrast the new typography presented aims to be a reflective tool with more qualitative outcomes. The emphasis is on interactions 'with' the equipment.

With an awareness of these other typologies of play, the first piece of equipment I considered were the bars. The sketches of movement around the bars, done during the observation, show that children moved quickly in and out of the area of the bars — demarked by the black foam mats. These were individuals and small groups of children. The bars seem to facilitate relationships by enabling children to have a place to pass through and so allow the participation of different children in relationships — they enable joining in. The speculative writing suggests that in their interactions the bars are not only a place to ‘hang’ but a place to ‘hold on to’ and so provide a sense of something solid — in particular the wooden poles at the end of the bars are used to provide an anchor. The black mat area created a place of belonging for the children. Whether they were near other children or apart there was a sense that, as they were on the mats, they were connected to the bars and so part of something larger. These reflections of the bars as supporting individual play as well as being well used by children were supported by the comments made by the teachers.



The second piece of equipment was the sandpit. The sandpit facilitates a different type of play as a larger group of children (as well as small groups and individuals) were seen there playing collaboratively. The wave-like crescendo of activity in the sandpit (seen through the use of sketches to record the event) indicated a building of community or coming together by the children where even the observers seemed to be drawn in. The comments by the teachers supported the popularity of the sandpit and the discussion by Julia (one of the teachers interviewed) suggested an additional sandpit. The speculative writing suggested

that the sandpit was a place that groups of varying sizes and individuals interacted with in different ways — from the frenetic ‘scooping’ and ‘piling up’ to the quieter and more contemplative slow ‘trickle’ of sand through the fingers.

The third piece of equipment was the tricky trail and, although this is designed as a series of activities which children can journey along, the focus was on the use of the trail by individual children who were on their own. Here the observations indicate children being able to play on their own but not alone as other children came in and out of the area. The trail then facilitated an independence for the children. The speculative writing revealed a long list of verbs associated with the interaction on the trail. Overall, the teachers accepted the role of the trail in meeting the objective of developing physical fitness and skills but did not seem to value it as a piece of play equipment. The popularity of the trail as observed and mentioned by other researchers seems slightly at odds with this.

The uniqueness of each piece of equipment is in the different aspects that they provide for interactions whether the joining-in and belonging created by the bars, the building of community or contemplation afforded by the sandpit or the opportunity for independence that the tricky trail facilitates.

This typology of relationships with the playground equipment is the first contribution to knowledge.



The Sandpit



9.2 Practical Suggestions for Schools

Whilst I am aware that this thesis has strongly advocated an antianthropocentric approach, I feel slightly hypocritical but bound to recognise the human-centredness of schools and acknowledge that, for practical suggestions to be adopted, they need to be voiced in a way acceptable and recognised by school leaders and teachers. I have therefore sought to consider through the research the question of ‘How can schools use these findings when reviewing playground design?’ Simultaneously, in order for this to be something new and make a change, I suggest that a more object-focused orientation to the playground would provide us new ways to see the playground. The entanglements in the playground between human and non-human can help us to understand the humans better — in the same way that the focus on the objects hoarded can help us understand the hoarder (Bennett, 2011).

Playgrounds in schools are designed with several key aims in mind. The first of these is likely to be to provide a place where physical activity can happen (as discussed with particular focus on the tricky trail in Chapter 8). Another aim is to provide an opportunity for children to socialise and so develop social skills. Perhaps thirdly is the aim of facilitating play for children for its own sake — as part of the rights of a child. (Article 31). In my considerations of practical suggestions for schools, I am focusing on the second of these

aims as I intend to make suggestions that will help children develop relationships with other children and focus on how choice of playground equipment can assist this.

9.3 Provocation to discuss the differing functions of different types of equipment

The first suggestion that I would make is about the necessity to have different types of play equipment available to children so that the different relationships (joining-in, belonging, building of community, contemplation, independence) can be developed. As discussed in Chapter 8, educators may find it more palatable to use the terms set out in the PPET (Parker and Al-Maiyah, 2021:10) which provides a clear structure to analyse a play provision in any playground and produces a mapping diagram. It is not therefore the aim of this thesis to provide that. However, I will draw attention to the failure of PPET to acknowledge the equipment as more than inanimate objects. It is important to note the agency of the equipment — the bars that slip, the sand that clings and the ropes that push back. Other pieces of equipment will also have an agency and affordances for intra-action that observation and speculative writing may reveal.

9.4 The importance of children's freedom to use equipment in different ways

Within the field of education my research on children's friendship responds to the call of Carter (2021); Carter and Nutbrown (2016); Tympa et al. (2021); Streelasky (2022) and Papadopoulou (2016) to engage meaningfully with the pedagogy of friendship for young children and support teachers in school with strategies to use in the playground. From my own research it is clear that the equipment has an important role to play in developing these friendships as the different pieces of equipment intra-act with the children in different ways and so facilitate different types of play. This can be seen clearly in the analysis of the sandpit in Chapter 7 where children come together to interact with the sand and play collaboratively. In contrast with the tricky trail where children often interact on their own with the equipment and the bars where children tended to be in pairs or small groups.

This finding supports the need for schools to offer a range of equipment and for teachers to allow children to interact as they choose and so create opportunities for building relationships and so form friendships. The research made it clear that it is important for children to have the freedom to use the equipment in the way they choose at the time. This echoes the findings of de Rossi et al. (2015) on the tricky trail

(discussed in Chapter 8) and how the wide variety of play options made it appeal to the children. Children may choose to play on their own, be in a group or want to join others. Carter (2021:4) explains that:

The process of selecting a friend comes before making friends. This can be defined as a time of observation where an individual will be looking around the vicinity, deciding who to approach.

It is important that children who are in this observation phase of selecting a friend have a place from which to observe. This may be them 'hanging' on the bars and watching, observing a larger group in the sandpit or climbing on the trail whilst other children come in and out of the area.

It is suggested that other schools might wish to use these questions as starting points for discussion and reflection if wanting to improve the outdoor play environment. Rather than providing one-size fits all answers the aim is to stimulate reflection and discussion amongst school staff as to what is happening at playtimes. The questions refer to play in a playground with fixed play equipment.

Questions for schools to ask:

- ❖ How wide a range of play choices are available to children?
- ❖ To what extent are children allowed a free choice in their play about where to play?
- ❖ To what extent are children's interactions with equipment restricted? (What are the rules for certain pieces of playground equipment?)
- ❖ To what extent do children participate in the planning and use of the playground?

Reflecting on these questions, I recollect the story of the children going up the slide which I used to illustrate my clash of roles in Chapter 4.5. The slide offers children different affordances or ways of intra-acting and climbing up the slide is one of them. At Mana Barumsa there was a rule to prevent this — for safety reasons — I feel confident that many other affordances and intra-actions are stemmed by rules such as these. By reflecting on these questions, it is hoped to open a dialogue about the intra-actions in the playground about missed or prevented affordances as well as other topics.

9.5 Debates about importing resources

As discussed in Chapter 7, the sand used at Mana Barumsa is locally sourced. However, there are many examples of the colonisation of the school and playground through the importing of goods and the, sometimes explicit, suggestion that these are somehow superior in quality – glue sticks or blu tack that stick better. The bars and tricky trail are both among the pieces of imported equipment in the two playgrounds. There is a locally produced copy of a 'pirate ship' – made at the carpenter across the road.

As the research progressed, and I spent time in the playground, I became increasingly uneasy with this dichotomy and the entwined prejudice. There is scope to explore this further and look at the colonisation of the playground.

9.6 Specific change within the school (a second sandpit)

A practical suggestion, more specifically to Mana Barumsa School, is that the school should construct a sandpit in the KS1 playground (in addition to the one in the EYFS playground). The thinking behind this is that in this research the sandpit, more than the other pieces of equipment, offers the widest variety of play in terms of types of grouping and numbers of children so facilitating collaborative and cooperative play. The suggested location of this sandpit is next to the playhouse in the photo and under the map wall (in the top photo). This was considered in my discussion with Julia (one of the Year One teachers) and also ties in with the interview comments of Naomi (another teacher) about the current location and the difficulty



seeing the sandpit from a supervision perspective.



The area in the KS1 playground suggested for the new sandpit.

9.7 The value of paying attention to how children's use of fixed play equipment

The research has highlighted the intrinsic value of paying attention to how children's use of fixed play equipment and a recognition that this may depart from designed intentions and focal points. Such observation might emphasise aspects that may be seen as marginal or peripheral from adult perspectives. This can be seen in the discussion of the bars and the importance of the poles and mats as well as the actual bars themselves. It can also be seen in the number of children in the sandpit and the use of the railings discussed in Chapter 7.

9.8 Limitations

There are inevitably gaps in my own research and areas that, given more time, would be areas to pursue. Some of the limitations to my current research are:

- The focus on only three pieces of play equipment. There is an opportunity to look at some of the other pieces of common equipment found in the playground, e.g., slide and climbing frame, to examine patterns of interactions and relationships.
- Limited time in the playground, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A longer ethnographic study with observations of the playground over the course of the academic year would give additional insights.
- Planned input from children, to get the child's voice, did not happen, again caused by the school switching to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of activity-based focus group interviews or the use of children to lead research themselves within the playground — both proposed — would give a rich insight from a different perspective.
- The age of the children in this study was 5 – 6 years old — the first year of primary school in the UK system and so generalisations to other age groups may not be appropriate. Future research could explore differences between the interactions of other year groups with the fixed equipment.

Finally, as indicated in Chapter 5, my methodology and approach have changed significantly over the course of the research, influenced by my reading of articles from a post-qualitative approach, I have become less anthropocentric. However, time has been against me embracing these ideas more fully and, although I lean towards OOO in my speculative writing, this is an area that needs more reading and thinking about in order to incorporate into my post-doctoral research.

9.9 Research Located in a Majority World Setting Adopting a Posthuman Approach

It has been a privilege to research in Ethiopia and begin to unpick some of my own assumptions. My research responds to a call from van Blerk (2019) and others for more Majority World research. Post qualitative research within the Majority World can be linked to de-colonising onto-epistemologies that embrace indigenous philosophies, as a 'ferenji' I would not claim to contribute knowledge to Ethiopians about their country. However, whilst aware of some of the concerns about the androcentrism of OOO (Asberg et al., 2015), I suggest that a speculative research approach and the use of OOO may be helpful in providing an additional perspective. I hope that my own research might draw attention to colonisation of the playground by drawing attention to the importation of objects that have a presumed superiority — we used glue sticks imported from the UK rather than locally sourced ones and encourage a move away from the Anglo-Eurocentrism that is evident in much research (Sundberg, 2014). Speculative writing can help researchers to truly 'listen', by which I mean the broad definition provided by Kanngieser (2020): 'listening as processes of sensing, attuning and noticing', and so I hope that my research in part responds to the more recent call for greater awareness of self and colonialism in listening (Kanngieser, 2023).

9.10 Speculative Writing and using OOO as a Research Method

By creating pieces of speculative writing that are not fabulations (Haraway, 2016) but OOO inspired pieces of writing I have allowed the reader to linger (Bogost, 2012) and consider the fixed playground equipment in a new way. I have highlighted the need for schools to consider the interactions between humans and the equipment and suggested a less anthropocentric approach. Within the field of education, my research expands upon the work of Krumsvik (2020) with university clickers and Choi (2018) with kindergarten blocks. Within the field of children's geographies, I have built on the work of Knight (2021) in mapping the playground and Kraftl (2020) and O'Brien (2022) in using OOO in the playground with the fixed play equipment.

9.11 Where Next?

The most significant part of my research seems to me to be the pieces of speculative writing which are done following OOO. These pieces of writing have enabled me to gain insights into the relationships offered through intra-action with each piece of equipment. Further research might include pieces of writing looking at other pieces of fixed playground equipment such as the playhouse, climbing frame or slide — all mentioned repeatedly in this research.

As indicated at the start of the chapter on the sand pit, and in 9.5, another area that would be interesting to explore is the colonisation of the playground through the use of the imported curriculum and play equipment. The tricky trail and bars were both imported from the UK and installed in the playground in work that was supervised by international teachers (see Chapter 8). This raises a number of questions that would be interesting to explore further.

Finally, further research on the topics of children being friends with the play equipment and the masking behaviour (discussed in Chapter 8 in relation to children who are playing alone on the trail) are areas that would be interesting to pursue further.



Evening in the playground



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Appendix A: Research Timeline

My doctoral research is entangled with my life in Ethiopia, the school and the playground. Some events on this timeline are more personal than others – all have impacted my research journey one way or other. Many thanks to my supervisors for sharing the journey!

- Oct 2016** Started the EdD course whilst teaching Year One at a Manchester school.
- Aug 2017** Moved to Ethiopia to work at an international school – teaching Year One.
- July 2018** Began Part B of the EdD and met supervisors. Initial interest was on the use of sociograms to map relationship patterns within the classroom.
- Jan 2019** Plan to research friendships within Year One as a result of spending a lot of teaching time supporting resolution of friendship issues that happened at playtimes.
- June 2019** Appointed Deputy Head and began to think about research outside of the classroom due to ethical and practical concerns about power dynamics.
- Aug 2019** Began planning research.
- Sept 2019** Break in studies due to brother's stroke.
- Dec 2019** Acting Head of School.
- Jan 2020** Carried out observations in the playground.
- Mar 2020** Planned focus group interviews and activities cancelled as school moved online due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Acting Head of School responsibility. Left Ethiopia and went to the UK.
- Jun 2020** Wrote first piece of writing from a post-humanist perspective - A Day in the Life as the playground due to a misunderstanding in the task set. The impact of writing was to shift my theoretical perspective.

July 2020 Carried out the teacher interviews online using Skype.

Aug 2020 Returned to Addis but due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic school restarts the year online so further research in the playground with children is not possible. Decision made to write about data already collected. School year spent in Ethiopia.

Jun 2021 Presented online at the MMU conference: 'A Gold Sequined Baseball Cap! Wearing Your Research Hat as a Teacher' from a Covid quarantine hotel in London.

July 2021 Other pieces of writing imagining to be the playground equipment (The Bars, The Tricky Trail and The Sand Pit)

Sept 2021 Returned to Ethiopia with the intent to finish role at school in December as two of my children are now at school in the UK.

Oct 2021 Acting Head of School until 1st Jan 2022. Made decision to extend stay in Ethiopia until the end of the school year.

Nov 2021 Civil war in Ethiopia – left country – school ran online and face to face.

Jan 2022 Returned to Ethiopia but all three of my children now in the UK.

Jun 2022 Moved back to the UK and first draft handed in.

Jun 2022 Presented at the MMU conference: 'Lingering and Speculation in the Playground'.

Dec 2022 Juggling three new jobs and three kids - final draft handed in.

Mar 2023 Thesis submitted!

Speculative Writing about the Playground (Chapter One)

This page is also in the thesis.

Although no two days are the same, my days have a rhythm dictated by a bell and the movement of beings. Today I am slumbering and silent as the dawn breaks over the surrounding roof tops, aluminium sheets sparkling in the light, dogs barking and the city and houses around me, slowly come to life. The guard walks around my edges, my ground is soft from the heavy rain that fell overnight. He does his rounds, concentrating more on the radio in his hand than me or my surroundings. He leans against the green metal bars that mark my boundaries, he looks down at the road and footpath below. He's watching the first staff pull up in cars and enter the school gate. He moves, the radio is off now, in his pocket, as he slowly unties the end of the string of the green, yellow and red flags that are hung around me every afternoon. The colours of these flags are the colours of the flag that hangs on the tall white pole behind me, blowing proudly in the breeze and though my flags are small, tattered and torn, there is a part of me that feels proud that I know where I amEthiopia.

The guard, coils the string in his hand as he goes, he unwinds the string from around the bars, which are by the slope - next to the hanging bars, he continues, past the slide and the climbing frame to the metal pole at the corner. The flags are down and more and more people are now passing me on the path. Some of them, smaller and lighter ones thud across me, not worrying about the squelch as they scream with the joy of being young, outdoors and seeing friends again. Other small ones plod in slowly, holding the hand of a larger one and cuddling up to them as they sit on the wooden benches that run down one side of me. The noise gets louder as more and more small things walk over, run over me. One or two of the big ones stand in the middle and watch. The small ones circle around them, they go along the wooden tricky trail, climb up the ladder and down the slide, swing upside down, the feel is happy. Then the loud metal bell clangs, the running stops, some small ones slide to a stop, some don't stop. "Freeze!" "What does the first bell mean?" Then, the second bell, more movement, most are walking but some run, up the seven concrete steps at my end, nearest the tall building with the big windows and onto the flat paving. More big ones are at the top of the steps. Other big ones move away and watch, some from the slope, a group of the male big ones stand by the railings, the same ones, day after day, they are old friends. The small ones stand one behind the other, some twisting and turning but most facing the building, the shiny marble steps on which today six big ones stand. There are twelve lines, six with all the girl small ones and another six with all the boy small ones. They alternate boy – girl – boy – girl. Last year they didn't do that, just 12 lines, I don't know why this year is different. Some of the small ones stand still, others hush the ones talking, others giggle, and he has just taken his hat. The noise turns into a murmur and then a whisper. The big ones speak. Today it is short, today the small ones are happy, today the small ones move away quickly into the tall building.

My equipment is empty, but there is not yet stillness, big ones with one or two little ones running behind, come down the path. Sometimes the big ones pause like those two now, they greet each other with kisses on both cheeks, they kiss the cheeks of the small one too. The little one pulls, it knows that the other small ones are already in the tall building but the big ones linger, murmur and exclaim. They are in no hurry, though the sun is getting stronger and I can feel the heat burning off my dampness. The two big ones stand under the roofed walkway that leads from the tall building down one side of me to the pole and smaller buildings at the end. Finally, they leave, a few others pass through, sometimes a small one by itself but now I can almost hear the whisper of the wind.

(The remainder of the day is not in the thesis and continues

I don't have to wait long before a group of about six small ones comes out with one big one. They come at the same time most days. There is the chalk, the small ones each take a piece and write letters on my concrete slabs, some days they have to go down the slope to find a space where there are no letters, different colour chinks give me a rainbow feel, the dust is on the hands and feet of the small ones and all over me, in my cracks I am purple, pink, blue and green. The big ones are clean. They watch, they stand, not sprawling like the small ones, they patrol the space and bark their words. But the small ones are happy to be outside with this barking big one, they skip out of the door of the building and down the steps to repeat what the other small ones did. Today the words are a – e, cake, make, bake, lake, flake are written in almost every one of my concrete squares.

Another big one and a group of six other small ones came out just after the first. This group goes down my steps and the big one sits on one of my wooden poles that make up the tricky trail. The small ones sit on the grass, they are not here to play, though the small ones tug at my grass and twist pieces round their fingers when the big one is not looking. I smile to myself as they dig their fingers into my dirt. The big one talks and the small ones answer. Today the big one has a book she holds. The groups swap over but the same thing happens each time. Some of the small ones leave with very dirty fingers, others leave clutching pieces of my grass. The big one does not touch me but the heels of her shoes leave indents in my grass.

The last two groups have gone but now they come, the small ones in ones, twos, threes or sometimes hoards come out carrying boxes, bags, bottles and they sit on my steps, on my benches, in my play houses, on the edges, on my floor, they are spread out in a glorious banquet and the noise of food and chatter floats up into the air. The big ones walk around. "No sharing!" But still they share, their crisps, their cakes, their popcorn, their apple, it's part of who they and I am, in our culture we share.

Not all of the small ones are kind to me, some drop their things onto me, strawberry yoghurt spills and makes a pink stain on the cement, a brown and yellow banana peel, pieces of injera and Sun Chips wrappers. One of the big ones wearing a white laboratory coat comes as she does every day at this time. Her long-handled red plastic brush and pan in her hands she follows around as the small ones move away and brushes up after them. She leaves me gleaming, my dustbins full for these small ones often seem to throw away almost as much as they eat. They have a sense of plenty in a land where I know there are others with nothing. Her friend in the white coat splashes the water onto my concrete floor as she washes items using the black plastic hose pipe that coils snake like around my edges.

The small ones throw down their bags and boxes and they play, they run and whoop in the sun, for the day is getting hotter. They drink and spill water on my grass. They sit in huddles and chat with their friends. They pretend. Some are round my edges, where the grating is for the rain that can fall as heavy as a monsoon. Today, as many other days one of the small ones have dropped something down there, today it's a small red square Lego block. They stick their hands through, knowing that they can't reach it. One of the big ones comes, lifts the metal grating and reaches down for the lego. He is one of the big ones that is walking around me, talking to the small ones, comforting them when needed and helping them solve their problems as he has done now. "No toys in school." The Lego goes into the pocket of one of the small ones. I know that I will see it again. As the small ones fill my space, the big ones pass through, in ones and twos, they walk out quickly and come back slowly, carrying cups full of tea or coffee as they return to the tall building. Some have a donut or other sweet treat. When these big ones come back, down the steep steps or along the path, I know that it is almost time, the bell, the pause, the bell, the movement. It gives rhythm to my day.

Today after the lines some of the small ones stay outside, others run into the building and return clasping bottles. Jumpers and sweaters are removed, they have been worn because of the cold start

but could have been removed hours ago. The small ones seem to cling to them. Some of the small ones have more than one layer below the red, yellow, green and blue t-shirts that almost all small ones wear. Today, as they do once every week, the big ones are wearing trainers. The lines settle into pairs of small ones and bounce away. Oh, a small one left behind, he runs to catch up, laces undone and bottle dangling from his hand. Then stillness.

Once again, I don't wait long, one big one and one small one come bouncing outside, they seem excited, they each hold a book. They go into my playhouse and sit on the rickety wooden bench, side by side, they talk and the small one reads. I listen to the story, about a donkey kicking a wolf, the twist is that the donkey kicks the wolf so that his teeth are knocked out and so the wolf can't eat him. I have heard this story often. I can recite the words. Today the little one reads clearly, the words roll over me. At the end, after answering the questions of the big one, the little one skips excitedly back up the steps. The big one follows her, scooping to pick up her pen and shuffling her papers, back into the building.

A red kite soars in the sky above me. The sky is a brilliant blue. My ground is dry now. Here he comes, the small one, my friend, he comes on his own with one big one several times every day, sometimes like today I can sense his anger and frustration, he needs me. His feet thud and then he climbs, he balances and I sense his breathing slowing and his balance restoring. I can almost feel the smile that I see on his face as he succeeds in swinging himself from log to log, clinging to my ropes but he doesn't fall. The big one too senses the change and knows, as I do, that he now will go back into the building. She says something and he runs ahead of her. "Slow down!"

A line of excited small ones dressed in strange costumes comes out of the building, they are carrying cards with words on and flowers and wearing large black hats. This sometimes happens and, when the small ones wear these strange costumes, they come past and don't even look at me, so excited to be going up the steps and in through the door. The two big ones are stressed. I can tell by their pace, their quick steps, quick breathing and often, like today, they run back to the building and back again with some strange object.

From the other end of the playground the big one who stays in one of the rooms comes. She only comes near me when she has visitors. I can tell they are visitors because they stop and look, they stare at me. Perhaps there is something like me in the country that they come from but there are not many of me here. There is a sense of the familiar and the small ones jump excitedly but unsure if they can come and enjoy me. Today the small one only needs a little encouragement and then he has climbed to the top of the frame and sits aside one of the smooth wooden poles surveying his territory, my territory. This is what I was made for. Reluctantly he climbs down as the big one and the two visitor big ones walk along my path. The small one follows, not wanting to leave me. Up the slope and into the building.

Almost as soon as they leave the small ones come out of the building, following the path down the slope and pause before climbing the steps. They walk in lines with the big ones at the front. They look at me longingly but don't come near. Along the balcony and in through the door. Also coming now are big ones in ones or two, a small crying small one is held by one of one, it is rocked and calmed so that as the big ones go through the door it is quieted. There is a pause. Here comes a big one talking loudly on his phone he walks towards the door but stands on the balcony shouting his conversation. Oh, another big one, this one looks worried, she is almost running along my path and up the stone steps to get to the door. Her and the big one on the phone enter and it is almost silent. I can hear singing and clapping from the door.

Two big ones stand on the balcony, leaning on the old wooden rail and look over me, beyond my wall and to the offices and houses on the other side of the road. These two come most days, perhaps enjoying the silence or shade from the hot sun. They talk and from the murmur they seem to be

putting the world to rights! They finish and move off together, round the corner and out of sight. I know that I am just one corner of a smaller compound.

The singing has started again but now the small ones come out of the door. Line after line, down the steps, impatient to get back to the building, they pay me little attention. Then the big ones and all the little ones in their strange clothes come. Down the stairs and onto my grass. Some of the little ones climb over me, the big ones lean on my metal poles and stay out of the midday sun. The small ones don't care, they shout and play, it's a celebration. The two big ones who were so stressed are there, they seem tired but their stress has gone, they stand relaxed and smile and joke with the other big ones. Slowly, after hugs and kisses, the big ones go down my path and away. The small ones go, with the two big ones into the building.

On their way back in the big and small ones pass my regulars. The two big ones who come day after day and sit on my picnic bench and eat their lunch. Other big ones join them. Today there are three others. These ones don't always come but my regulars do. They are part of the rhythm as much as the clanging metal bell. The picnic table has a roof so they sit here rain or shine. On a hot day like today it provides relief from the heat of the sun.

Once again, the small ones come out, in ones, twos and groups, no bags so this time they are free and run. Some of them go round and up the stairs into my neighbour's place. There they climb, kick a ball, hang upside down on the bars, climb on the ship and most importantly dig in the sand. I am always jealous that my neighbour has this. The small ones are like bees around a honey pot towards the sand. No toys they dig in the thick coarse brown sand with their hands. They scoop and drop and pat and hit to create mounds. In groups, in pairs, they perch on the wooden ledge around the side and lean on the metal fence, often more than 20 of the small ones are there. My neighbour is very proud of this and I admit that I am jealous.

However, I have lots of fun of my own. Some days and today is one, they kick a ball, groups of small ones run after the ball. Sometimes they fall over, hitting my ground, sometimes there are tears and very occasionally a drop of blood falls onto me. The ball dominates the play but only involves about 15 of the small ones. Perhaps they are the 15 noisiest. Certainly, on days where there is no football the play seems calmer. The ball has been kicked too hard it soars into the sky and over the fence. The small ones run to the fence and hold the green metal bars. They peer down to the path and road below. "There!" "It's stuck by the wheel." The big one has come. She too looks down, spots the ball and then calls to a passer-by. The ball appears, over my fence and bouncing onto the grass. "Thank you!" "Amaseganalow!" The small ones carry on running, shouting, chasing.

Apart from the footballers, there are a group that chase. They form another large group of about 15 small ones who chase each other around over my grass, jumping the tricky trail, ducking under the bars and running under the slide. Sometimes they hide. On the opposite side to my fence and right next to the steep stone stairs is a house. It has four wooden sides, one with a large window and another with a large door. No benches so the small ones sit on the floor, huddled in the corner two or three small ones sit and share secrets. The stories I could tell you! Outside and leaning in through the window are other small ones. Behind the house. In the less than a metre gap between the house and the stone wall other small ones hide or run through. Out of sight of the big ones, until the big one comes to check.

There is an outdoor sink here, a white large porcelain unit that is as solid and old as I am. The small and big ones use it to wash their hands and utensils. They don't drink from it as this water is not safe. Next to the sink is a world map and some small ones are standing and pointing to countries around the world. They are countries where the water is safe to drink. "The USA my uncle lives there!" "Duabi, my cousin went there for a holiday!" "China, my Dad is there for business." These are children of the world.

On and around the slide are about 6 small ones they go up the metal stairs and onto the platform that has metal slides on the opposite sides. They race down, oblivious of the heat from the metal, down the slide, up the stairs. One small one stays on the platform at the top. Watching. Under the platform sit three small ones, they have a sheet of stickers and are sharing them out between themselves and other small ones. Near them stands a bigger small one wearing a red baseball cap. There are 4 of them here today. They talk to each other but mostly to the very small ones. One is playing football. Another holds the hand of a small one who is hobbling. They go to the big one and then the big one walks the small one away.

The other big one is now in the middle of the grass holding the ball. The small ones are gathered round. I can sense the anger of one small one. His feet seem to sink into my ground as he stamps his foot. There is talking. He stomps away, up the concrete steps and sits on one of the wooden benches at the top by the building. The big one gives the ball back to the small ones and the game continues.

On the tricky trail small ones balance and hang on the ropes, twisting and swinging back and forth. My regulars get up and move across me. Stopping to speak to small ones. Out and away. Just before the clanging metal bell resounds through the air and the chaotic fun ends. It is the main event of my day. The noise and bustle. The shouting and fun. I feel exhausted but exhilarated as my equipment creaks from use. The lines have moved into the building.

Now the small ones have gone two magpie crows come down and hop around searching for bits that the big ones in white coats have missed. They fly off suddenly as they hear before I do a group of more than 20 small ones come running down the stairs followed by one big one walking slowly. The big one plonks down onto one of my benches and leans against the metal pole. She watches as the small ones run and play. Occasionally they go to speak to her. I know that today is the day before my two days of rest. There is a pattern of 5 days and then 2 days of rest which makes the year flow until the long, wet period of months when I see practically no one. During those times I get such irregular visits that I am delighted when small ones come and play. Usually over the rest days I get one or two quick visits but that is it.

The big one gets up and says something, the small ones move off slowly up the concrete steps and into the building. I see the guard coming with the bundle of flags in his hand. The tangled string hangs down and it seems like a bundle of rags. Expertly, he finds the end and ties it around one of the green metal bars that make up my fence. The same one every day. He walks along the top of the steps and towards the slope. He winds the string round the pole and walks down, behind the benches, wraps the string around another pole and to the end. The flags are barely moving. There is no wind today. The guard walks slowly along my path and up the slope. He walks across the top of the steps and stands by the fence. He watches as the big ones come along the path and past the building.

Some of these big ones return after a few minutes carrying bags and accompanied by really small ones. These small ones are too small to reach my bars but love climbing up the stairs and going down the slide, trying to reach for the next rope on my tricky trail and clambering on the logs on my climbing frame. The big ones sit on the benches and watch the small ones. Some big ones stand and talk to others. There is a sense of expectation as they are all waiting.

There is no marker of when it will start but there is a gradual increase in big ones. The path is crowded and they stand in groups outside the building. Some big ones go into the building. The big ones do not pay me any attention but the small ones that sometimes come with them run onto my grass and climb on my equipment.

The cacophony increases as lots of bigger small ones come down the path, in noisy chatting gaggles they pass by the big ones. Sometimes stopping to greet someone. "Selam!" Kisses. "How is your mother?" "How is your father?" "Is my son coming?" Big ones and small ones carrying papers and

bags, those ones with cardboard creations and others with huge posters down my path and away. Today they will leave faster than other days. Tomorrow is a rest day for me.

The maintenance worker comes through the crowd. Pushing against the flow of people he walks to the end and pulls at the long black hose. He gives me the drink I have been longing for and the water forms muddy puddles on my grass.

It is getting quieter. The water still flows, the hose has been dropped and left, water gushing. Today has not been one of those unusual days when the small ones, all wearing strange clothes, parade around my edges. It has not been one of the exceptional days when all day the small ones are outside doing activities in groups set up on and around my equipment. It has not been a day when in the middle of the afternoon one or two big ones and a group of small ones come to play ball games. Today has been a day much like any other.

The big ones leave early today, some carrying bags of books. There is a quickening to their step. They do not look at me as their thoughts are of leaving. As the water flows small insects begin to come out of my grass and buzz in the sky above me. Soon the sky is full of insects and red kites who swoop down for a feast. It is a banquet and, as the sun slowly sinks in the African sky and the blue fades to pink and purple, I realize that there is no place on earth that is quite like this and that no one sees and hears what I do. I realise that I am special and that though I may change, maybe even get that sandpit of my neighbours that I am so jealous of, I will always be unique and have an insight into the lives of the small ones that no one else has.

Appendix C: Photo Montage Explanation



It is difficult to explain or capture 'the feel' of a particular place but in order to try and capture some of the meaning behind the playground at Mana Barumsa as a place I have created a photo montage of images. These images have been taken across the nearly five years that I have now worked at Mana Barumsa and I have selected them as they represent something to me about the research context.

At the top of the page, the images are of myself and two other Year One teachers in the playground. These images were taken for World Book Day and show us all reading in the playground – each on a different piece of equipment. These photos were taken at the time before I had decided to focus on the playground however the images indicate that the playground was a place of importance and relevance for the children and us as Year One teachers. They are also representative of the wider relationships that I have at Mana Barumsa – in particular here with members of staff (who I have permission from to use their photo as part of my thesis – photos originally taken for World Book Day.)

In the centre and the background to the whole montage is the Ethiopian flag which flies from the flagpole near the school entrance. The blue sky and greenery in the background highlight some of the 'feel' or essence of the place – the landscape features that I associate with Ethiopia. The photographs to the left of the bars and to the right of the trail are both photographs of some of the playground equipment but are taken of birds in the playground when it is empty – after school. The photographs of birds in the playground are meaningful to me as an indication of more-than-human life of the playground but also remind me of wider family as I took photos to send to my father of the birds I saw. The thick black mats under the equipment – that are old and curled up – are part of the feel of the playground – it is used, loved.

There is a small photo of me wearing the gold sequined baseball cap that I wore when doing the research in the playground – this indicates the research and my other and different interaction with the playground. The close-up of the pole is a photograph that straddles my role – taken to illustrate the missing part – the black plastic circle – a photo so that the maintenance staff could identify the problem – taken in my role as Deputy Head – it also illustrates the object being centre and my move away from an anthropocentric approach – you have to look closely to see the pink foot and hand in this photo.

To the right, the photo shows the feet of some children who are seating on the equipment and was taken as part of my attempt to take a photo that encapsulated my research. The feet belong to Year Four boys who I was teaching at the time but are symbolic of the human – object interaction and relationships in and with the playground and the equipment.

To the left, there is a photo of the playground as the sun is setting. This for me is an indication of the life of the playground – that it is there not only in the busy school day but is a constant as a place. The shadow of

the trees and the colour of the sky are an indication that we are in Africa. The photos that have the wooden playhouses with straw roofs – Tukuls – are an indication that we are in Ethiopia. The sandpit can be seen in one of the photos – this part of the research was very important for me - it was the impetus for the change in my approach and caused me to reflect on the agency of things in the playground and develop a less anthropocentric approach. The sandpit play was very distinct as it included many different types of play (see Chapter 7 for more detailed discussion.)

The photo near the bottom of the page shows the green rope of the tricky trail being used as a clothesline to dry the uniforms of the school guards – guards are common in all Ethiopian schools. For me this photo encapsulates the entangled nature of the playground and its relationship with the wider school community – not only the children who play there but other staff and things. There are also memories connected to this photo around my own children – all of whom attended Mana Barumsa during the time of the research.

The photos at the bottom of the montage show the two different playgrounds at the school that are used by the Year One children. They situate the playgrounds within the remainder of the school buildings and are a reminder of the interconnectedness of the school – the playgrounds are not isolated but part of the school campus. There is an entwined relationship – you have to pass or cross the playground to move between parts of the school.

In order to do this, you will see sections of my writing from 2020 and 2021 which are an earlier draft of the introduction chapter where I tried to provide the setting and give some of my own background experience – these are indented and in a smaller font. These pieces of writing came to trouble me as they seemed to embody some of the stereotypes that I was hoping to avoid and so the aim of this writing was to take the chapter and respond to what I had initially written. My response to each section is below each excerpt forming a dialogue. The aim is that this reads as a conversation between two different versions of myself. I begin my writing by introducing the history of how I came to be in Ethiopia. There were key events that shaped my initial interest in Africa and a desire to visit:

Location – Africa

My own love affair with Africa started many years ago when, at the age of 11, I won the Woodwork prize at school and could choose a book. I chose a book about African wildlife. At the time I did not believe that my choice held any deep significance for me but the flame was lit. I first came to live in Africa as a very naive twenty something year old, fresh out of university. I had a tumultuous nine months – evacuated from the then Zaire (now DRC) because of the civil war, relaxing on the beach in Kenya and then experiencing a terrifying armed robbery in Uganda but I was hooked. Most recently this is my fifth school year living and working here. Let me tell you about my chosen home - Africa.

It is hard to find a more romanticised view of Africa – ‘the flame was lit’ – think about your first night in Africa and the power cut at the hostel – you scrabbling around for the candle and matchbox in the pitch black. Your views uphold unhelpful stereotypes – wild animals as your choice of book – Africa as an uncultivated, uncivilised whole – rather than a myriad of different countries and cultures - a place where elephants and lions wander freely. Yet Addis has sky scrapers as tall as any other city – banks, businesses.... You mention that you came as a ‘naïve twenty something year old’ and all the dangers and terrors that you faced but you were cushioned from the reality of life – others were not as fortunate as you in being able to escape. It was not those experiences but the warmth, generosity and sense of things being ‘real’ – life seeming more alive that hooked you in – life in all its horror but also all its amazing glory. Finally, you sound like a benevolent uncle – you have chosen a child to bequeath something to – ‘your chosen home’. How many people wish they had the power and opportunity you do to make a choice? – Do you believe in equality? – Think of those people who never make it across the Mediterranean and the families mourning them.

Given the size of the continent, all 36.2 million square kilometres of it and second only to Asia, I feel hesitant about making statements that are most likely to be sweeping generalizations that do not enable the individual differences to be seen. No two of the 54 countries or 9 territories are the same. Of course, I can say as a white European woman that there are certain things that seem to me to be more African than others. The sheer number of people, especially young people is always striking to others from a similar background to me and is echoed in the statistics – Africa is the second also in population amongst continents and has 41% of the population under the age of 15. ¹

¹ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/africa-population>

You claim not to want to make ‘sweeping generalizations’ but seem to then go on and make them. There is a juxtaposition in your writing - you say that there are ‘individual differences’ but do not let us see them.

In the neighbourhood of the school mansions stand next to shacks – where is this in your description? You introduce the dualism of them and us – things that are ‘more African’ but what gives you the expertise? On what authority can you make such remarks? How do you even know what it means to be ‘African’ – is there even such a thing?

The stereotypical warm weather that people who have not visited may associate with Africa seems like a dream on the cold nights in the rainy season - when you go to bed under a thick quilt and with a hot warm bottle as there is no central heating in the houses. That said, the strong African sun is undisputed – explained by the equator dividing the continent and ensuring month upon month of clear deep blue skies.

You challenge the stereotypes that many people in the UK have about Africa being warm. However, you then return to the stereotype of ‘deep blue skies’ that seems far away from the grey reality of the long rainy season that you avoid every year by returning to the UK for the summer.

Lastly, there is the poverty that is a daily fact of life for so many. Once again, the statistics back up this – in 2020, 19 of the 20 poorest countries in the world are in Africa². I am currently living and working in Ethiopia. A country known best in the *Minority World* as a country of famine and drought but there is much more to it than that. I arrived here five years ago to take up a post as a Year One teacher in an international school. I have lived in several African countries but the one to capture my heart is Ethiopia.

² <https://ugwire.com/poorest-countries-africa/>

You are beginning to use some facts about Africa when you begin to discuss the poverty but how much are you in an expat bubble that protects you from the everyday poverty that millions experience? You again mention that there is ‘much more to it than that’ but I linger as I read on the famine and drought that conjures in my mind Bob Geldof and “Do they Know it’s Christmas?” The lyrics of that song are shocking in their stereotypes. This was an opportunity to counter that with some of your own experiences and you did not do it.

In recent history, Ethiopia has come from the Solomonist dynasty of Haile Selassie, followed by a communist era, when it was ruled by ‘The Derg’ to the establishment in 1994 of a federal constitution. Today the country is led by Nobel peace prize winner President Abi Ahmed but peace is still illusive. As I write this rocket shells have been fired at several airports in the north of the country and the UN is calling for negotiations between the government and TPLF.

Still as I revisit these lines the conflict rages in the north of Ethiopia. It is largely unreported by the “Western Media” who currently are too busy with Ukraine. The contrast in how the *Minority World* treats the majority seems very obvious to me at times like this. The school had a week’s holiday in November 2021 because of the civil war but otherwise has remained open whilst embassy, NGO and UN workers and their families – the international children at our school – were evacuated to safety and not allowed to return. There are bigger issues of power dynamics here and questions of sovereignty – however, it’s always best to avoid politics.....

The country has nine ethnically based regional states and two city states. Within this huge country there are more than 80 different languages spoken and a range of religions followed. Most prominent are the Orthodox Christians, whose fasting days on Wednesdays and Fridays each week, plus at numerous other times, dictates the food served in restaurants, and Muslims. Within Addis Ababa you can hear the call to prayer for both of these groups.

It's hard for people to imagine the size of the country and the wide range of languages and cultures in Ethiopia so here you begin to highlight this. Thinking about the research the fact that there are children from these different backgrounds and religions represented may be worth mentioning.

Overall, in all this writing you have presented an oversimplified and often slightly patronizing description of the country you claim to call home. I would call you to dwell on the messy entangled nature of the research relationship, recognise that it's okay to feel confused and drop the mantle of the expert in exchange for that of open observer. Reflecting on how entangled and messy my own relationship is with the location and identifying some of my own baggage, stereotypical ideas and assumptions has enabled me to begin an internal dialogue between these two selves and the views they hold. I have not jumped from one to another – they are not binary opposites but rather I recognise a blurring where I am meandering between.

Making and staying friends

Catherine Hughes



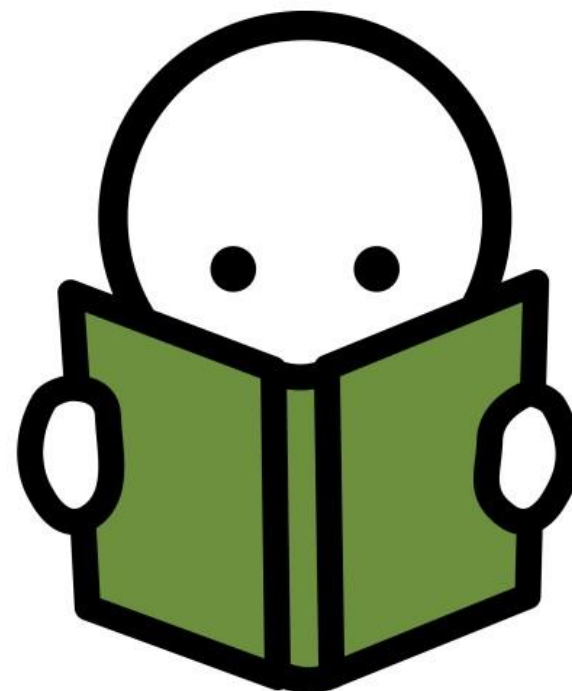
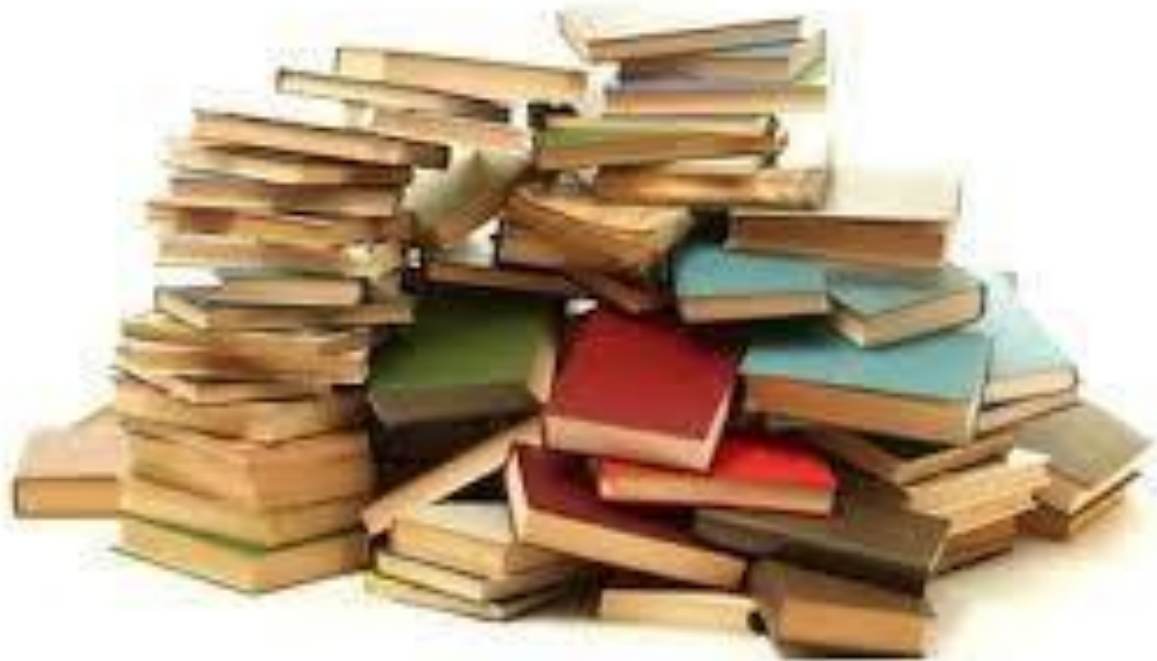
I like finding out new things and trying to be the best teacher that I can be.



So I decided to go back to university!



I have spent 3 years doing lots of reading!



And now I am ready to do something!



I am going to try to discover the way year 1 children make and stay friends.



To do this I am going to spend lots of time watching year 1 play together at break and lunchtimes.



I will come into some lessons to see what Year 1 are doing!



I will write some notes and draw pictures to help me understand what is going on.



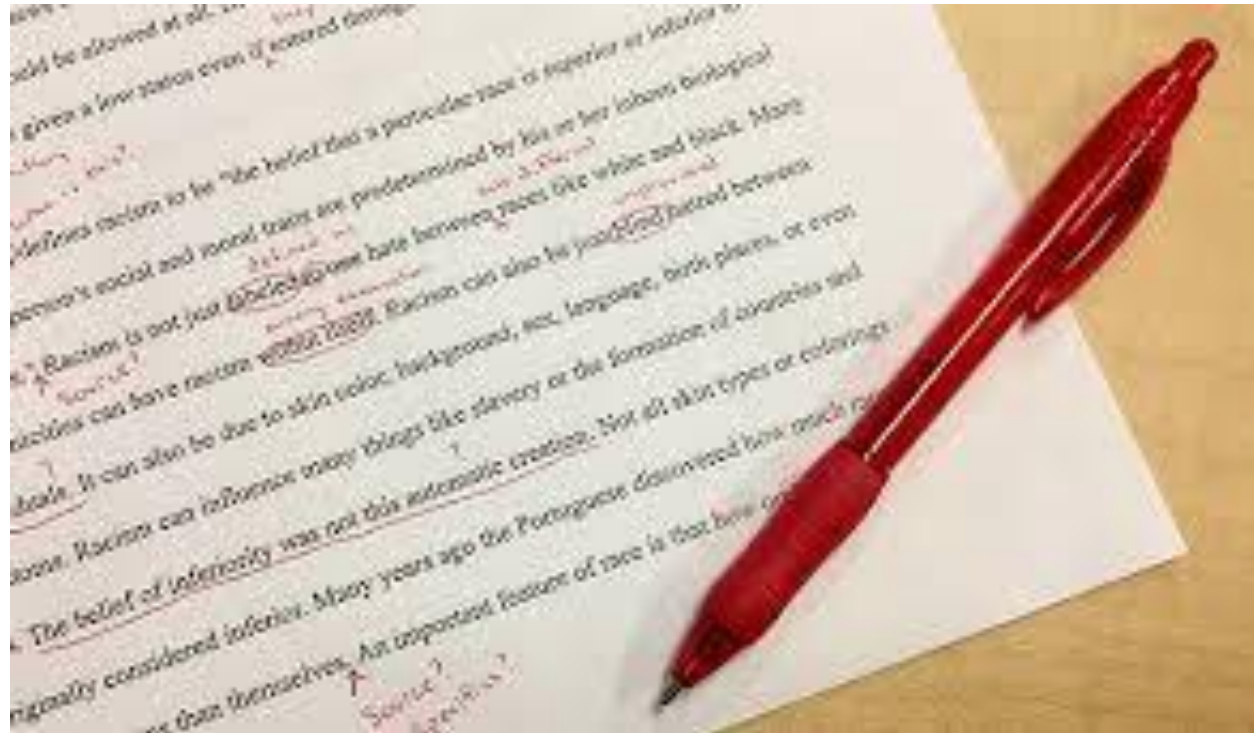
Then I will write them up on a computer.



Think about it a lot!



Edit my writing again and again.



And then email it to my supervisors in Manchester.



Kate



Sue

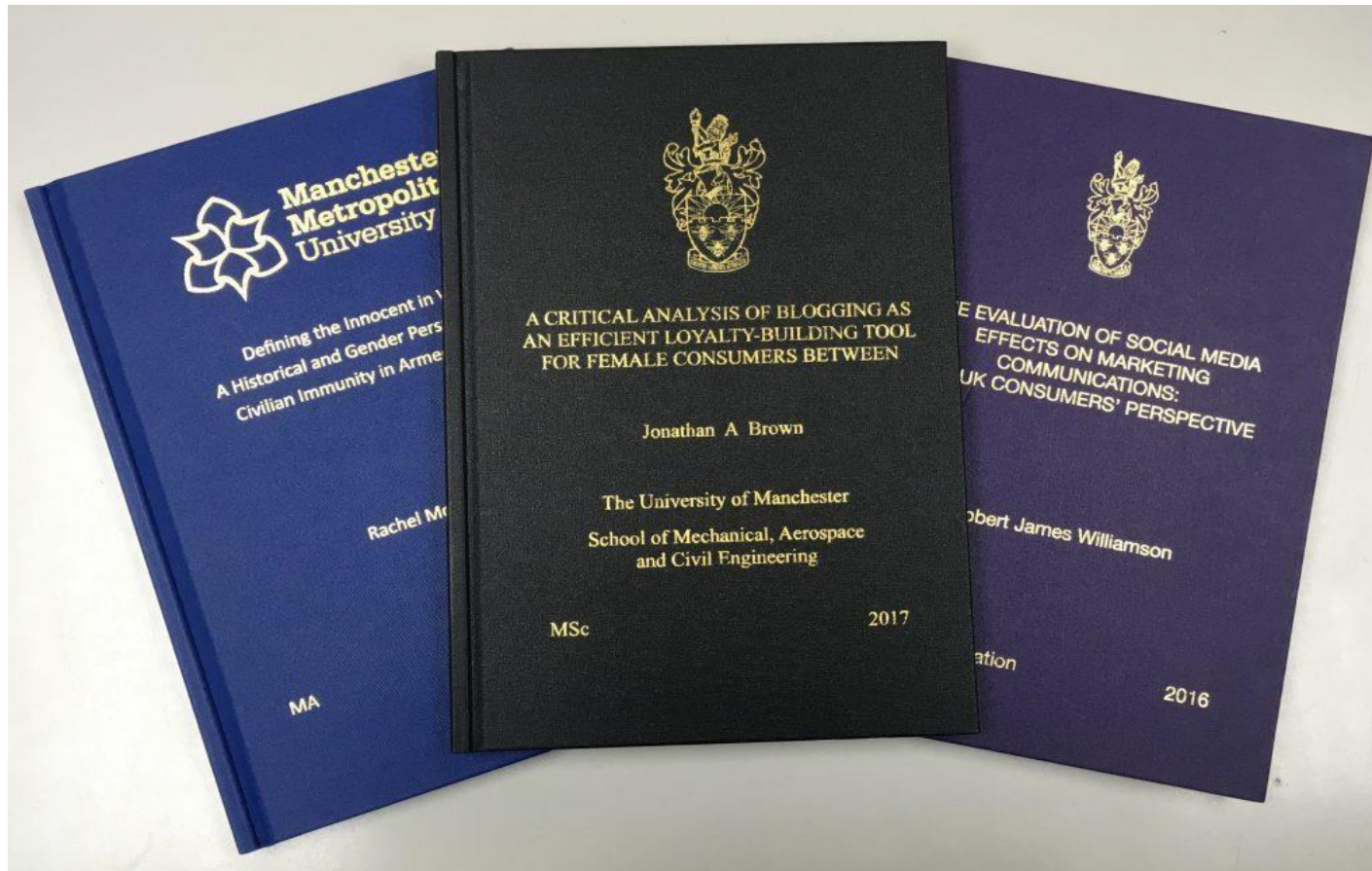
I will write up my ideas and try to get them put into a journal for other teachers to read.



I will go to conferences to tell other people about my ideas.



Finally, after 2 or 3 years I will make a book from my ideas and hand it in - this will be my thesis.



Then I will have to answer questions about my ideas in a ‘viva’ with people who work at a university.





If all goes well, I will
graduate as a Doctor of
Education in 2022!



So, I am asking for your help.

I would like you to share your ideas with me about making and staying friends.



I will give you an Information Sheet - telling you all about this research.

I will give you a form to tick and sign.

All children and teachers will have a pretend name for the research.

You can say no to taking part. You can change your mind and will not have to explain why.



TOP BABY NAMES OF 2015

- | <i>girl</i> | <i>boy</i> |
|-------------|------------|
| 1. SOPHIA | 1. JACKSON |
| 2. EMMA | 2. AIDEN |
| 3. OLIVIA | 3. LIAM |
| 4. AVA | 4. LUCAS |
| 5. MIA | 5. NOAH |
| 6. ISABELLA | 6. MASON |
| 7. ZOE | 7. ETHAN |
| 8. LILY | 8. CADEN |
| 9. EMILY | 9. LOGAN |
| 10. MADISON | 10. JACOB |



Thank you for listening!

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Any questions??

Ms. Catherine



Making and Staying Friends

I am currently in my 4th Year of my Doctor of Education course at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in the UK. I am now at the data collection stage of my studies. The purpose of this study is to find out about how Year 1 children make and stay friends. Data will be collected through observations of children's interactions at break and lunchtimes, some lesson observations and discussions. Notes and diagrams will be made in a confidential research journal. The focus is on children's friendships. Your teaching is NOT being studied. Individual children and members of staff will not be identified in the research as the research is about the process of friendship and NOT individuals.



This research will provide the school with suggestions for ways of helping children in the process of making new friends and with the transition to year 1. All Year 1 children are invited to take part in the first part of the research and all staff teaching Year 1 are also invited to participate. **Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and should not be considered as part of your role at the school.** Please contact me in person at school or via email if you have any questions or comments.

Please Circle Yes or No.

- I agree that Catherine may observe me at some break and lunchtimes and make notes. Yes/No
- I agree that Catherine may observe me in some lessons and make notes. Yes/No
- I understand that I will be anonymous in all research published. Yes/No
- I agree that all observation notes and diagrams can be stored and taken to the UK. Yes/No
- I agree that all observation notes and diagrams can be shared with staff at MMU. Yes/No
- I agree that research based on the observations can be published in journals and books at any future date. Yes/No
- I agree to participate in informal discussions about the research and I understand that what I say may be recorded, stored, taken to the UK and used in research in the future. Yes/No
- I agree that research based on the notes from these discussions can be published in journals and books at any future date. Yes/No

Even after you sign the consent form, you are free to withdraw and choose not to take part in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Name: _____	Date: _____	Signed: _____
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Name of researcher: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

Catherine Hughes _____

This Project has been approved by
Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.



Making and Staying Friends

I am trying to find out how Year 1 children make new friends and stay friends. There are lots of new children in Year 1. All year 1 children can join in. I need your help.



Please ✓ or X

At break and lunchtimes Ms Catherine may watch me play. _____

Ms Catherine may come to some of my lessons to see what I am doing. _____

Ms Catherine may draw or write things in her notebook about me. _____

Ms Catherine must not tell anyone my real name. _____

Ms Catherine may keep her notebook and take it to the University in Manchester (UK) to show to other people. _____

Ms Catherine may write about the things she has seen at school. _____

Ms Catherine can put her writing in a book or magazine so other people can read it. _____

I agree to taking part in the Making and Staying Friends Project.

Name _____ Date _____ Signed _____

If you do not want to be watched or be written about then just tell Ms Catherine – you do not need to say why - it is ok to say no!

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Catherine Hughes _____

This Project has been approved by Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.

Making and Staying Friends

I am currently in my 4th Year of my Doctor of Education course at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in the UK. I am now at the data collection stage of my studies. All children in Year 1 are being invited to take part in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to find out about how Year 1 children make and stay friends. Data will be collected through observations of children's interactions at break and lunchtimes. Notes and diagrams will be made in a confidential research journal.

Individual children will not be identified in the research as the research is about the process of friendship and NOT individuals.

This research will help us to help children in the future when they are making new friends and with the transition into Year 1. Please contact me in person at school or via email if you have any questions or comments.



Please Circle Yes or No.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| I give my permission for my child to be observed at some break and lunchtimes. | Yes/No |
| I give my permission for my child to be observed in some lessons. | Yes/No |
| I understand that my child will be anonymous in all research published. | Yes/No |
| I agree that all observation notes and diagrams can be stored and taken to the UK. | Yes/No |
| I agree that all observation notes and diagrams can be shared with staff at MMU. | Yes/No |
| I agree that research based on the observations can be published in journals and books at any future date. | Yes/No |

Even after you sign the consent form, you or your child are free to withdraw and choose not to take part in the study at any time without giving a reason.

I agree to my child _____ taking part in the above project.

Name: _____	Date: _____	Signed: _____
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Name of researcher:	Date:	Signature:
<u>Catherine Hughes</u>	_____	_____

This Project has been approved by
Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.

Making and Staying Friends



Participant Information Sheet :

Exploring the nature of friendship between year 1 children in a majority world international school.

1. Invitation to research

I would like to invite you to take part in some research to help me to better understand about how Year One children make and stay friends.

2. Why have I been invited?

All Year One children and teachers are invited to take part in the first part of the research. In the second part, I will ask a small group of children to help me and for all the Year One Student Council Reps to help me.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw, or say no, at any time, without giving a reason.

4. What will I be asked to do?

In the first part of the research I will be observing all the Year One children during playtime. You do not need to do anything. I may come into your classroom and see what you are doing. I will ask the teachers to talk to me about their ideas about friendships in Year One and how we can help children. You can help me by drawing or writing about making and keeping friends in my book. You can talk to me and share your ideas.

After the holidays, in the second part of the research I will ask some children to be part of a group that makes something for us to sell at the summer fair. While we are making things I will video-record our discussion. I will ask the Year One student council representatives to help me make a booklet to help new children to the school. While we are designing the booklet I will video-record our discussion.

5. Are there any risks if I participate?

There are no risks to you participating. All children and teachers in the study will be given a pretend name so that other people do not know who they are.



6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

If you take part in the research you are able to draw or write in the research notebook that is shared with the university. You will not be given anything for taking part in the research.

7. What will happen to the samples that I give?

No samples will be collected.

8. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, we will collect from you personally-identifiable information.

The Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

We collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest we rely upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When we collect special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use, and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose. All children and teachers in the research will be given pseudonyms. All participants have the right to see observation and interview notes before they are used.

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the [University's Data Protection Pages](#).



What will happen to the results of the research study?

Remember, people will not know which person is you in the study as you will have a pretend name. The results from this research will be shared with the teachers at the school to help the children who come into Year One with making and keeping friends. The research will also be written up and published as a thesis. It will be published in journals and discussed at conferences in different countries.

Who has reviewed this research project?

My supervisors are Kate Pahl and Sue Bermingham. This research has also been checked by Sam Sellar and others who work at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

If you want to ask any questions please come and speak to me or email me:

catherine.a.hughes@stu.mmu.ac.uk

You can also contact my main supervisor:

Dr Kate Pahl

k.pahl@mmu.ac.uk

For the faculty ethics officer, please contact:

Chair of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee, Professor Ricardo Nemirovsky,

r.nemirovsky@mmu.ac.uk, or +44 (0)161 247 2023,

Manchester Metropolitan University,
Brooks Building, 53 Bonsall Street, Manchester M15 6GX.

If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the legal@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see:

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Ms Catherine



Making and Staying Friends



I am currently in my 4th Year of my Doctor of Education course at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in the UK. I am now at the data collection stage of my studies. The purpose of this study is to find out about how Year 1 children make and stay friends. Data will be collected through observations of children's interactions at break and lunchtimes, some lesson observations and discussions. Notes and diagrams will be made in a confidential research journal. The focus is on children's friendships. Your teaching is NOT being studied. Individual children and members of staff will not be identified in the research as the research is about the process of friendship and NOT individuals.

This research will provide the school with suggestions for ways of helping children in the process of making new friends and with the transition to year 1. All Year 1 children are invited to take part in the first part of the research and all staff teaching Year 1 are also invited to participate. **Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and should not be considered as part of your role at the school.** Please contact me in person at school or via email if you have any questions or comments.

Please Circle Yes or No.

I understand that I will be anonymous in all research published.

Yes/No

I agree to participate in informal discussions about the research using Skype for Business

Yes/No

I understand that what I say may be recorded, stored, taken to the UK and used in research in the future.

Yes/No

I agree that research based on the notes from these discussions can be published in journals and books at any future date.

Yes/No

Even after you sign the consent form, you are free to withdraw and choose not to take part in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Name: _____	Date: _____	Signed: _____
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Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Catherine Hughes _____

This Project has been approved by
Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.



Making and Staying Friends Email Consent



Thank you for taking part in the interview on about making and staying friends. As mentioned, I will send you a copy of the transcript of your interview. I would value any further comments or amendments that you would like to make – based on the transcript of the interview.

In order to use this as part of my study, I need you to consent to your emails being used as part of my research.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and should not be considered as part of your role at the school. Please contact me in person at school or via email if you have any questions or comments.

Please Circle Yes or No.

I understand that I will be anonymous in all research published. Yes/No

I agree to participate in informal discussions about the research using email. Yes/No

I understand that what I write in an email may be copied, stored, taken to the UK and used in research in the future. Yes/No

I agree that research based on the notes from these discussions can be published in journals and books at any future date. Yes/No

Even after you sign the consent form, you are free to withdraw and choose not to take part in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Name: _____	Date: _____	Signed: _____
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Name of researcher:	Date:	Signature:
<u>Catherine Hughes</u>	<u>27th July 2020</u>	<u>C.A.Hughes</u>

This Project has been approved by
Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.

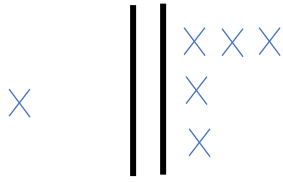


All of the observations took place between the 17th December 2019 and 3rd March 2020. The time was limited due to the start of the Covid pandemic which switched the school to online learning.

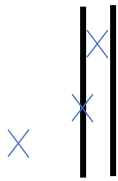
- The first observation took place on 17th December in the KS1 playground. The observation focused on the reactions to me wearing 'My Research Hat' – the shiny baseball cap – this involves both children and staff. My role as Acting Head was also relevant here as I struggled with the conflict in my roles – researcher and head.
- The next day, 18th December, the observation focused on identifying the different activities that children took part in. This observation was in the EYFS playground and this was the first time I observed in this location.
- On January 13th we had returned to school and the observation focused on the bars in the EYFS playground. I used diagrams with children marked with a X to show the movement around this piece of equipment.
- On January 22nd the observation focused on the sandpit in the EYFS playground. I used diagrams at 2-minute intervals to record movement in and around the sandpit.
- On February 3rd the observation focused children who I termed 'loners' that is that the majority of the time observed they appeared to be playing alone. The observation focused on the use of the tricky trail and children's movements around this piece of equipment in the EYFS playground.
- On February 26th the observation focused on activities that the children were doing in the KS1 playground that appeared dangerous and where once again I struggled with my conflicted roles of Acting Head and researcher.
- On March 3rd I did the last observation. This was in the KS1 playground and the observation focused on children that no one seems to want to play with.

Appendix M: Sketches of the Bars – 17th January 2020

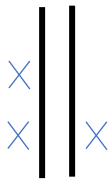
Sketch One – 12.10 pm



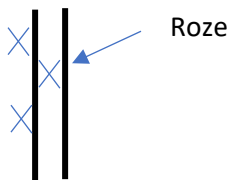
Sketch Two – 12.20 pm



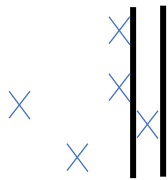
Sketch Three – 12.25 pm



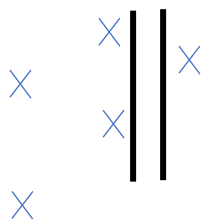
Sketch Four – 12.30 pm



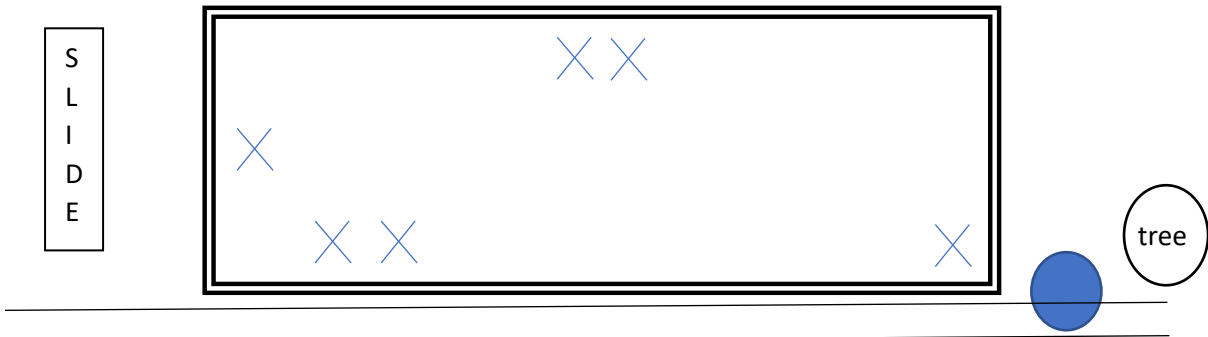
Sketch Five – 12.35 pm



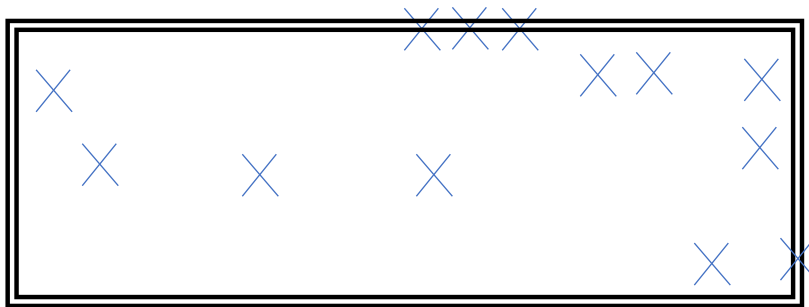
Sketch Six – 12.40 pm



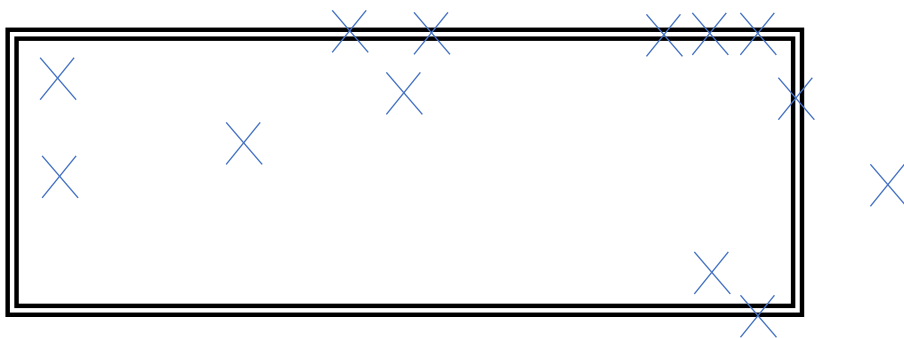
Sketch One – 12.15 pm – My position is shown by the circle. Total of children = 6.



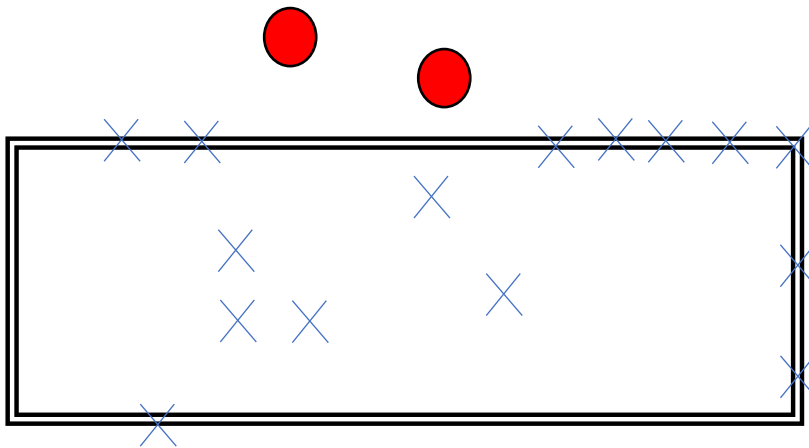
Sketch Two – 12.18 pm Total of children = 13.



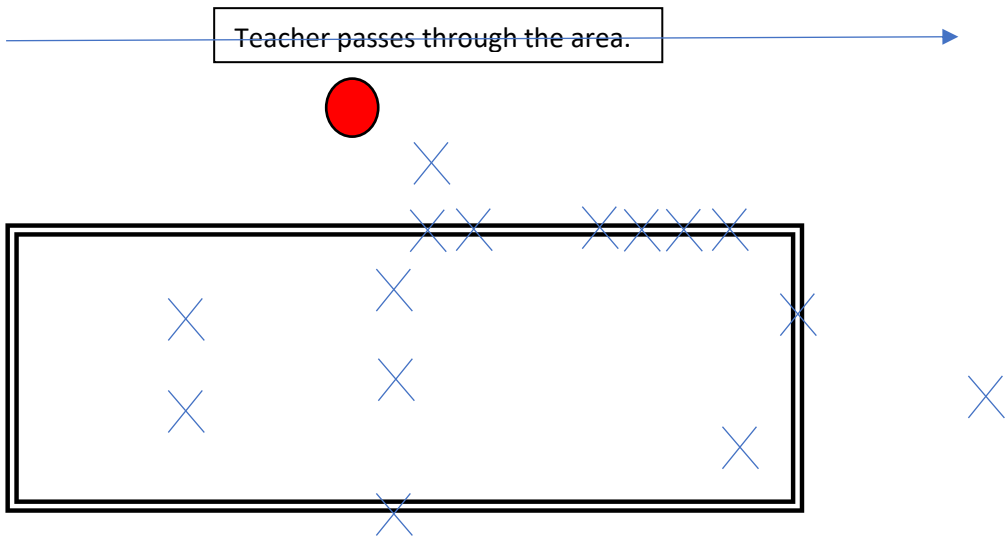
Sketch Three – 12.20 pm Total of children = 13.



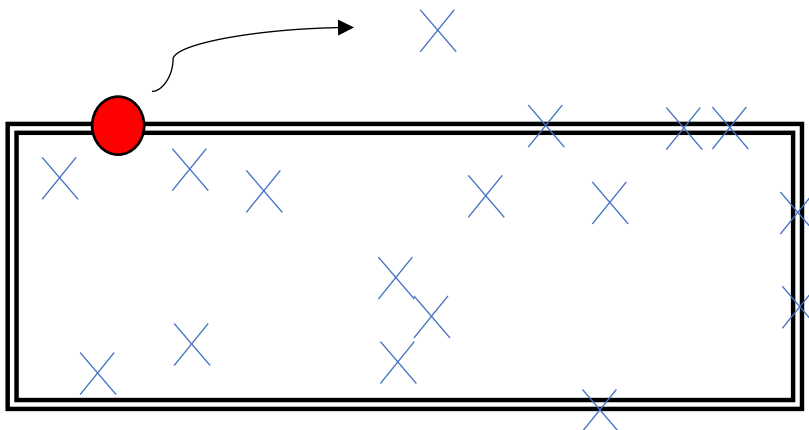
Sketch Four – 12.21 pm Total of children = 15. The red circles are the year 5 playleaders.



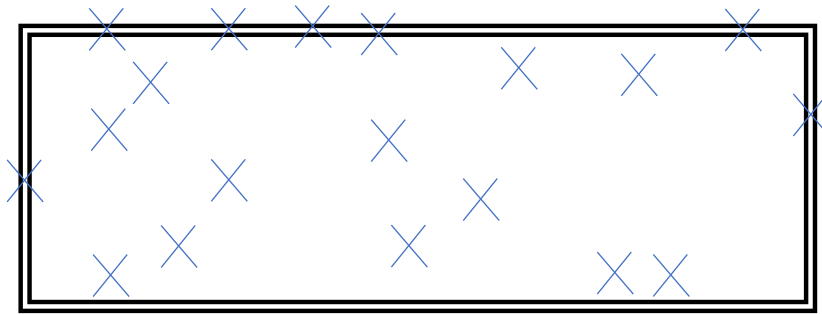
Sketch Five – 12.23 pm Total of children = 15.



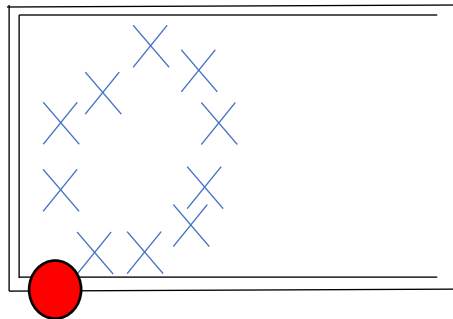
Sketch Six – 12.25 pm Total of children = 17.



Sketch Seven – 12.27 pm Total of children = 19.



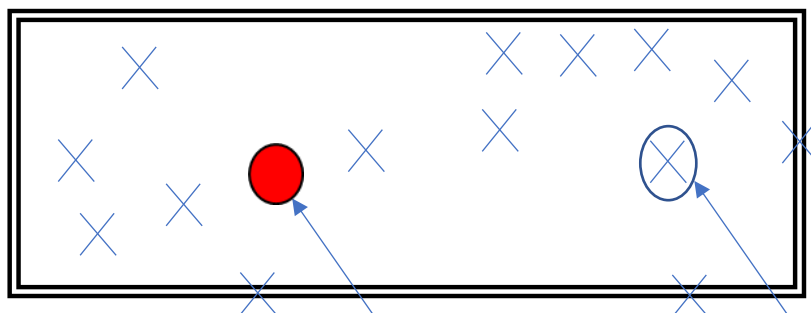
Sketch Eight – 12.29pm – 10 children join in and pour sand at the same time – they call “Yeah!” as they do it.



I did not make any comments about what was going on. However, one of the teachers, Lucy, came past, she spoke to the group and then said to me “They keep getting it into people’s eyes.”

The group then became more organised. One of them announced “This is a competition! Whoever has the biggest mountain will win!” One of the playleaders then stepped in and shouted “Stop! Stop!” She then tried to create a competition between girls and boys.

Sketch Nine – 12.29 pm Total of children = 14.

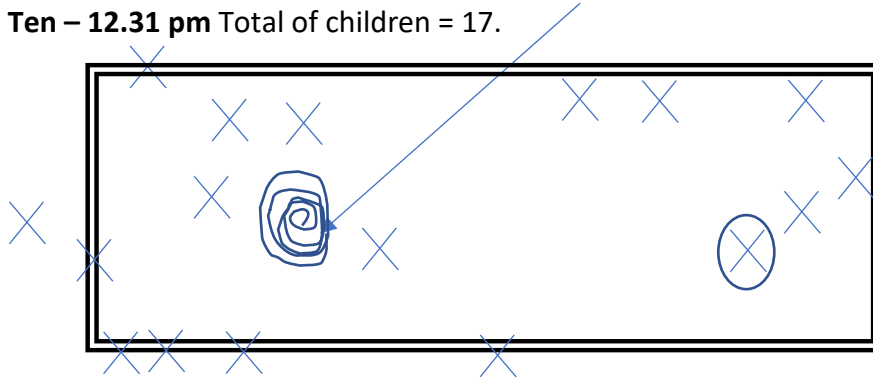


Pile of sand

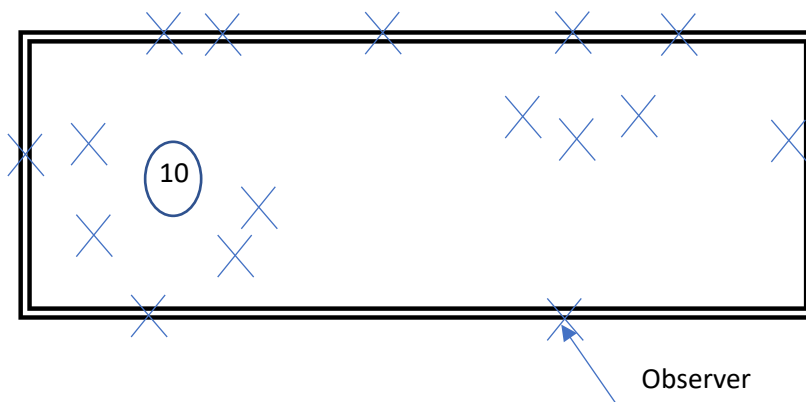
“Stop! Stop!”

Stamps on the girls pile – the girls look to see what I will do. I don’t react.

Sketch Ten – 12.31 pm Total of children = 17.

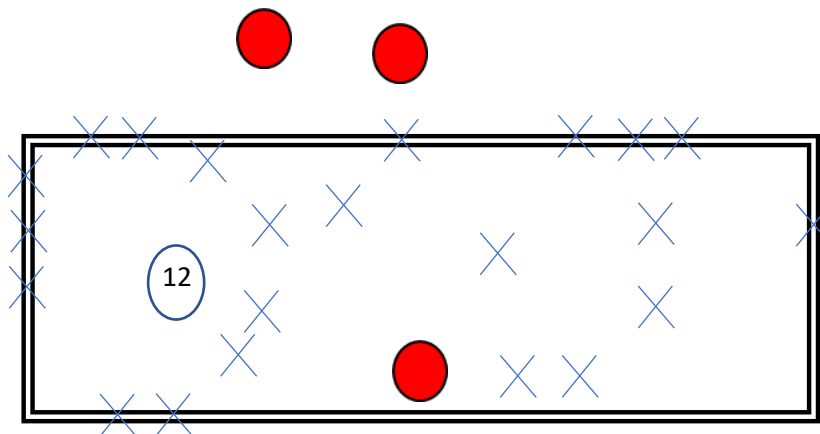


Sketch Eleven – 12.33 pm Total of children = 16 - 21.



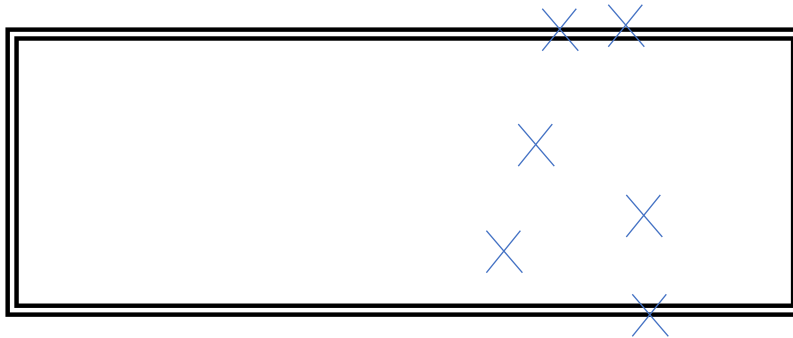
At this point, the year 5 playheader shouted "Start!" and 10 boys started shovelling the sand with their hands to create a pile. One boy broke away from the group and approached the girls. He asked "Can I play?" One of the girls responded with "You're on that team!" and pointed towards the boys. One of the boys then shouted "The boys are winning!"

Sketch Twelve – 12.35 pm Total of children = 22 - 34.



As can be seen in the sketch, at this point the sand competition became very large and involved roughly one third of the year group. The year 5 playleaders then introduced the idea of being out. This may have been in response to the year one children starting to throw sand. One playleader said "You're out!" as other children used the playleader as referees or someone to appeal to "He's just destroying ours!"

Sketch Thirteen – 12.37 pm Total of children = 6.



At this point children could see that the bell was about to ring and so started to leave the sand pit. Although some children did go back in the sand, most children left the area quickly and by 12.39 the sand pit was completely empty. One boy, who was later reprimanded, ran back into the sand pit and then back out again. He was spotted by one of the year 5 playleaders who told the teacher. As I look at this final sketch I realize that the playtime started and ended with 6 children. I wonder if they are the same children? It was very difficult for me to follow who the children in the sandpit were. I wonder about asking the children to wear coloured bibs (such as worn for PE) so that I can follow them more easily but this seems as if it may intrude on the freedom of playtime. Perhaps I could ask the children who have opted in to chose to wear a bib if they wish.



This photo was taken at 12.43pm – after the sandpit emptied.

At this point I spotted a small green truck. I had not seen any of the children playing with this, although it was where a small group of girls was based for most of the playtime.

The children played in the sand without any equipment. I did not notice this until after the sandpit had emptied.

The edge of the tukul can be seen in this picture and the slide at the end of the sandpit. In the foreground is the tree that is shown in the first sketch.

Appendix O: Conversation with Julia about the Sandpit

I had a conversation with Julia on Friday 31st January about the research and in particular about the sand pit. I told her about the group playing last week and how I felt that a sand pit area was an important social device. Julia told me that she had a plan to construct a sand pit in an area of the other playground. She raised three issues. The first was that some staff had said that only having one sandpit made it something special. The implication being that if there was another sandpit it would not be used in the same way. The second issue was the quality of sand as the current sandpit is filled with builder's sand. I spoke about the fact that many schools are now using mud and that the most recent Hope Education catalogue I looked at was full of mud play equipment. (for example, p.139-140) The quality of sand was one reason why the school had previously had 4 small sandpits in the playground. Julia said that they were useless as they only fitted 3 children in and you couldn't sit down in them. Indeed, it did appear that the size of the sandpit allowed a different kind of play. We then looked around the playground and identified a possible site for a new sandpit. It is on a raised concrete platform, next to one of the playhouses. Julia commented that it would be easier to clean up this area and that she had previously bought dustpan and brushes so that the children could sweep up and put the sand back in the box when they had finished. I reflected to Julia that I was surprised that my research had led to me suggesting the purchase of equipment. However, the research coupled with my new leadership role puts me in a strong position to make improvements to the play facilities.

Appendix P: Photo Sheet with Pseudonyms



Appendix Q: Weekly Reflections / Research Diary

The following are the weekly reports which are the write up of my research diary with a few notes that were sent to my supervisors in order for them to follow my thinking and progress. They cover the period of time between Nov 2019 and March 2020 – the main data collection period which was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Week's Reflections : 10th Nov 2019

The biggest thing to happen this week is that I have received ethical approval to begin my data collection. I have emailed the Head of school about using the school photocopying facilities and having a meeting with parents. I plan to speak to Year 1 staff on Tuesday afternoon. At this point I will show the Powerpoint, that explains my research, and hand out the information sheets and consent sheets to staff. I then hope to have a parents' meeting on Thursday morning and speak to the 3 Year 1 classes on Thursday and Friday. I am conscious that I cannot start any observations until I have had 90% of responses so I need to be proactive in chasing forms!!

Several articles that I have read recently seem relevant in this point in the research. Firstly, as I prepare to start my research an article by Ross et al in *Children's Geographies. A visual ethnographic pilot study of school travel for families living with childhood disability* gives details about a pilot study and brings up a number of relevant points.

Firstly, Ross et al (2019) speak about the 'emotional labour' required of the researcher. As Deputy Head as well as researcher I have a strong vested interest in the 'success' of the research, in whatever form that may take. I feel perhaps a greater responsibility and attachment as I am not simply walking into a situation and walking out – this is a criticism made of many researchers. (REF?!) I can see that my connection with the students and my emotional investment in them as children in my care combined with my desire to complete the research to a high standard may be draining and bring significant pressures.

Ross et al (2019) also speak about the 'unknown' biases that the author/ researcher has because he is an able-bodied white male researching children with disabilities. In my research I must try to become aware of the biases that I possess as an educated - white – female – parent - Deputy Head. Each of these roles gives me a lens through which to see the world – when you go to the optician they may put more than one lens in the glasses holder to 'fix' your vision problems, each lens is there to tackle one particular part of your vision. So, the biases that I possess must each be acknowledged and addressed separately.

Finally, Ross et al (2019) also speak about the 'diligent, continuous, uncomfortable reflection' required as a researcher. It is crucial that I reflect on what I am doing and think deeply about the research process.

Honkanen et al (2018) in their research on well-being speak about how 'well-being' is a social-construct, that is 'elusive' (p.184) and has "typically been studied from the adult's point of view" (p.184). It seems that this is very similar to the position of friendship. They also make the point that the kind of information or data produced and by whom is an epistemological choice. My own research on friendship is also an epistemological choice and I need to get further clarity on my own methodological stand point.

The work of Prout on the new sociology of childhood is referenced in many of the articles that I am reading and this is something that we discussed in our meeting in the summer. I have started reading some of *A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, Promise & problems*. The use of the term 'muted groups' (p.87) for women and children (referenced to Hardman (1973) was something that caught my eye.

Hanna (2018) in her article *Crossing the border from 'migrant' to 'expert': exploring migrant learners perspectives on inclusion in a primary school in England* writes about empowering children to be experts and challenging the power dynamics in school and the traditional teacher-pupil dichotomy

(p.10). She refers to Lundy's on a rights-based approach that "upholds children's right to be involved in anything that effects their lives" p.5. Hanna (p.10) encourages us to view the child as an 'expert' and to respect the knowledge and expertise that children possess in their own situation.

"In this case, the child is the 'expert' on their own lives and has an insight into the experience of the 'new' migrant pupil that long-term settled adults may not have. Here, the teacher takes the back seat. This not only holds the potential to improve the experience of that particular child, but it means that such a child can help the teacher to help other children who join the school."

Hanna (2018, p10)

This is what I hope that my research into friendship will do – empower Year One children to help other Year One children in the future. In order for this to happen it will be essential that I listen and observe carefully the children and that they have the agency to be able to make suggestions to improve the experience of future students.

Hanna (2018) p. 5 mentions using the "four-stage approach of Bryman" and the data-analysis is an area that I definitely need to read up on more. Finally, Hanna discusses the 'hidden curriculum' that underpins all that happens in school and the 'spatial' and 'behavioural' rules that "must also not be underestimated". It is crucial that my reflections do not make assumptions but question the practise and everyday procedures and occurrences.

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This Week's Reflections : 17th Nov 2019

The main progress of this week has been in starting to collect the consent forms from the Year One teachers. On Tuesday I showed 5 members of staff the Powerpoint and went through the information sheet. I showed them where a copy of this could be found on the teacher server (on the school network). All 5 members of staff signed consent forms and gave me a pseudonym that they would like to use for the research. The two class teachers (Julia and Naomi) seemed particularly positive about the idea of doing research. Julia was keen to start some discussion of the issues and commented about the experience that international teacher parents had had with their children in the school.

“It was ok in Key Stage One but once they got a bit more street-wise they had trouble making friends.”

Julia Nov 12th 2019

This prompts me to consider if there is a difference between the international students at the school and the national students. This may be an area that comes up more in the future, however, it is important for me to keep an open mind and to observe and think critically.

I also showed the staff the golden hat that I will be wearing as a researcher and the shiny silver notebook that I will be using! These are visual indicators that I am present in the playground or classroom as a researcher and not as deputy head. They were purposefully chosen to be articles that I would not normally be sign with. I feel that it is very important to have a clear visual sign and this idea of a hat was stimulated from my teaching experience of using a drama technique called “mantle of the expert” to teach history. This is a technique devised by Dorothy Heathcote in the late 1970s and 1980s. More information can be found at this website.

<https://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/what-is-moe/introduction-to-moe/>

There is also a change that occurs when you put on specific items of clothing. This is something that I first became aware of when I put on a military uniform as an Officer Cadet. I would stand differently as if the clothes made me become a different ‘me’ to the me that I was when I wore other clothes. Since becoming aware of this I can note in myself this change and feel that the wearing of the hat in some way facilitates me becoming the researcher – another slightly different me.



My research hat and notebook.

Unfortunately, one of the Year One teachers was off work sick this week so I have not yet managed to show her the Powerpoint and ask her to sign a consent form. Once I manage to do this the next

step is for me to show, separately, each of the Year One classes the Powerpoint. Then I can ask the children for their consent and the send the parental assent forms home. Once all these has happened, I can start the observations. I think that this is not likely to happen for another two weeks.

Finally, I have been considering where I position myself when I start the research and whether I will be in the playground or looking at the playground. I think that I need to experience both as they are advantages to both perspectives. If I stand on the veranda, I can get a 'birds'eye' view that will enable me to see larger patterns of play and identify groups. When I stand in the playground I will be 'in the thick' of it and have an on the ground perspective that will allow me to see the details. Due to this I am planning to start on the veranda and then move into the playground area. This will also give the staff on duty an opportunity to get used to seeing me there as a researcher.



View of the
KS1
playground.

The veranda, along the admin block, that overlooks the playground. The KS1 building is the white building at the end.

There is also another playground used at lunchtime. Year One play in the KS1 playground twice a week and 3 times a week in the other playground. I need to ask all staff on lunchtime duty with Year One to sign a consent form. More to do!



This Week's Reflections : 24th Nov 2019

This has been a busy week for me work-wise as the Head of school is away and so I am Acting-Head. This has meant that I have been unable to get into classes. However, I have managed to get the consent form signed by the third year one teacher meaning that I can now start the class presentations and hand out the forms – I will try to do this next week.

This week I have managed to read the book '*Listening to Young Children: A Guide to Understanding and Using the Mosaic Approach*' (2017) 3rd Ed. by Alison Clark. I found that this helped me reflect on aspects the process of research and challenged some of my use of terminology.

Visual Images

The mosaic approach uses a variety of different methods but many of them rely on visual images. In chapter two Clark states:

“A child of three, for example, may struggle to convey the importance of a particular space or person within their early childhood institution, but taking a photograph or making a map with their chosen images may provide a stronger ‘voice’.”

Clark, A. (2017) p.31

The idea of making use of visual images resounded. Part of the focus group activity with the Student Council could be asking children to choose different images about friendship and making and breaking friends. The EAL needs of children at the school may mean that their language skills are nearer those of the Early Years in the UK.

Clark also states clearly her belief in the ability of young children to be experts in their own lives:

“Explicit in the approach is a belief in young children as competent commentators.”

Clark, A. (2017) p.33

Observations

Clark goes on to stress that while observation ‘can contribute to our understanding of children’s lives.’ The difficulty with observation is that it ‘only gives an adult perspective on children’s lives.’ p.37. So that the value of observation lies in it being part of the mosaic or puzzle and not as the whole. Later on, Clark discusses the use of timed observations in a particular area. It would be possible for me to timed observations of individual children after some initial observation in which I identified those children who seem to be isolated or playing alone and those children who seem to be ‘social centres’ or children who appear to be playing in the middle of a group of children. When observing or interviewing, Clark discusses the need to look carefully for non-verbal clues:

“There was also the need to remain alert to children’s non-verbal communication and to be sensitive to when children’s facial expression, attention and gaze suggested they would rather be elsewhere.”

Clark, A. (2017) p.78

Interviews

The importance of paying attention and being reflective is relevant to both observations and interviews. Clark comments elsewhere on the importance of recording the context in which interviews take place. She gives an example of a girl who answered a question by replying 'chimpanzees' which was likely to be prompted by the chimpanzee book that was prominent in the area where she was interviewed. It will then be important to record the context or area where the focus groups take place so that when the discussions are analysed consideration can be made of any impact that the location has on the comments that children make. For example, if the children are within hearing of a certain office or classroom, they may feel less free to speak for fear of being overheard.

Interviews have power and are important as a means of giving interviewees some formal acknowledgement and indicating the value or worth of their knowledge and experience. This is particularly important as my position in the school gives me certain value in the eyes of others that is hard to mitigate for. Clark says that:

"The interview provided a formal opportunity to acknowledge that their opinions were valid and their knowledge about the children was valuable."

Clark, A. (2017) p.106

During the interview it is also possible to enable children to access their thoughts about something by allowing them to consider new ideas or as Clark says "children need 'permission' to explore new possibilities" (p.111) It is possible that children or staff may have fixed views about friendship and what they conceive as possible, interview questions should facilitate the consideration of new approaches or ideas.

Clark discusses the fact the children who are bilingual or multilingual may have a preference for communicating in a different language. This is something that it will be important for me to be aware of as the vast majority of children at the school are EAL learners. It will be useful to identify what language the children are playing in and to think about the role of language in friendship.

The Research Process

When considering the terminology used in the research process Clark emphasises that 'co-construction' is preferable to collecting data. She states:

"'Gathering data' suggests a positivist paradigm, plucking discrete, preformed information from research subjects The choice of co-construction is intended to emphasise the opportunities for research participants to piece together their views and experiences with the researcher and each other."

Clark, A. (2017) p.33

The research process is not a clear straight line but a winding and often poorly marked path. The phases of research are equally blurred.

"Although the gathering and reviewing are described here as two distinct phases, in reality these stages become to some extent blurred. Reflecting on meanings

and reassessing understandings took place throughout the whole study, but this second stage allowed a concentrated period of reflection.”

Clark, A. (2017) p.111

Reflection is critical throughout the entire research process. It is clear that I need further clarity myself on which research paradigm I am following. I also need to think about how much time I will spend observing so that I end up with enough but not too much data.

When carrying out research, there are many things to be considered. There may be Clark refers to the work of Fine (1987) on the possible roles that ‘unfamiliar adults’ may take in research with children. These are:

- leader
- supervisor
- observer
- friend

Clark, A. (2017) p.80

It is necessary for me to consider carefully how to obtain the position of ‘observer’ when my Deputy Head role within the school may automatically mean that I am perceived as ‘leader’. I need to also try to minimise the ‘mismatch of interests’ between the roles of researcher and practitioner (p.122) There is a need for any researcher to be flexible and work hard to ‘fit in’ with the schedule of the school such as teacher sickness, assessments or other school events. If I am looking for change to happen I am actually following a participatory action research model?

Finally, student voice is a fashionable concept but as Clark says

“ Student voice is not seen as a separate activity but part of respectful dialogue across generations..... The hope is that they become aware from an early age that their views and experiences are valued together with those of others who are different, and have the potential to lead to positive change in their immediate and wider environments.”

Clark, A. (2017) p.129

I am aware that I need to build on these ideas and read more!!!!

This Week's Reflections : 30th Nov 2019

This week, despite continuing to be Acting-Head I have managed to do more data collection. The largest part of this was to present the Powerpoint explaining my research to 2 of the 3 classes. I also managed to present the Powerpoint to the remaining 4 Learning Assistants.

Class 1A – Presentation and Student Assent Forms

I went into class 1A on Monday afternoon to do my presentation. I wore my shiny gold hat (which the children loved!) and carried my silver research notebook. The children sat on the carpet for the presentation. The computer for controlling the slide show was at the back and I wanted to stand at the front so another member of staff offered to move the slides for me but it didn't work well.

The children then went and sat at tables and there were 3 members of staff supporting them to put their answers in the correct place. Between us we struggled to get all children to complete the right question.

I learnt several things from doing the presentation and student assent forms with 1A. These are

- 1 I should have left a space for children to write their names at the top. The children were used to having to put their name and the date at the top. The fact that it was in the middle confused some of them. The ones who could read well and had initiative found the word NAME and wrote their name next to it before I had started my explanation. Other children just wrote their name at the top without looking at the rest of the sheet.
- 2 It needed the 4 adults to support the task, Julia, the class teacher, was surprised at how long it took. It would be better for me to take a group at a time after the presentation. Teacher enthusiasm was also necessary and I felt that my positive relationship with Julia and the fact that we have known each other for 2.5 years made this part of the research go more smoothly.
- 3 The idea of ticking or crossing proved somewhat problematic. There were a variety of approaches within the class. Some children ticked everything. Some children crossed almost everything. Some children felt that they had to put a cross somewhere as I had emphasised that it was optional and ok to say 'no'. They seemed to interpret this as that they had to say 'no' to something. This led to me being able to observe and write about only 13 of the 23 children present and then one of these did not want to be observed in the classroom.

Speaking to the class teacher, Julia, afterwards she commented that she would have said to the children, after explaining what the research was all about:

“If that sounds ok to you just give it all a big tick!”

Julia, November 25th 2019

This would have been rather than reading each statement and getting the child to tick or cross it. There was one occasion when it was clear that the child, for whatever reason, felt strongly about not

participating. This was accepted and the child was not asked to explain their reasons. My feeling was that the lack of participation was down to how the use of the ticks and crosses for the form filling was presented.

- 4 Pseudonyms – as part of the presentation the use of pretend names or ‘fake names’ as the children called them was mentioned. A group of four girls who worked independently at a table (the other tables had a member of staff near) wrote their pseudonyms rather than real names on the form. This prompted me to allow the children to write their chosen pseudonym at the bottom of their assent form.

One of these four girls, went on to return the parental consent form with her pseudonym rather than real name. Luckily, we spotted this and got it changed!!

The issue of children choosing the same pseudonym has already arisen as one of the girls from 1B choose the name Rose yesterday, this had been chosen by girls in 1A. Rather than going back to the girl to ask her to chose a different name I will use their class name to differentiate between them.

As I left the room there were a number of parents standing outside the door. I used this as a chance to speak to an informal group about the research and show them the parental consent forms that had been put into the children’s bags. The parents appeared puzzled and this encounter indicated a possible need to have a parent meeting where I can show them the presentation and they can meet me to ask questions. I hope to do this, this week, when the Head returns...

Class 1B – Presentation and Student Assent Forms

Learning from what worked and didn’t with Class 1A, I was able to sit at the front of the class and control the presentation in 1B. This made the presentation much smoother. All adults had also seen the presentation before and so knew what it was about. (In 1A one of the Learning Assistants had not seen the presentation and so needed to watch it with the children.)

1B were very keen to ask me questions and were interested in the fact that I would have to also have to answer questions, they advised me to be honest and not to lie!!

I then took a group, that the teacher gave me outside to complete the forms. The children all completed the forms with ticks – this made me reflect on whether I had been clear enough about the use of crosses – although I did clearly state to tick if it was ok This needs more reflection.

I only managed one group of 6 children – I have the remaining 19 children to do next week (plus the 2 children who were away in 1A) and all of 1C!!! I gave these 6 children the parental consent forms to fill in. The parental consent forms from 1A have started coming in.

So, lots left to do before I can start observing

This Week's Reflections : 8th Dec 2019

The Head arrived back this week which allowed me a little more time to try and chase the remaining forms. The classes are known by the first initial of the teacher's surname so I have named the classes 1A, 1B and 1C as none of the classes are currently called these. However, I could also call them by the initial of the teacher's pseudonym so that I can easily sort the children by classes.

Class 1B

I followed up with the rest of the children in 1B this week. I asked one group of children if they remembered the presentation that I had shown them last week.

One child replied, "Oh yeah! I remember that. It was really boring."

Another child agreed. "Yeah! I just wanted to colour my picture."

1B children. Dec 4th 2019

So, appearances can be deceptive as they had appeared the most engaged of the 3 classes that I presented to, or maybe they were just the politest audience?!

There were several children away, but apart from these all children completed the assent forms and all the consent forms were sent home.

Choice of Names for Pseudonyms

One of the girls in the last group wanted to use her brother's name as her pseudonym. I said that she might want to choose a girl's name but could use his name if she wanted. I am wondering about whether was a good idea as it may confuse the audience. However, a lot of the children's names are Ethiopian so many people in the UK won't know whether the name is a boys or girls name. In this case the name is a western name. I taught the girl's brother last year and so that has been my main link with her in the past, I wondered if this was why she chose to use his name but didn't ask her. I debated the ethics of feminising the name and in the end decided to respect her choice, perhaps further down the line she will change her own mind about it. Several other children from the different classes have chosen unusual names, for example there is a girl called "Cool" and a boy called "Dingow" (pronounced Dingo).

Class 1C

This week I also managed to do the final whole class presentation to 1C. 1C were very quiet while I was presenting and when I asked if there were any questions, they gave me advice about friendship. Such as

"You need to be kind."

"You need to not hit back if someone hits you but tell the teacher."

I took a group of 7 children after the presentation and then took other children the following day. There were 2 children away today. Overall, there are several children who have missed out on the

form filling and some who have missed both the presentation and form filling. This is something that I need to tackle next week.

Staff Forms

One other member of staff watched the presentation as well and so I was able to ask them to fill in the form. There are several members of staff who are not in class full time with year one but who do lunch duties with them and so I also need to ask them to complete a form. I was able to get 3 of these teachers as well as Curly Bird, the head of learning support, an experienced teacher who I think will be interesting to discuss the research with and informally interview.

Overall, it appears that if I chase forms and catch up with missing children next week then I should be able to start the observation during the last week of term and in the first few weeks of next term (which starts January 13th).

Photos of second playground



This Week's Reflections : 15th Dec 2019

After the skype call with Kate and Sue I decided to do three things. Firstly, I showed the Powerpoint about the research to the head of school. This was so that he was aware of what staff and pupils had seen and so that he can answer any questions from staff, parents or children. Secondly, I showed the presentation to the children who had been absent and asked them to complete the form. This happened with 6/7 children and from these children several of them gave full assent. Parental consent forms were then sent home to all 6 children. Thirdly and most excitingly, I started the observations!

Selecting an Observation View Point

On Thursday lunchtime I went to the playground at 12.20. I stayed until the children lined up, at the end of their break, at 12.40pm. During this 20-minute slot the major task was to decide from where to observe. Initially, I stood on the veranda of the administration building that runs alongside the playground. However, I found my view was restricted and I could not see what was going on. I then moved onto the stairs that lead from the veranda into the playground. I checked from several points but also felt that my view was restricted. I then decided to move to the opposite side of the playground. I sat on the stairs outside of the Year 1 and 2 building. I made sure that I sat in the corner with my back to the wall so that I had the best view of the whole playground.

The Reactions of those in the Playground

Staff in the playground at this time ignored me. There were initially two members of staff on duty and during my time in the playground these members of staff changed over. However, I found it interesting that my presence was noted by members of staff, I talked to Lucy later in the day and mentioned that I had started my research – she commented

“I know. I saw you.” Lucy, 12th December 2019

Children in the playground were keen to come and speak to me. At least three different children ran up to me and said

“Hi! Miss Catherine!” Year One children, 12th December 2019

One girl, Sarar, ran straight up to me and asked

“Can I see what you are writing?”

I then showed her and read her what it said on the page. She then asked if she could write in the book and she wrote her name. She then gave me a sentence to write in the book.

“Rayan's birthday is today so her Mum is going to call us.”

Sarar seemed satisfied with this and ran off for a few minutes. She then returned and asked to write in the book. Sarar first wrote her own name and then organised other children to write their names in a numbered list down the page. This list also included some other names, including the word 'teacher' and some names of siblings. One girl only wrote her pseudonym and not her real name. This was the same girl who had chosen the name of her brother to be her pseudonym. This was interesting as her brother had been in my class previously and the previous contact that I have had with her has all been when she came to collect or drop off her brother from the class. I wonder if

the reason that she chose his name was that she associates me with him. The same girl was also the only girl playing football with a group of boys, I then wondered if this was another reason for her to choose a boy's name as her pseudonym.

What I observed

The playground seemed a busy and chaotic place as I sat still it seemed that everyone else was on the move. There was a game of football that seemed to dominate the playground. I was surprised to discover that when I counted only 11 children (10 boys and 1 girl) were actually playing football. There were several other groups of children doing different things. There were 7 children who seemed to be 'parading' – marching up and down along a route down the side of the playground. Then there were 10 children including the birthday girl (Rayan) who seemed to be chasing her around the playground. There were some children playing in smaller groups and pairs, these included Cool and her friend.

The 12 Children

From the 75 children to whom forms have been distributed I have had 25 of them returned. Of these only 1 parent did not give full consent to do the research. From the 25 there are 12 children who have given their assent. As I do not know the names of all of these children, I have printed a photo sheet with the pseudonyms of the children underneath. This file is saved with password lock on it onto only my desktop computer. All data on the desktop should be backed up next week before the end of term. I hope that I can use the photo sheet for this week only – until I am able to recognise the 12 children in the research group. The photos sheet will be kept in the silver notebook that is locked in the cupboard in my office. Two of the 12 children do not yet have pseudonyms. One boy did not choose a pseudonym when he filled in the form. The other, a girl, chose a name that is too similar to her real name and would make her easily recognisable.

Things to do this week

- Ask the 2 children to choose pseudonyms.
- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining 3 staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the 6 staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.

This Week's Reflections : 20th Dec 2019

Logistics

A nice surprise this week was receiving three more parental consent forms from two girls who had already given their assent. One of them was Rayan, the birthday girl from last week, another was Efrata, who was very interested in what I was doing during the December 17th observation and the last is Alex. This means that I now have a group of 15 children to observe (12 girls and 3 boys). I also had the first complete refusal back from a parent – which I also took as a good sign – as it is an indication that despite my position of power parents are comfortable with saying no to me.

I managed to show the PowerPoint to one of the teachers on duty with Year One during two lunchtimes and she was very positive about the whole idea.

I managed to ask one of the children for a pseudonym and he chose the name Max. I asked one teacher to complete the form – as she had not answered one question and she also chose a pseudonym.

17th December Observation

I was able to get into the playground to observe for about 15 minutes. As there was no football today, I decided to sit at the opposite end of the playground (from last time) and so sat where the goal usually is, on the grass under the tree. For the first few minutes I was almost ignored and was able to see that the play was mostly taking place down the sides of the grass space with a large empty space in the middle (where the football usually happens!)

I started to try and identify where the children that I was observing were in the playground. Rayan was on the top of the slide. Roze was with 3 friends under the slide. At this point another girl and Efrata came over to me. They were very interested in what I was doing and I explained about not writing the children's real names. Efrata then told me that her pseudonym was Mermoc – I asked her to write in my book. I then showed her the piece of paper that I had with her photo and the name Efrata underneath and asked her if she wanted to change it. She said that she wanted to be called Efrata. This conversation underscored for me the fact that some may not be aware of what pseudonym they have chosen – perhaps I need to make sure that I share these again with the children and check. I think the way to do this is informally as they approach me during the research.

During the rest of lunchtime, I tried to observe what some of the other children were doing – Rose was very interested in what I was doing, although she did not speak to me, she circled around me several times and observed what was happening. Natna also came to see what I was doing. Free was playing a chasing game (duck, duck, goose) in the middle of the playground.

I also noted two boys who ran past me and one said "I'm going to kill you!" and pointed his fingers at the other boy. They both ran off. At this point I was surrounded by a group of children and so did not see what then happened. I was struck at this point in the different position I was in as a researcher. As Deputy Head or as a teacher I would have felt the need to intervene and speak to the boys about the appropriate use of language. This was not appropriate for me to do with my research hat on.

A few minutes after entering the playground I was joined on the grass by a girl named Sarar. She was also the same girl who wrote in my book last week. Sarar stayed by my side the whole playtime and although she has assented to be part of the research her parents have not returned the consent form. Other children sat down and one boy asked 'Can I join in?' I then said remember we did the

forms to say who can join in. Sarar and another girl both commented that they had put all ticks and then a boy said

“I put two crosses.”

Year One boy. 17th December 2019

It was interesting to see that the children remembered the forms and the fact they had ticked or crossed their answers. It gave me some evidence that they had been thoughtful about the form. I am still conscious of the issue that some children put a cross because they could put a tick or a cross and they had not put a cross yet so they did!

I had difficulty during this observation identifying all the children who were in the research group. I had a piece of paper with the children’s photos and pseudonyms underneath. I had to keep this hidden from the children and some children glimpsed the photos and wanted to see the paper. I felt that for the sake of confidentiality I needed to keep this from them but this felt uncomfortable – as I let them see and read what I write in the book. I therefore decided that I needed to identify two children to focus on during my next observation and to try to follow them to see what they were doing. This would not be done by moving around after the child but by looking for them at regular intervals and so focus on them rather than get a general feeling. It may be that these more focused observations actually happen after the Christmas holidays.

I spoke to Julia after school about the observation and she commented on the fact that I was surrounded by the children. I explained that I was part of what was happening in the playground and feel that I am not just a passive observer. In fact, I have tried to be this but it is just not manageable. My presence in the playground does change things. Taitu’s direct approach and conversation with the children acknowledged this. She asked the children what I was doing and what they were doing with me. Sarar simply hugged me in response to this. An action that Taitu acknowledged. The children were not able to give a simple and coherent response to the question but Taitu’s comments provide visible evidence that my presence in the playground altered the reality and experience of the playground for at least some of the children.

My Research Hat

As soon as the children came up to me the immediate conversation centred around my shiny gold hat. The children referred to it as my ‘shiny hat’ and ‘your special hat’. One child asked me

‘Please can I try on your hat?’

Year One child. 17th December 2019

Today Taitu was on duty she commented about my hat:

‘When I see it, I want to smile!’

Taitu. 17th December 2019

She then asked the children what it made them feel. There were various replies:

‘It makes me feel about nothing!’

Year One boy. 17th December 2019

‘That hat is just sparkly dots!’

So, Taitu then asked them to describe my hat. The children said it was 'nice' sparkly' 'shiny' 'spooky'.

The importance of research context is evident to me here. I know that the children have been learning about light and dark as their topic. They have looked at words for describing these and 'spooky' will be one of the words that they have learnt.

I reflected about the role of my research hat and think that this is an important part of my methodology and also the topic that I feel that I could write a journal article on. I have a personal deadline to submit a journal article by the end of the summer 2020.

18th December Observation

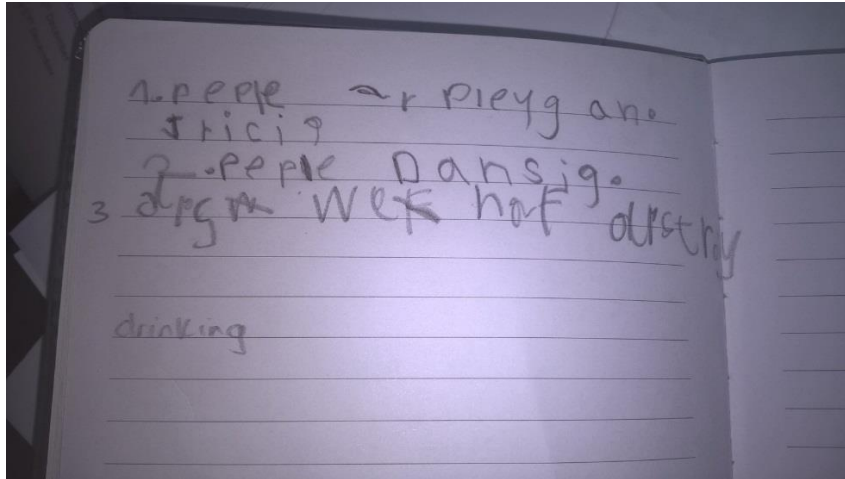
I was keen to spend a least a few minutes in the playground today because the Year One children play in the smaller nursery playground on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I entered the playground it seemed relatively unnoticed and managed to sit at the side, against the wall for a few minutes before Sarar spotted me and sat down next to me. As I entered the playground I walked past the sandpit and saw that there were 18 children playing there. This is clearly a key area, roughly one quarter of the cohort were in this area. Plus, there were other children in the nearby house and slide. This would seem an obvious place to sit. I wonder about the reaction of the children if I am already in the playground when they come out – rather than joining them.

I tried to make a note of the activities that the children were doing: Rayan was on the play ship talking with Lucy, the teacher on duty, Max was also on the ship, Van was behind the house (this is called the tukul), Rose was on the bars and Roze was near the wall and then chasing around the play area – perhaps playing tag. Tukul is the defined by the online dictionary as

“A [cone](#)-shaped mud hut, usually with a thatched roof, found in eastern and northeastern Africa.”

<https://www.yourdictionary.com/tukul>

There is a tukul in this playground and also a playhouse. The playhouses in the other playground are often called tukuls because they have straw roofs (and even though they are rectangular or square in shape.) Once again, my observations got slightly sabotaged by Sarar, today I decided to ask her about the form and if it was possible for her to aske her parents about completing it. I explained that I could not write about her without their permission. Today she wrote in my notebook her name and then on the next page she wrote the following:



This says:

1. People are playing and drinking.
2. People dancing.
3. ? were half destroyed.

Research notebook 18th December 2019

Point 3 was written by a boy while I was talking to the girl who had not yet chosen a pseudonym. Sarar could not tell me what he had written. It is interesting to see how Sarar has understood that I am writing down what the children are doing and that she uses numbers to organise her writing (this is not something that I have done in my notebook but is something is commonly used in school).

The girl who had written a pseudonym that was very close to her own name was playing alone near me in the playground. I beckoned her over and asked her to sit down. I then explained about the pseudonyms and asked her if she would like to choose a name. She said no. However, because I was not sure if she had understood I tried to explain a bit more. However, I was hesitant to provide her with examples as I felt that this would take some power away from her making her own decision. The girl is in Julia's class and Julia came over and suggested that during their lesson they could think of a name even 'sparkly' or 'glittery'. Again, this ties in with knowing the research context and the fact that the children are learning about Light and Dark and so the vocabulary being used in lessons.

The play space in this playground is much smaller and there were groups of children playing together. My position near the wall, at the side of the play area, did not allow me to see the sandpit area and so I need to look for another position next time.

Things to do during the holidays!

- I need to follow up on the referenced for reading from Mazzei on silence.
- Start reading up more on methodology and begin to write up methodology chapter.

MAZZEI, L. A. 2006. *Breaking the Silence: A Critique of Whiteness in Teacher Education. Racing the Urban Challenge: Education in the Cities for the 21st Century. Manchester.*

MAZZEI, L. A. 2007. *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research - Putting Poststructural Theory to Work*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Things to do after the holidays!

- Ask the one girl remaining for her pseudonym.
- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.

This Week's Reflections : 27th Dec 2019

Reading

I started with searching for Lisa Mazzei's writing on silence that Sue referenced and found a book entitled Posthuman Research Practices in Education that contained a chapter in which she is a joint author.

In the introduction to the book reference is made by the authors to the work of Elizabeth St. Pierre who said "we perpetuate the dominant approaches we critique." Taylor & Hughes (Eds) (2016) p.2. This phrase struck a chord with me because I feel in my research that it is hard to get out of the deputy head or teacher role and into something else. There are certain expectations of me. I took a group of students out of the classroom to complete the research forms and we sat, for sake of quickness, outside of the building on the floor. A class of older students went past and it was interesting to note their surprise at seeing me sitting on the concrete floor with a group of year one students (wearing my shiny gold baseball cap!).

The pressure to conform to a role comes from a range of places – students, parents and teachers - all of these have preconceived ideas about how a teacher or deputy head should behave. My 12-year-old daughter told me "You can't do that! You're the deputy head!" The pressure also comes from within myself as to what I perceive the role to be and the standards that I hold myself to.

Edu-Crafting a Cacophonous Ecology: Posthumanist Research Practices for Education; Carol Taylor.

The first chapter of the book is written by Taylor and sets out to explain how post-humanist theory has developed. She defines posthumanism as

"a constellation of different theories, approaches, concepts and practices."

Taylor (2016) p.6

As described by Taylor, I was attracted by her use of words like 'unsettling' and 'flux' to describe posthumanism because my recent experience of research has been muddled and made me slightly uncomfortable. She states that posthumanism attempts to blur or muddy the binaries of humanism such as animal/human, body/mind, self/other (p.7). Presumably it also attempts to divert other binaries such as good/evil, right/wrong, knowing/unknowing and expert/ignorant. These binaries define much of the traditional approach to research, the tendency to look for a 'right' answers and to use 'experts' and perhaps to perceive children among those regarded as 'ignorant'. The traditional path of research follows a single, linear path to knowledge but Taylor describes how posthumanist research 'emerges' and knowledge is not discovered but rather is

"an enactment of knowing-in-being that emerges in the event of doing research itself. In opening new means to integrate thinking and doing, it offers an invitation to come as you are and to experiment, invent, create both with what is (already) at hand and by bringing that which might (or might not) be useful, because you don't yet know, into the orbit of research."

Taylor (2016) p.18

I found that this definition of research to be freeing as it allows me to come as I am, there is not a necessity to be an expert, and to follow my own path or 'the scent' of the thing. (Bennett, 2010). This more reactionary approach feels much more real and is a much broader definition than I have previously been aware of. A posthumanism approach would allow me to take into consideration the

things that are going on all the time but that I have put in the background as they are non-human. These are things such as the play equipment, weather, events (such as Rayan's birthday) and the atmosphere – excitement caused by the approaching end of term...

Taylor's description of the enactments is exciting and inspiring. She uses active verbs:

“a practice of the plunge: letting go, diving, freefall, surfing, swimming, waving and drowning..... to (try to) see the world as a grain of sand do away with binaries Plunging is a messy, ungainly and sometimes dangerous business: there are no methodological safeholds, handholds or niches for secure knowing.”

Taylor (2016) p.20

The concept of ‘plunging’ and being submerged in the research is invigorating and appears much more realistic than the traditional, linear research process that suggests that there is something out there for us to find out or discover and that we gain knowledge this way. In posthumanism there is no secure knowing and this is liberating in allowing us to come across something and to hold value onto each grain of sand rather than look for the diamond that it will make.

The desire to do research in this way can be driven by ‘Potentia’ or the ‘energy, vitality and constitutive desire to endure.’ (Braidotti (2013) p.137). Indeed with the current situation in the world, with issues such as climate change being discussed by children, we are now more than ever in need of an approach that looks beyond the human and encompasses our whole world.

Rethinking the Empirical in the Posthuman; Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre

St. Pierre echoes my own thoughts on own views posthumanism. She states that it is a new work that

“promises educators a way out of theoretical, material and empirical structures that seem to strangle us.”

St. Pierre (2016) p.26

Posthumanism is a liberating approach. St. Pierre recommends that, as we abandon the humanist qualitative methodology, we read philosophy and go back to deepening our understanding of ontology and epistemology. (p.28) She recommends that we ignore the familiar methodologies and act as the inquiry started before we ourselves began. However, she acknowledges that

“It's very difficult to escape our training.”

St. Pierre (2016) p.28

St. Pierre's writing encourages me to want to try a new path and also to look back to some of the philosophy readings that I have avoided in order to better understand myself, the past and the possible approach that I may be taking.

Thinking with Agentic Assemblage in Posthuman Inquiry; Alecia Youngblood Jackson & Lisa Mazzei

Youngblood Jackson & Mazzei use the term ‘framework’ to describe the posthumanist approach. They reference Borad (2007) and state that

“we are able to map a dynamic, changing typology that is continually being re(con)figured...”

Youngblood Jackson & Mazzei (2016) p.94

This constant, dynamic movement resonates with my own research experience. The focus of this chapter is on 'thing-power' (Bennett (2010) which Youngblood Jackson & Mazzei explain is

“objects become things when they become energetic and make things happen.”

Youngblood Jackson & Mazzei (2016) p.95

This is illustrated by reference to Sulkowicz's art thesis: *Carry That Weight*, where a Columbia University student carried a 50-pound mattress as part protest of the university's mishandling of her complaint of sexual assault. In this example, the mattress becomes a thing because it causes people to react. However, there is a wider 'assemblage' of objects including people that together have agency. As I reflect on this, I wonder again about my shiny gold baseball cap and the power that an object like this has has it become a thing?!

I feel that I have begun to understand something about posthumanism. This is a new area for me and something that I feel that I would like to know more about and read more on....

Things to do:

- Finish reading book about posthumanism.
- Read articles from Children's Geographies.
- Write about the twins and the mother who wanted her son to take part.

Things to do after the holidays!

- Ask the one girl remaining for her pseudonym.
- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.

This Week's Reflections : 4th Jan 2020

Parents V Children – Power Dynamics

The law has recently changed in the UK so that medical staff can only tell the parents of a child test results with the consent of that child. There are good reasons for the law but it can also add needless complications. In a similar way the ethics of ensuring that both the child and parent give permission (assent or consent) is important and can appear as a needless complication. A few issues arose during the process of distributing the forms that made it become clear to me that this was not the case and that it is important to get both the assent of the child and the consent of the parents. The first was an event early on in the process when I was stopped by a parent and asked about my research. She said that she had already returned the consent form for her son to take part in the research. She was keen for him to participate as he struggled with making friends, unlike her other child. She asked about the school using the research and I answered that I hoped that the school would get some suggestions as to what to do to make the transition smoother in year one. She then asked when I would start as she was very keen for the research to happen. Around this point in the conversation, I realised that her son had not given his assent to take part in the research. This was a moral and ethical dilemma; I did not feel it right to tell the mum that her son had declined to take part in the research. He had filled in the form in school, as part of a group, I did not and have not asked him why he chose not to participate. I sensed that telling his mum that he had opted out would cause him problems because his mum was so keen for him to take part. I felt contradictory and recognised the mother's wish to help her son and any right that she might have to know what her young son had decided. However, I felt a greater responsibility to the boy and his right to make his own decision. I didn't say anything.

Hackett & Procter

As I am away from school and the research, I have been thinking about the observations that I have carried out so far and felt that I have been there in the midst of things. I know that I have learnt things from doing the observations and reflecting on what I am seeing but it seems that these things are so small, minor and insignificant. I have begun to wonder whether I can really see what is going on, acknowledging that I can at best only see a small part and from my own perspective, but can I even see that? I was comforted by the comment of Hackett et al.

“This was in order to make the framework practical, acknowledging that no one can observe and record everything during every visit.”

Hackett, Procter & Kummerfeld (2018a) p.493

Indeed, no one can observe everything and in acknowledging this it frees us to look in depth at what we can see. That one grain of sand that is not a pearl but with many others makes a pearl. The creation of a framework was something that struck me as useful as a concept and a possible outcome of the research. However, I am also conscious that there are dangers in making assumptions and that each situation is unique. This actually means that the cohort of children that I am working with is also unique and whilst there will be shared commonalities there will also be differences. So I feel it necessary to state clearly that I would align myself with Hackett et al who seek to avoid

“the critique within early childhood education of a generalisable notion of quality that may guarantee universal developmental outcomes for all children.”

Hackett, Procter & Kummerfeld (2018a) p.495

Whilst I can acknowledge that there are things that we can take from one situation and apply to another situation the uniqueness of each much also be accepted. Hackett et al (2018b) when talking about their work involving design of spaces for young children in museums state:

“Whilst it is true that young children are frequently unpredictable, surprising and creative in their engagement with places, objects and experiences there is also, we argue, something specific to the geographies of museum spaces that enable us to attend to improvisation and the serendipitous in specific ways.”

Hackett, Holmes, MacRae & Procter (2018) p.484

The space makes a difference to what can and does happen. So, in observing the relationships between individual children the inanimate objects are also of significance. The children who sat around the sandpit may be one example from my own research of how the design of the playground facilitates and enables certain ways of being. There are two playgrounds in the school and only one of them has a sand pit. I feel that the sandpit area is an area of specific interest in what it allows children to do. Perhaps of significance is that there is a change in the normal school rules in this area as children are allowed to take their socks and shoes off. There is something about digging as Uncle Jasper says in the book ‘Time Travel’ – “Dig! All children should dig more!” p. xxxx

I also started to read Tim Ingold’s (2018) book “Anthropology And/As Education” because he works is referenced many times by Hackett et al. These ideas are bringing me back to the posthumanist ideas that I encountered last week and I feel that I have found a theory that I can put into practice.

Chapter 9: Decentering the Human Species in Multispecies Ethnographies by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Affrica Taylor and Mindy Blaise

This chapter raised several issues of interest. The first of these was the use of the term ‘Common Worlds’ (referenced to Latour). We are sharing the world with others – both human and non-human. The school cats that wander the grounds and the interaction between cats and humans is an example of how this concept may be useful in my own research. I remember several incidents when I was a teacher on playground duty – interactions of the children and a butterfly, a beetle, a spider.

The second point was the call to be ‘present’ in our work. The authors cited here Tsing and her phrase that ‘We are participants as well as observers’ Tsing (2013) p. 24. We are part of what is going on in the research. My presence in the playground does change things. In my first observations I have been trying to be inconspicuous and not change things. However, I wonder if I walk around the playground will I see and experience different things. Will I get a string of children following me?

In the chapter an example is given of spotting a dead kangaroo. The children then requested and were allowed to visit the decomposing kangaroo’s body three times. It struck me that sometimes we do not allow such things - the disgust but also fascination of death. I wonder what else we don’t allow because of fear and because of ways of things and being that are accepted without question.

Finally, the authors again reference Tsing (2011) who encourages researchers to ‘slow down’. Once again this resonates with my own experience of research and the idea of looking closely, looking from different perspectives – perhaps I need to sit at the top of the slide or climb the climbing

frame. Blaise's research with dogs called her to put down her notebook and pen so that she could listen and feel. Perhaps I too need to do this – to just be in playground.

Things to do:

- Finish reading book about posthumanism.
- Read articles from Children's Geographies.
- Read more by Tsing.

Things to do after the holidays!

- Ask the one girl remaining for her pseudonym.
- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.

This Week's Reflections : 11th Jan 2020

Global childhoods beyond the North-South divide

Further to the recommendation to read about children's rights, I read the chapter of this book. The book starts with a discussion about the binary of global south and global north and calls rather for analysis that focuses on similarities between childhoods in different countries around the world. They also state that focuses on differences obscures

“diversities that exist within regions and societies, based on variables such as socio-economic status, education and ethnicity which have parallels across societies.”

Meichsner, Bourdillon and Twum-Danso (2019) p. 6

They go on to reference the work of Arsel and Dasgupta (2015 p.651) who suggest that there are 'First Worlds' in the 'Third world' and vice-versa. This prompts us think critically about research and not simply dismiss it as irrelevant, research from one country will likely have some relevant parts regardless of where we are in the world. This seems pertinent for my own research as it means that what I produce can be shared but also that I need to look at research around the world and pick the relevant parts that impact my own work. At the end of the chapter there is a call from the authors to move beyond binary oppositions and look at the different influences within the local context. This seems once more to hark back to posthumanism and an approach that calls for a more inclusive attitude towards our analysis of worlds. It also reminds me that my own context is unique within Ethiopia and cannot and should not be regarded as observations or reflections of life in the country as a whole, or even the area of the city that we are in, outside the walls like is very different for most people.

The concluding chapter of the book returns to the 'us' and 'them' of the binary (p.258) used in describing not only the different parts of the world: First World, Third World; Minority World, Majority World; Global North, Global South; but challenges our role within research – are we using 'us' and 'them' to describe ourselves and those we are researching? In dropping these binary terms, the authors also pose the question about labels

“Who decides what is positive and how?”

Meichsner, Bourdillon and Twum-Danso (2019) p.258

It is essential that the labels that are used are helpful and positive to those receiving the label and not stigmatising for those on the receiving end. Indeed, it should be those on the receiving end who are consulted before the labels are chosen. Finally, the authors make the following observation:

“People affected are often better placed to understand how to manage their lives than outside experts, and this observation leads to a means to enhance our chance of using our categories positively: we can check our thinking

against that of the people concerned and make sure we take account of their perspectives.”

Meichsner, Bourdillon and Twum-Danso (2019) (p.261)

In my own research, this is a reminder of the importance of involving and co-constructing the research with the children and staff at the school and not making presumptions about what is occurring.

Anna Tsing

In looking for more about Tsing, I read an article curiously entitled *The Buck, The Bull, and the Dream of The Stag: Some Unexpected Weeds of the Anthropocene* (2017). The article discusses the ‘rewilding’ of an old coal site in Denmark and also how the state date of the Anthropocene era could be defined. Tsing discusses the ‘weeds’ that occur in places – these are things, sometimes animals or plants, that make a home for themselves in a place that they were not put. I wonder as I write this if Liana is a ‘weed’ in my research. She is not one of the children whose parents elected for them to take part but she has joined in regardless. I wonder about the ethics of writing about her, when, although I have her assent, I do not have her parents’ consent. How ethical is it for me to approach the parents – shall I simply put another form into her back and hope that this time it gets returned? I am assuming a ‘no’ because I do not have a ‘yes’. This feels in most cases the right thing to do but as Liana approaches me every time I am in the playground, I feel am pushed to explore how to write about her interest and the role she plays in an ethically responsible way.

I was also interested in Tsing’s identification of the different things in the world and the roles they have and her use of the phrase ‘more-than-human-social-worlds’ (p.17) in the conclusion of the article, sums up an approach that is not limited to merely the human but goes beyond this. It draws me back to my golden research hat and how an item of clothing can by itself be distinct and embody meaning. This can be shared meaning as the children and I may regard the hat in a similar way. Tsing references Helen Veran’s (2001) book where she uses the word ‘ontics’. Veran’s book – *Science and an African Logic* is described by Onyango (2001) as an ‘ethnomathematical’ approach and the book begins with three case studies of Veran’s observations of mathematics lessons in Nigeria. Here the word ‘ontics’ appears to imply different ways of being. As we move into different spaces, we react differently to the world around us, the idea of young children running down long corridors which was mentioned by Ingold in the book I read last week. We are rooted in the ‘here and now’ ontically, in what we are doing, how we are doing it and perhaps even our thinking and approach. I began to look at the philosopher Martin Heidegger’s work on this but have a lot still left to learn!!

Things to do:

- Ask the one girl remaining for her pseudonym.

- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.
- Read articles – ‘Horses in the Sandpit’ and ‘Reconceptualising Children’s Agency’
- Read more by Tsing & Heidegger.

Global Childhoods Beyond the North-South Divide

by Meichsner, Sylvia; Bourdillon, M. F. C; Twum-Danso, Afua

2019

This Week's Reflections : 17th Jan 2020

The first week back after the three-week holidays and it has not been too productive data wise!! The main achievements of this week were to do an observation, to agree a pseudonym for the one remaining girl and to give a parental consent form out to Sarar.

13th January Observation

As I entered the playground I was greeted by

“You’ve got that hat on again!”

Year 1 child 13-1-20

I found a chair near the fence and sat down behind the pirate ship. It was not a clear view of the playground as various areas were obstructed but it seemed a very natural place for me to sit. The difficulty with this was that as people walked past me they spoke to me about ‘Deputy-Head’ business. This led me to reflecting as to whether part of my research role is to be disruptive to that image of deputy head and to wonder if the hat would enable me to do something ‘unheadish’ such as lie on the grass in the middle of the play area? Today the sandpit was covered in a tarpaulin. So I was unable to follow through on the idea of sitting in that area.

After only a few minutes in the playground, Sarar approached me. (Sarar is the girl who I previously wrote about as Liana. She has actually chose the pseudonym Sarar on her form. The mistake was made as I do not know the real names of all the children.) Sarar asked me

“Can I write in your book?”

Sarar 13-1-20

Almost straight away. Other children then also came around me and asked.

“Why are you writing? What are you doing?”

Year 1 children 13-1-20

Sarar did write in my book a numbered list with comments about her brothers and Dad. I then managed to get my book back and I asked Sarar to go and play. This was because I felt very conflicted about having her be such a part of the research when I did not have parental consent. Sarar however was determined that I was going to pay her attention. She did this by climbing on the ledge behind the chair and walking along it. For the first few minutes she had another girl with her, but after that girl got bored just Sarar continued. She sang a repetitive and rather screeching song that seemed to be designed to annoy me or perhaps just to get a response. When I didn’t respond she then bent down and sang in my ear! At this point I decided to involve Sarar in a more creative way as I was having difficulty spotting the children who had agreed to being observed. I showed her the photo of a child, covering their pseudonym and asked her to find them. She did quickly and ran back to tell me, pointing out the girl. This girl, May, had a completely different hair style to the one I had in the picture! Sarar then was able to tell me that two of the children were off school sick. I realized at this point how much expertise she had and that I needed her help!!!

The Bars



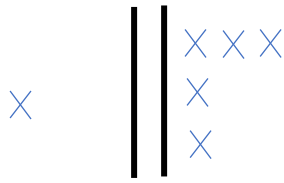
I was sitting on this side of the playground (out of the picture) for the observation.

This photo shows the hanging bars. As you can see, they are on a soft mat area. As I observed the playground it became clear that there were different groups of students gathering around the bars. Both different children and different numbers. I later mentioned to Julia my observations and she said that it is a very social area and she mentioned a girl in her class who rarely played elsewhere. My observations from a distance seemed to indicate that different groups of children passed through the area, some moving away and then returning.

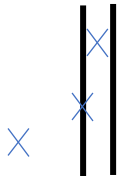
In my first sketch of the play area there were 6 children. There were other areas in the first sketch including a group of children sitting in a circle. As I decide to focus on the bars. I then sketched the bars only and indicated the position of the children as a X. I made these 6 sketches in my research notebook at 5-minute intervals.

(These sketches are reproduced on the next page.) The largest group of children that I saw on the bars was 8 but this was not recorded. In these sketches the largest group was 6 children. The children hung on the bars, chased under and through the bars, lent or just stood around the bars and talked. I wondered again about the significance of the inanimate objects in the playground and whether my future suggestions for the school may be around the use, layout and possible purchase of play equipment to facilitate friendship. This was no something that I had predicted to find. Once again, I fall back to post-humanism

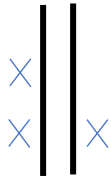
Sketch One – 12.10 pm



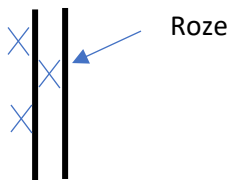
Sketch Two – 12.20 pm



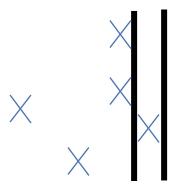
Sketch Three – 12.25 pm



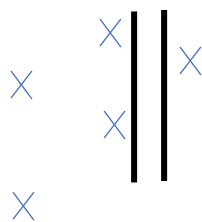
Sketch Four – 12.30 pm



Sketch Five – 12.35 pm



Sketch Six – 12.40 pm



There are clearly more questions to be asked about the bars and it seems that this activity is worth replicating. It seems unlikely that this is a one-off, especially as Julia's remarks seem to echo my own findings.

The Research Participants

I have found it hard to identify the research participants but did manage to record the activities of some of them. Van was around the bar area at the start of playtime. He had his arm in a sling but still managed to lay on the grass and roll around with his friends, go to the wall area. The wall area maybe another area that children use as a social base. There is a narrow ledge that the children are small enough to sit on in relative comfort.

Roze was on the wall before moving to the bars. Natna was also near the bars at one point. Free was walking around the playground hand-in-hand with a friend. Cool and Elsa were also doing the same. Rayan was on the pirate ship and grass areas. There was a group of six children doing gymnastics, including making bridges, on the grass area. Rose was walking around the playground alone for some of the time but was then joined by a boy. When the bell rang, Rose was the last to line up.

The Use of Amharic

The vast majority of the children at school speak Amharic as a first language. Amharic is widely spoken in the playground, although it is discouraged by the teachers as it excludes children who cannot speak Amharic. At the beginning of my observation, a small group of children gathered around me. One of the things that these children asked me was to say words in Amharic. They wanted to see how much Amharic I spoke and clearly were not very impressed!! As I write on this it reminds me of the work of Corsaro in an Italian kindergarten and how they laughed at his Italian. There is much that could be explored about the role of language use in the playground. How much Amharic is spoken? As a school we do not have statistics but anecdotal evidence suggests that it would be a lot. In the secondary school there is a clear message that all languages are acceptable during break times. The use of Amharic is not against any rules in the primary school. Indeed, such a rule would be impossible to enforce, even if desirable, as the children are allowed in a wide area of the campus at break and lunch. They should be within sight of teacher but may well not be within earshot!

Pseudonyms

There was one child who at the end of last term I tried to get to choose a pseudonym on 18th December. I had not heard anything from Julia the teacher and so spoke to Julia when she was on playground duty this week. Together we approached the girl and asked about choosing another name. Julia and I made suggestions such as

“Do you have a favourite girl’s name?” Julia 16-1-20

“What do you like to watch on TV?” Me 16-1-20

Eventually, as we had no responses of any sort from the girl, Julia asked a series of questions so that we got to a name. “I think you like Frozen. Didn’t I see you wearing a dress?” and after a few more unanswered prompts “What is the name of the girl in Frozen?” Finally, “Do you like that name?” (Julia 16-1-20)

The girl who we will now refer to as “Elsa’ seemed very confused by the whole process and unsure of what was happening. Elsa does not communication difficulties. This felt like a drawn out and uncomfortable procedure for us all and made me reflect on the damage that we may do in pursuing such things unnecessarily. Should I have stopped? I did stop back in December. I felt I needed a pseudonym in order to write about Elsa but should I have just chosen one for her rather than subjecting her to this ‘procedure’. I felt it was more of a procedure because of the lack of response from Elsa, it was Julia and I ‘against’ her. We got what we wanted out of the situation but what did Elsa gain and what possible damage did I do? I’m uncertain if there is a way to tell. Perhaps for the future I could create a list of possible names and get the child to point to one. I had felt that this was too leading but I feel now that that matters less than creating discomfort of any sort for the child.

Sarar

Sarar is very keen to take part in the research or is keen to interact with me when I am in the playground. I therefore felt that it was important to explain to her that to be able to write in my book and help me that I had to have her parents sign the form. In order to do this, I printed out another consent form and explained this to Sarar. We then put the form in her bag for her to take home. I have not yet had the form back. I hope that if I get the form, I will be able to ask Sarar to be my research assistant and to get her advice on what is going on in the playground, where to sit and to use her expertise. I feel that I am moving towards the point where I should start to think about the group work part of the research. The student council group could run simultaneously to the observations so that the two research methods can helpfully impact each other.

Of course, I wonder what Sarar thinks I am actually doing she did comment

“You’re just writing lots of things!” Sarar 13-1-20

Things to do:

- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.
- Read articles – ‘Horses in the Sandpit’ and ‘Reconceptualising Children’s Agency’
- Read more by Tsing & Heidegger.

This Week's Reflections : 24th Jan 2020

Overall, I did not get as much done this week as I would have liked

22nd January Observation

Today I decided to focus on the sandpit. I therefore sat near the edge of the sandpit and almost behind the tree. This meant that my view of the remainder of the playground was obstructed. It also meant that I was really only visible to the children around the sandpit. It may be for this reason that today's observation was the only one I have done where Sarar was not next to me for the whole of the observation period. Instead soon after I sat down Efrata approached me.

Efrata and Young Children's Awareness of Issues of Consent

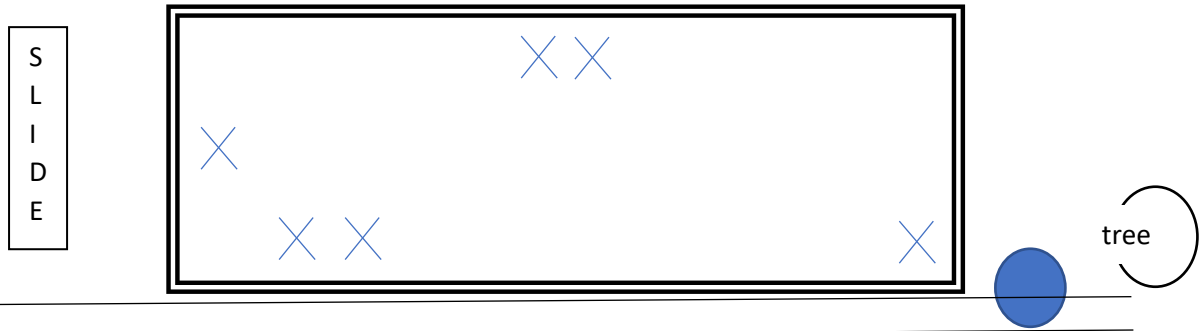
Efrata came up to me and told me "I filled in the form." I replied something positive but non-committal and so she followed up with "I said 'yes!'" She stood expectantly by. Another child also commented about the forms. Efrata repeated herself and so, finally, I checked that she was the same girl I had a photo of on the parental consent photo sheet. As I drew diagrams in my notebook, Efrata asked me about what I was doing and why. She then later on showed me her cartwheels – "Look! I can do this!" and then she herself played in the sandpit.

This exchange with Efrata made me reflect on how aware a young child can be over issues of consent and assent. Efrata filled in her form on the 4th December. Before the Christmas holidays and exactly 7 weeks before our exchange in the playground. However, she appeared clear about having given her permission to take part in what I was doing and was interested in it. Efrata is six years old. I initially wanted to write 'only 6 years old' but when I look at how she tackled her participation in the project it makes me question my presumptions about the abilities of six-year olds. It seems that we can easily jump to the conclusion that a young child does not have the awareness over issues such as assent but this clearly illustrates that they do. Perhaps it is the fact that Efrata was given the agency or power to make the decision for herself about her participation.

The Sandpit

I had observed previously that the sandpit was a centre of social activity. Today's observation backed up this. The first drawing of the sandpit was at 12.15 and shows that there were 6 children in the sandpit. This is the smallest number of children that played there. In order to try and capture the rapidly changing play of the children I drew sketches timed at 3-minute intervals. I used a rectangle with a thickness to indicate the fact that the edge of the sandpit acts like a seat. The children are marked with a X. Xs over the edge of the sandpit were either sitting on sanding on this edge. No names were put on the diagrams, although some of the research participants, such as Efrata, did play in the sandpit. The diagrams show the change in play patterns to a scenario where there was a competition to build the biggest pile of sand. This was largely orchestrated by one of the year 5 play leaders.

Sketch One – 12.15 pm – My position is shown by the circle. Total of children = 6.



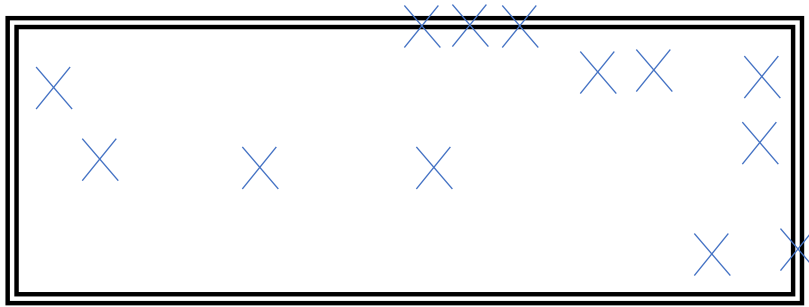
This photo was taken at 12.43pm – after the sandpit emptied.

At this point I spotted a small green truck. I had not seen any of the children playing with this, although it was where a small group of girls was based for most of the playtime.

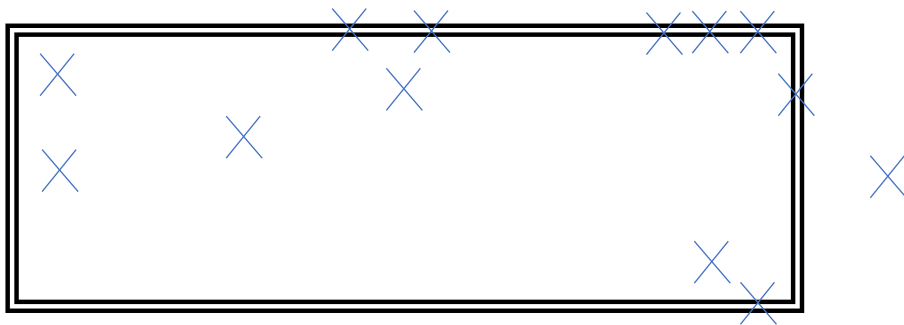
The children played in the sand without any equipment. I did not notice this until after the sandpit had emptied.

The edge of the tukul can be seen in this picture and the slide at the end of the sandpit. In the foreground is the tree that is shown in the first sketch.

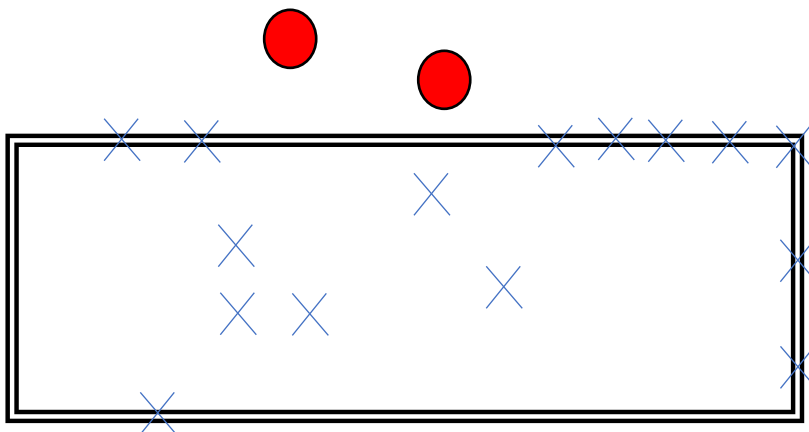
Sketch Two – 12.18 pm Total of children = 13.



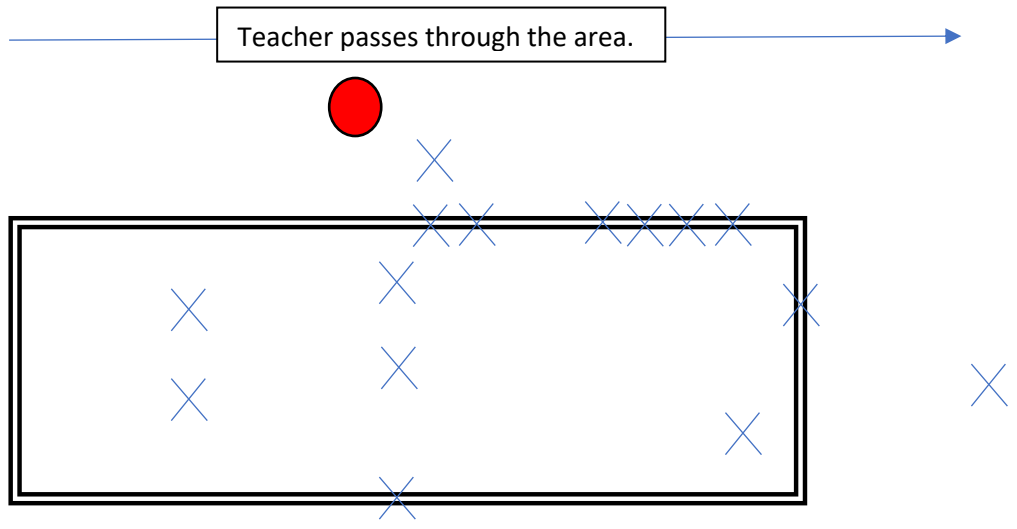
Sketch Three – 12.20 pm Total of children = 13.



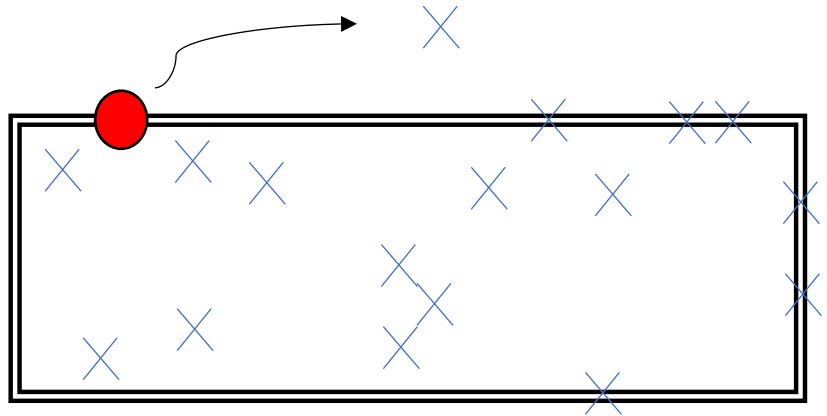
Sketch Four – 12.21 pm Total of children = 15. The red circles are the year 5 playleaders.



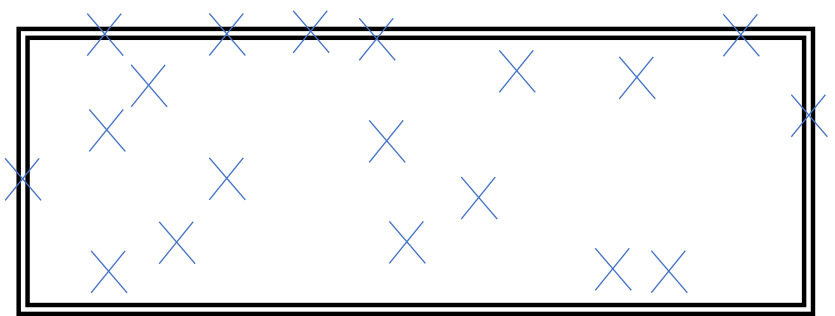
Sketch Five – 12.23 pm Total of children = 15.



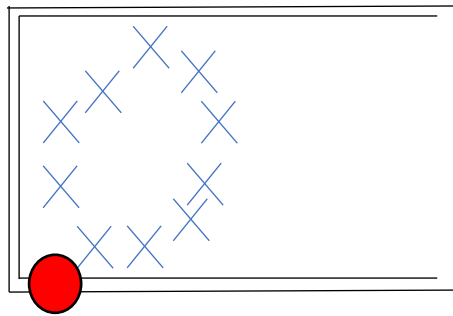
Sketch Six – 12.25 pm Total of children = 17.



Sketch Seven – 12.27 pm Total of children = 19.



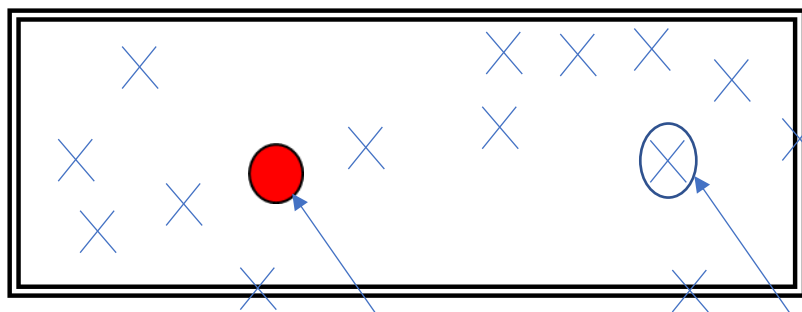
Sketch Eight – 12.29pm – 10 children join in and pour sand at the same time – they call “Yeah!” as they do it.



I did not make any comments about what was going on. However, one of the teachers, Lucy, came past, she spoke to the group and then said to me “They keep getting it into people’s eyes.”

The group then became more organised. One of them announced “This is a competition! Whoever has the biggest mountain will win!” One of the playleaders then stepped in and shouted “Stop! Stop!” She then tried to create a competition between girls and boys.

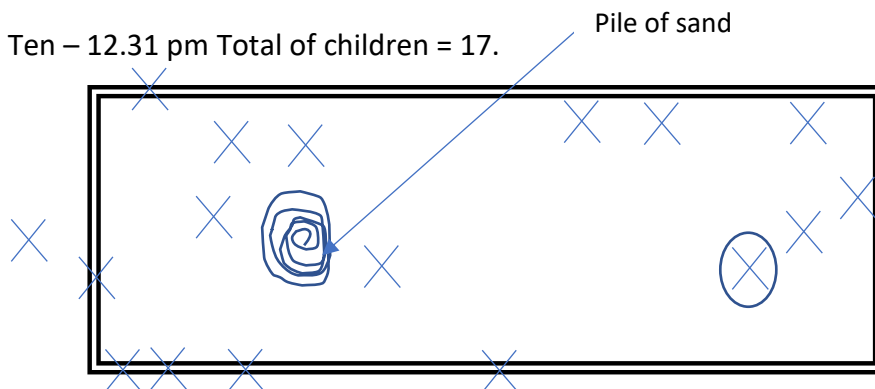
Sketch Nine – 12.29 pm Total of children = 14.



“Stop! Stop!”

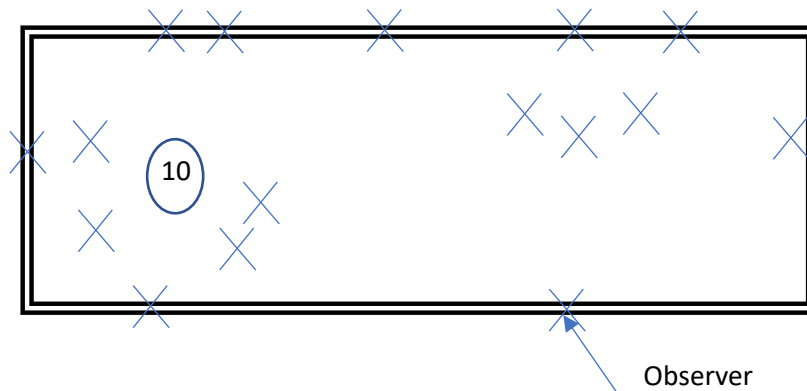
Stamps on the girls pile – the girls look to see what I will do. I don’t react.

Sketch Ten – 12.31 pm Total of children = 17.



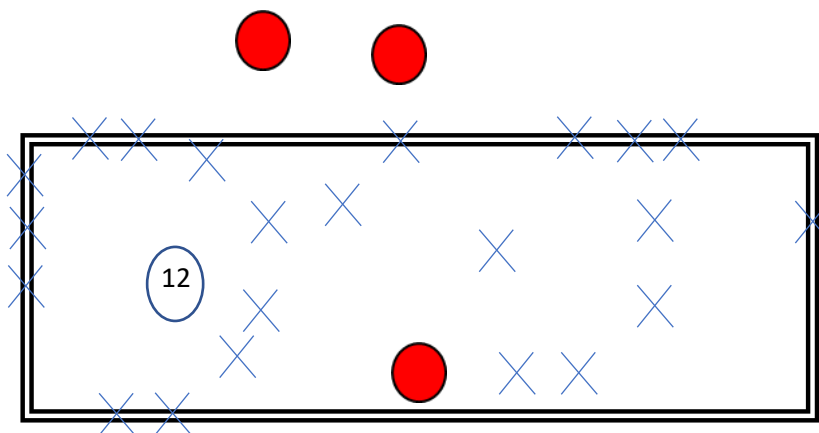
Pile of sand

Sketch Eleven – 12.33 pm Total of children = 16 - 21.



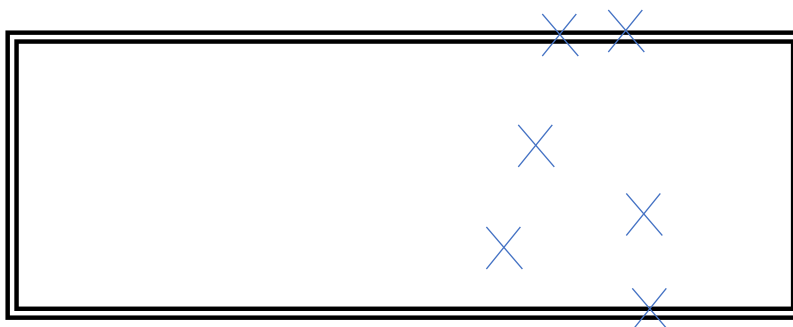
At this point, the year 5 playleader shouted "Start!" and 10 boys started shovelling the sand with their hands to create a pile. One boy broke away from the group and approached the girls. He asked "Can I play?" One of the girls responded with "You're on that team!" and pointed towards the boys. One of the boys then shouted "The boys are winning!"

Sketch Twelve – 12.35 pm Total of children = 22 - 34.



As can be seen in the sketch, at this point the sand competition became very large and involved roughly one third of the year group. The year 5 playleaders then introduced the idea of being out. This may have been in response to the year one children starting to throw sand. One playleader said "You're out!" as other children used the playleader as referees or someone to appeal to "He's just destroying ours!"

Sketch Thirteen – 12.37 pm Total of children = 6.



At this point children could see that the bell was about to ring and so started to leave the sand pit. Although some children did go back in the sand, most children left the area quickly and by 12.39 the sand pit was completely empty. One boy, who was later reprimanded, ran back into the sand pit and then back out again. He was spotted by one of the year 5 playleaders who told the teacher. As I look at this final sketch I realize that the playtime started and ended with 6 children. I wonder if they are the same children? It was very difficult for me to follow who the children in the sandpit were. I wonder about asking the children to wear coloured bibs (such as worn for PE) so that I can follow them more easily but this seems as if it may intrude on the freedom of playtime. Perhaps I could ask the children who have opted in to chose to wear a bib if they wish.

Playleaders

This was the first observation where I saw the Year 5 playleaders in action. This is a voluntary role that was created within the school to give the older primary students an opportunity to take some responsibility as well as having the chance to play with the younger children some of whom are younger siblings, cousins or friends. The Year 5 children wear red hats with the words Play Leader on them – this is why I represent them with red circles in the sketches. The playleaders appeared to really enjoy the organisational part of the role. At the end of playtime they were shouting “Get out! Get out!” and then “Clean your shoes!” I wondered if the sand pile game would have been gender based if the year 5 playleader had not made that decision. I also wondered what other stereotypes the Year 5 children are inadvertently teaching the Year 1s.

Roles

Not all the children in the sandpit area were playing. There was a significant number of children who simply stood or sometimes sat and observed what was going on. Most often these were single children but there were also pairs and groups. It leads me to consider the different roles that are carried out by children at playtime – the organisers, observers and the joiners-in! This is something to think more about!

Things to do:

- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.
- Read articles – ‘Horses in the Sandpit’ and ‘Reconceptualising Children’s Agency’
- Read more by Tsing & Heidegger.

This Week's Reflections : 1st Feb 2020

This week has been incredibly busy with interviews of potential new staff and reports out to parents. I haven't managed to do any observations.

Conversation with Julia

I had a conversation with Julia on Friday 31st January about the research and in particular about the sand pit. I told her about the group playing last week and how I felt that a sand pit area was an important social device. Julia told me that she had a plan to construct a sand pit in an area of the other playground. She raised three issues. The first was that some staff had said that only having one sandpit made it something special. The implication being that if there was another sandpit it would not be used in the same way. The second issue was the quality of sand as the current sandpit is filled with builder's sand. I spoke about the fact that many schools are now using mud and that the most recent Hope Education catalogue I looked at was full of mud play equipment. (for example, p.139-140) The quality of sand was one reason why the school had previously had 4 small sandpits in the playground. Julia said that they were useless as they only fitted 3 children in and you couldn't sit down in them. Indeed, it did appear that the size of the sandpit allowed a different kind of play. We then looked around the playground and identified a possible site for a new sandpit. It is on a raised concrete platform, next to one of the playhouses. Julia commented that it would be easier to clean up this area and that she had previously bought dustpan and brushes so that the children could sweep up and put the sand back in the box when they had finished. I reflected to Julia that I was surprised that my research had led to me suggesting the purchase of equipment. However, the research coupled with my new leadership role puts me in a strong position to make improvements to the play facilities.

Hohti (2016) Children Writing Ethnography: Children's Perspectives and Nomadic Thinking in Researching School Classrooms.

Hohti starts her article with the introduction that

“Schools have historically been studied in relation to issues considered important by adult researchers or pedagogues, with the focus usually being on educational aims. Matters brought up by the children, even if children are in the majority in schools, have not been equally taken into account or used as the focus of scientific interest. In this respect, children can be regarded as a voiceless minority.”

Hohti (2016) p. 74

This resonated with my experience of schools as places where the thoughts and opinions of teachers and parents matter more than those of children. The article also had the similarity that the researcher was also a teacher and that this created a different and less distinct separation of roles:

“Thus, from the beginning, the research setting blurred the divide between practice and research, between teacher and researcher and between the knower and the known.”

Hohti (2016) p. 75

The rest is still to read!!!

Things to do:

- Present the PowerPoint to the remaining staff on duty at lunchtimes.
- Ask the staff who have not yet done so to choose pseudonyms.
- Observe the year 1 children again as many times as possible this week.
- Read articles – ‘Horses in the Sandpit’ and ‘Reconceptualising Children’s Agency’
- Read more by Tsing & Heidegger.

This Week's Reflections : 1st Mar 2020

There has been along gap due to me being in the UK and then because of staff training.

26th February Observation – Role Conflict

This observation had a very different feel about it to the other observations that I have done. It was the first time that I have felt really conflicted in my two roles – researcher and Deputy Head. Organisationally, today differed from the other observations because both Year 2 and Year 1 children were in the playground. From the start my role was conflicted. It was crazy hair day and I took off my wig to put on my researcher's hat – the gesture was, at least to me, symbolic of a change of position and role. However, it was not as clear cut as I hoped that it would be. I sat with my gold hat on the side steps where I could see most of the playground. My position was also selected because I wanted to stop the Year 4 children in the top playground coming down the stairs and the Year 1 and 2 children going up the stairs. So, although I had my research hat on, I was undertaking the role of Deputy Head too.

Almost immediately I was approached by Year 2 children who were excited to see me. They asked me what I was doing and I explained. In response to my explanation one child pointed and told me

“That boy over there! He is not being nice. He snatched his water bottle.”

Reflecting now I wonder about children choosing to report poor behaviour and get other children into trouble. I had not mentioned looking for such behaviour but rather I said I was looking at how Year 1 played together. Perhaps the poor behaviour is a blockage to friendship. However, I wonder whether my role of Deputy Head and so, solver of all problems(!) also leads to an increased number of children approaching me. There is a crossover in my roles. Abem is a Year 1 boy that I have known for several years. He come up to talk to me. One of the things he said was

“Some of the Year 5 and 6 children did this. (Demonstrated gestures with his hands) I just went to talk to the teacher and year 5 and 6 got time out by their teacher.”

The moral of the story seemed to me to emphasis that he told someone and it was sorted out. The culprits got their punishment!

Although the Year 1 and 2 children were both in the playground, they seemed not to be playing with each other but rather around each other. I decided to focus my observation on the slide because it seemed unused by any children. However, as I watched I saw children: climbing up; running down; sliding down; making a train; jumping off and sitting underneath. The behaviour seemed to become increasing more dangerous. The playground rule is that the slide is for sliding only! At this point I felt the most conflicted that I have done in all my observations. For a few minutes I observed but I felt that it would

remiss of me not to act when an accident seemed imminent. I spoke to Taitu, who was one of the teachers on duty. I simply said

“Can you watch the slide.”

There were a group of four Year 1 boys playing dangerously. Taitu went over and spoke to the boys who then stopped some of their dangerous play. They did then continue when she turned her back.

Dlena then came to talk to me. She said

“Can you guess my brother’s name? It begins with an A.”

Year 1 children often use my knowledge of their siblings as a way to engage me in conversation. It is a clever tactic and mimics something that adults would do. I wonder whether it may be an indicator of certain social skills that will help children start conversations, build relationships and make friends.

At the end of the playtime I took off my hat and went to speak to both Julia and Taitu. I asked them to remind the children of the rules for playing on the slide. I felt that I had a responsibility to do this after my observation. However, I also felt slightly conflicted and a bit guilty, as if I was deceiving them, I had been there as a researcher and I had used my finding against them. I am aware of the necessity of treading carefully. Overall, I feel that my responsibility to keep the children safe has to pre-empt the other conflicting factors.

2nd March Observation – Loners

In order to refocus my observation on the research question I decided to observe children who were isolated and alone during playtime. The thinking behind this was that these may be children who are having difficulty making friends.

As with all observations a moments glance may present one picture whilst continuing to watch for a longer period indicates something else. The observation of Michael Jackson illustrates this. Michael Jackson was one of the children I observed. He was initially playing on the bridge by himself and interacted for a short time with another boy before the other boy wandered off. Michael Jackson then started crying and clutching his stomach. This caused other children to approach him. First two boys and then two girls came. One girl came and hugged him. The teacher on duty then approached and Michael Jackson was sent to the nurse. My initial observation may be that Michael Jackson was on his own because of a lack of friends. However, the reason revealed by further observation seems to suggest that he was not feeling well and it seems likely that this was the reason for him choosing to be alone. Of course, I may be making incorrect assumptions here and Michael Jackson may be alone at other times too.

Another child who may be considered to be alone for a reason was Ocko. I observed a boy named Ocko for the last five minutes of playtime. I first noted Ocko making owl eyes with his fingers. At this time, he was sitting on the ledge by the wall alone. A minute later he was approached by the Year 6 play leader, presumably to see what was wrong, Cool and Ella listened to this conversation and the play leader then left. Ocko remained in the same

place. Other children approached him, including a boy who came several times. However, Ocko stayed on the wall, only shifting to move position and hug his legs. When the bell went for the end of play Ocko remained where he was (rather than moving to line up). When he did move, he walked slowly with his hands hanging down. It appeared that Ocko had a had a disagreement with one of his friends and that was the reason for him choosing to be alone.

Children have the same right as adults to choose to be alone and indeed with sometimes, like adults, feel the need to be alone. I noted several children alone at different times but this usually only lasted for a minute. For example, Roseile cartwheeling; Van wandering; Rose looking for her friend (she then linked arms with her and walked off); Natna sitting on the wall; Van crawling on the grass (and then was joined by others) and Roseile sitting in the pirate ship and putting something in her mouth.

The other longer moments of being alone maybe because of a range of factors like Michael Jackson's sickness or Ocko's probable disagreement. PR was a girl who seemed to be alone for another reason. I first noted her alone on the hanging ropes. She is passed by other children but they do not interact with her. PR then walked along the edge of the playground on the wall that forms a ledge. She moved towards a boy called YG but as she did YG ran off. PR continued along the wall, she approached the teacher and Year 6 playleader. There were several children in the play house and PR went in. PR observed the other children. She made no attempt to interact. She hovered around the door, moving in and out. Watching PR on the edge of the circles of play that were occurring I realised that she would have been hidden if I was to do a momentary glance around the playground. PR was near the other children but not interacting with them. Her use of the play equipment like the hanging ropes, which is an individual task, and hanging around the door of the house, both seemed to mask the reality of her aloneness. Once again, the interaction between the play equipment and the child seems crucial.

YG also seemed to use the play equipment in some ways as a mask. He was on the edge and alone for most of the time. He used the hanging rope, balancing logs and climbing wall. All activities that are individual and that he did alone although there were other children around.

The focus on loners was not possible in the most recent observation. However, it does seem that it is an interesting focus and brings to light a different dimension of the playground. It may also help me identify children to participate in the focus group.

Things to do:

- Read Sue's ethics articles.
- Speak to teacher in charge of student council.
- Speak to Head of school about sending out focus group invites to student council.
- Arrange place, time and recording for focus group.
- Distribute invites to Year 1 student council members.
- Carry out observations.

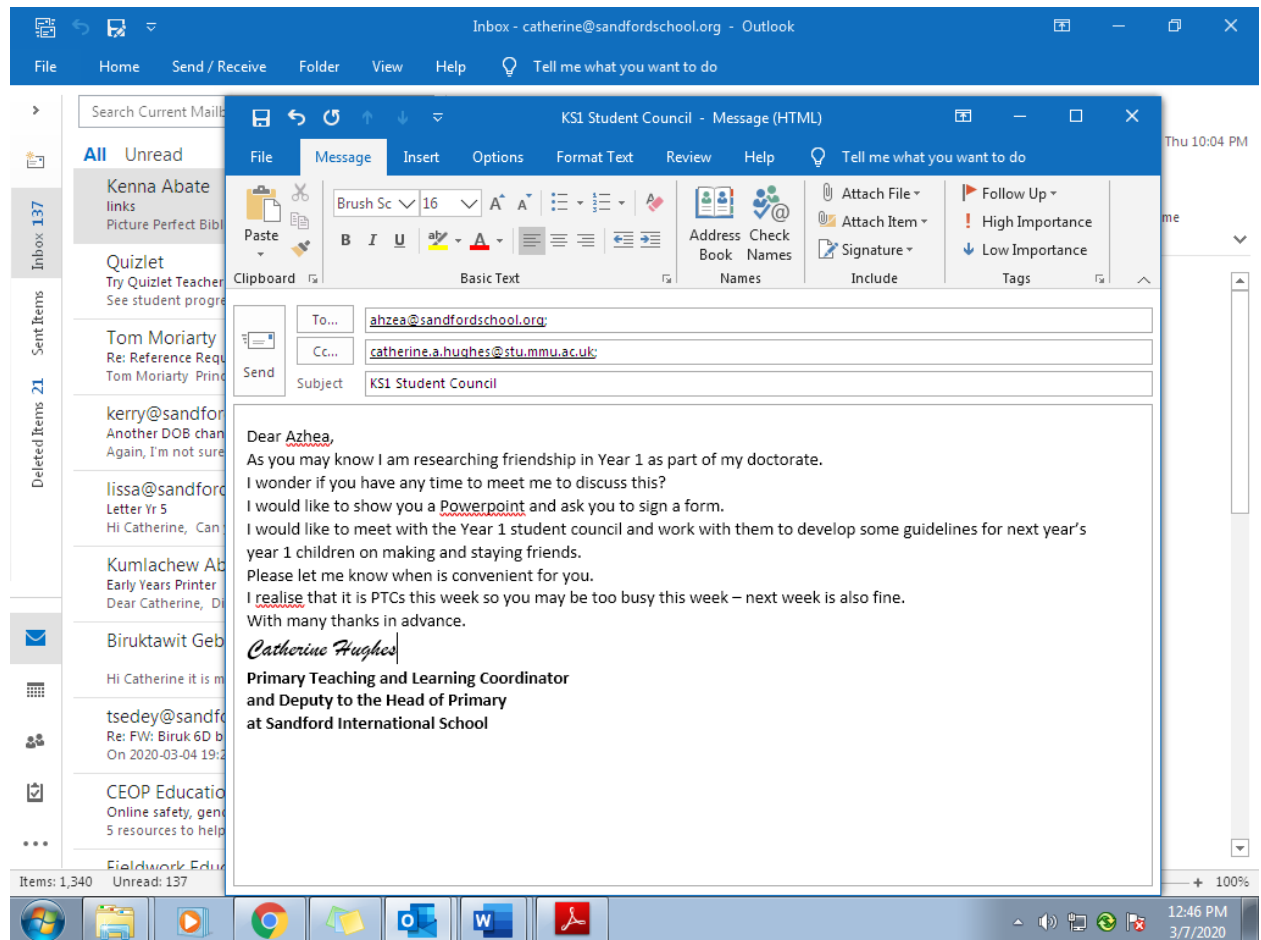
This Week's Reflections : 7th Mar 2020

Another hectic week at school. I have been Acting Head and we have Parent Teacher Conferences and Sports Day next week plus World Book Day, interviews for new teachers etc....

Focus Groups

I have realised that the wording on my ethics form will need to be changed in order for me to use it before the school fete. The mini-bazaar has already happened. I have emailed Adam about this.

I have also emailed the teacher responsible for the Student Council.



I have realised that as we finish school in June, I only have 14 weeks of school until the end of the academic year. I hope to get all the data collection finished during this time.

Things to do:

- Read Sue's ethics articles.
- Speak to Head of school about the focus group invites and videoing children.
- Arrange place, time and recording for focus groups.
- Distribute invites to Year 1 children and parents.
- Carry out observations.

Appendix R: Interview Prompts

Can you describe some of the different children's friendships that you have seen this year in Year One.

Can you share your thoughts on how Year One children make friends.

What about how children maintain those friendships?

As you know, my observations were done in the playground, I am currently interested in the role that the equipment in the playground plays in children's relationships. Can you share your thoughts on this?

How reflective is what happens in the playground of what is happening in the classroom and so what is the impact on learning of what happens in the playground?

Researcher: Okay, my first question, I wondered if you could just describe for me some of the different children's friendships that you have seen in Year One this year.

Julia: Okay, so, I would say, particularly with the type of class we have, this year in Year One, the friendships we have are quite different. 'Cos we get so many new children, classes are mixed. So I feel like it takes all of Year One quite a bit of time, even if they are with children that they knew from the year before, which is a bit weird but I have noticed, that, maybe because it is they are Year One and the level of English, different children have, but, um, it does seem (0:01) to take a bit of time for kids to get back into the swing of things in the first term. So, when you mean type of friendships? Some kids grab onto people they recognise from last year, for a few weeks. Some, I notice, a lot of boys in my class, will not necessarily, chat so much but when they get in the playground, they, sort of make friends by, if someone is running around - someone will just run around with them and they manage to, sort of, end up having a friendship like that, outside. I don't really, when you say type of friendship, what? Do you mean the name for it? Or what they are doing when they make friends?

Researcher: Yeah, well both, both.

Julia: Okay. So, there is often a group, a group (0:02) of girls, there always appears a group of girls, four or five girls and there are usually one or two who are really popular and chatting and confident who seem to attract three or four friends. And maybe a little girl, may be with pretty clothes and I don't know whether they want it or not but it just always seems that there is one who is more confident in there.

Researcher: Right yeah.

Julia: And then there is type of (kid?) that just seem to be on their own for quite a long time and then maybe around Christmas, it doesn't always happen but I will see them in the playground, quite happy like, so, can I use kid's names?

Researcher: Yeah, I will change them. (0:03) So yeah.

Julia: Okay, someone like Jol will play on the bars, for the whole of the first term on her own, and seemed okay. I just noticed that her and I think Xyz was one. You know, when you are watching to make sure that kids are playing with someone. So, there's always a few, I can think of someone else, Roseile actually, who are often alone and they look happy at playtime and I am not worried about them but I suppose I often, help them to join a group, which isn't necessarily what they want but I suppose we all think that everybody wants a group of friends. But, um. So it's always a bit, it is interesting in Year One I think because the level of English also matters (0:04) because sort of

the complexity of the games or how much language is needed as part of the game effects who can play in which group, I think. Um,yeah? (Pauses)

Researcher: No, that's right. Thank you..... Sorry, I just want to type this bit.

Julia: Type away!

Researcher: Yeah. Thank you!

Julia: No chill!

Researcher: Perfect! So, the next one is, you sort of covered it a little bit, really, in particular how they make friends, you said about the boys, can you talk a little bit more about that.

Julia: So, basically, with boys, okay, (0:05) so I will talk about this year group as opposed to generally but I just noticed it with, they may take a bit longer and to, I don't know, the way they approach each other is very different from girls. They just join in and then they are part of the same thing every playtime, boys, it is difficult to talk about it in class we are so much control as a teacher and splitting them into ability grouping so maybe they are not with someone who they naturally want to make friends with. But, so the playground is probably the best. But they, yeah, I think they often go to the kid who makes people laugh for the boys, the one who is quite confident, that is something that they really, most of the kids except some quiet ones, like, (0:06) students, ones who are quite loners. I think of Micaygrloner, walks in every day ... makes the kids laugh, gets lots of attention but his playtime feels, almost, I can't think what the word is, random, but just sort of, running around having small interactions with lots of different groups, you know like, a bit like – Raah! I'm with the football! Raaah! I'm playing tag! (Laughs) Nothing, sort of, not settled for the whole of playtime. A bit more sort of, switch friendships.

Researcher: Yeah

Julia: I would say that he looks happy doing that, but it's just, that
(indistinguishable)

Researcher: Yeah.

Julia: Not all of them, I have got a (0:07) boy who made friends with another very quiet girl. It was the most beautiful friendship I have seen in my time in Year One. They sat next to each other on the carpet for the whole of the first term and never spoke. And then just watching them play on the climbing frame, they are (undistinguishable – friendship ambulance siren) after Christmas. And in fact, I asked both parents, did, just because I was fascinated about them, the way that they had made friends, had, such and such is seeming much more confident at the moment has she mentioned that she has made a

new friend? And I asked the same ... and neither child had mentioned their new friendship, to their parents. Which I thought was really interesting....

Researcher: Yeah.

Julia: Cause (0:08) this was after a good two weeks, a good month and other people noticed, like Desta noticed this friendship. It was just so lovely. So and then there is, I feel like every year there is a girl, or a boy, who feels very separate and parents will come in and say so and so says that they have no friends. That happens every year I think in Year One with some one or two and they often are talking about this popular group and saying that maybe one of them doesn't want them to join, or, you know, we are already part of a group, you don't need to and so. That's always really sad because obviously it's very hurtful and difficult to navigate for that child. Obviously, it's something (0:09) that's, you know, they have to figure out a way around it in the playground. But that always happens. There was a kid who literally survived the whole year, just like on their own - just bobbing around doing their own thing. Yeah - it's a funny year, Year One, I think. Because also they are in a playground with Year Twos. So I think sometimes friendships, you know the more street wise kids want to connect with them – especially, I feel like the boys, more than the girls, want to connect with the cool dudes in Year Two. That does happen, not a lot, but then there can be behavioural problems. (10:00) Um Yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

Julia: Okay, I wish you told me to look out for this more.

Researcher: No that's cool, so can you just go back a little bit, to the ones you were saying the beautiful friendship, you were talking about. Yeah?

Julia: Say again? Say that again.

Researcher: You talked about the beautiful friendship between two kids who they sat on the carpet and never spoke and then you watched them play on the climbing frame and then after Christmas their friendship blossomed. Yeah?

Julia: Yeah.

Researcher: Those two kids, were they girls?

Julia: No, a boy and girl.

Researcher: Okay.

Julia: Both, equally quiet, quite similar in personality. In that, you know, very polite, very disciplined, (0:11) well behaved, two little people, and then just in their friendship, their personalities have, came out more and so even, nicely confidence maybe – talking when they shouldn't be – things like that, it was really nice to see, you know, once they developed that friendship I felt that

other sides of their character came out in the classroom. So that they gained some huge confidence by having that relationship with each other. And I have put them in the same class together next year. (Laughs)

Researcher: Yeah.

Julia: But, as I say, I haven't seen that before in Year One so that is why it was so noticeable. And I notice that a lot of their playing is that they are doing something, but a lot of it is chatting. (0:12) So I feel like some of the friendship, sort of, a lot in Year One is just lots of running around after each other in some form, whether it is football or tag or although there are others sitting around the playgroundchit – chatting. I think that's more Year Two. Umm

Researcher: Okay, that's great thank you. I just wanted to clarify.

Julia: Okay.

Researcher: Right, okay, so next question, was,okay. How do you think, how do you think those children, how do you think the children in Year One maintain (0:13) their friendships?

Julia: Throughout the year you mean?

Researcher: Yeah, so once they have made a friend, how do they? Once they have made a friend, how do they keep that friend?

Julia: Well, interestingly enough – it's different in our school because I think friendship normally, what I have seen in other schools, when they start going to each other houses, that and that gets parents get involved as well and the parents gets to know the child – that seems to make the friendship a lot stronger and that is not something that happens in our school, which could be, I don't know what, for whatever reason, could be just the flipping geography of Addis Ababa, (0:14) but, so, for the children, they have to make a bigger effort to maintain the friendship they haven't got adult input in that way. I think we, as adults, help a lot sometimes, or parents do, when they see a good friendship they sort of make it more possible to meet up. So, they don't have that and so I think that there is a lot more pressure for it to work in the playground for them. So in terms of how they manage it, I think, they do try, if there is an opportunity to free play or whatever or work with a partner, if I say, if the teacher says "Right, we're all going to get with a partner," even if that person is on the other side of the carpet you see their eyes to look at each other and... So they will try to as much as possible to always get to work with someone (0:15) from their group or that friend, or line up together, or in Golden Time they'll always make sure that they are with that person and ... There is not that much opportunity in Year One because a lot of their work is done by ability grouping and it's only just luck if that friend is in that group. So, it is hard I think for them within the classroom

for them sort of to have friends. In the playground, trying to keep it going with the same person or same group. And I just think sometimes it is very hard (0:16) to be part of any group – not just what seems to be the most popular group. I think they sometimes struggle and I don't hear the word 'best' friend as much - as I have heard it in other schools. Yeah. (Pause) I think there are quite a few children who just play in a different group each day actually, when I think about that now, whereas ... the dynamics seem a little different, or quite a lot different, at Sandford. They do seem (0:17) to have a good friend from the year before and then be put into another class. Some will play with their old friend from the year before, and hang onto that, I've seen that quite a few times. And then others, at the beginning of the year are distraught not to be with the best friend from the year before but then have settled and started a new sort of group and maybe don't even play with that person. I am thinking of April, whose parents, they were very upset that she wasn't with someone....

I don't know if this is helpful Catherine!

Researcher: Yeah, it is. It is. (0:18) Give me one second. Let me, um, Sorry! I just need to write this down otherwise I will forget. I am not sure, one hundred percent confident that it is recording so if I don't write this down I will be stuck. Right, cool, brilliant.

Julia: No, chill.

Researcher: Right so, as you know, my observations were done outside in the playground,

Julia: Yeah

Researcher: I didn't get to do any indoor, so I am quite interested in the role that the equipment plays in children's relationships. (0:19)

Julia: Um, humm.

Researcher: Can you share what you think?

Julia: Yeah that is a huge thing, I think, in the playground for us – (Loud siren in background) if they have got something they can, have or do together, it helps promote their chatting or anything like thatThe more the better, I would say, the more equipment. Not, you know, not, it's funny, I feel like the standing equipment, the sort of climbing frame stuff, has almost with different children a shelf-life they will (indistinguishable) – to go for the hoops, the skipping rope or the things that they're having themselves (0:20) to do something more than just climbing on it. So that the long piece of wood, sort of stretch where you carry along a pathway kind-of-thing on the right hand side of the Key Stage One playground*, and that doesn't seem to get used much, um, the climbing frame does, the slide does, I would say that area in the middle for football. I mean, as soon as the football appears the

boys are over-the-moon and yeah, I would say in terms of equipment, the stuff where they are doing more or having to pick it up or do something with it. It seems to Also, the sandpit. The sandpit is so popular – (0:21) there is just usually 20 children – up to 20 sometimes, ok maybe not that many, it's probably between 10 and ??, it's not the biggest sandpit but, in the other playground, I think more would if they could – I wonder how much chatting they do there? I haven't passed but sometimes I wonder are they playing on their own in there? Or are they chatting? Probably a bit of both.

The bars in Early Years are very popular. But I would say, there's some equipment, or some of those climbing things I have honestly, not seen hardly anyone one but skipping ropes to take out, hoops, I'm sure bats and balls and things like that, (0:22) seem to be really popular but in terms of friendship, yeah I'm sure playing things together – It seems to make them socialable, whereas when they are climbing they are sort of on their own doing it. You've probably seen the opposite!

Researcher: Okay, cool. Last, last question, you will be happy to know! How reflective is what happens in the playground of what happens in the classroom and you kind of talked a little about this that they might choose different people and stuff and so, kind of leading onto that, what is the impact (0:23) on learning of what happens in the playground?

Julia: Hum, you mean how, so, the impact on learning So, I'm ... You want me to think about a friendship that I have seen in the playground and how those particular children, whether that friendship effects learning. Yeah, so, if ... interesting. So, I would put, so the two children who have a lovely relationship if I put, in group work I think they would achieve more those or they do seem to get more done in partner or group things that at they would if I put them with other children. Because I think they have more confidence, so they would, you know, rather than in group work (0:24) someone sitting back and letting others ... thing. Some friendships are ... I would say, can be a little bit, they seem to be, it happens a lot with girls, falling out one day, great friends the next, falling out one day, great friends the next, so in terms of being in the classroom – I would say, could be, that some friendships can be quite volatile and might not be, might not impact that well on their learning because yeah, I think just if there is a dominant one in the group -then just like in the playground the same situation might happen within a group task - one person, that person will take over ... (0:25) so I suppose, it's depending on the type of friendship that exists between the kids the way it would help or not help their learning inside – Also, sometimes, I know a lot for teachers do this – which, just, may benot the way we're supposed to do itbut you know these two just absolutely love something ...I am just going to make sure that they are not next to each other today or any time because they won't achieve the aim of the particular, or whatever

the lesson is, and that might be more helping the teacher in their managing rather than that friendship – Humm, I am doing the wrong thing! So that I think that could be sometimes as decision made just because life is easier whereas it would be interesting to let them (0:26) work together and see if that does result in better work. I wish I would have done that now you know so that I could have answered your questions.

Researcher: (Laughs.)(pause) Yep!

Julia: Um Cool!

Researcher: Right, so that's kind of my questions, is there anything else that you think I should be asking you?

Julia: Not at the moment. Can I? If something occurs to me can I email it?

Researcher: Yeah, sure – that would be really good.

Julia: Because, when I am wandering around, I might suddenly (0:27) think of something that has happened or that was interesting, like the dynamic was unusual or, I mean maybe it's more generalised what you are thinking about, but, you know when you think about something, it's not until later that a whole load of other stuff pops out. That tends to happen to me.

Researcher: Yeah. You could do one last thing for me.

Julia: Yep.

Researcher: Which is, just describe yourself. Because, when I write about what you have said, I need to put in who you are. How would you describe yourself?

Julia: You mean, as a teacher or just as a person?

Researcher: Yeah, probably a bit of both, but teacher mainly.

Julia: Okay, so, 53middle aged - teacher(0:28) God! You knew I'd love this!

Researcher: I know, that's why I saved it until last.

Julia: Oooh, I would say, ummm. Good God! I am thinking of in the classroom, okay, I would say – chatty, positive, someone who probably the best part of teaching is chatting with kidsrather than (Indistinguishable) them ... and .. ummm Catherine, help me!

Researcher: What? What did you say? The best part of teaching is chatting with kids rather than what? (0:29)

Julia: Teaching them, but, don't, you can't put that!

Researcher: Laughs

Julia: I say, a sense of humour, in the classroom and Yeah, can I say negative things? (Laughs)

Researcher: If you want to.

Julia: (Laughs) What?

Researcher: If you want to.

Julia: Yeah that, probably It is tough for me I would saybut I think (0:30) I am very caring and I don't know what the word is....when you are, like their, the children's wellbeing is something that will go home with me – I am very committed to all, the all, not just their academic progress, their emotional needs and ... is something that is really important to me as a teacher, like all of it..... Yeah, why I am even trying for another ? This is impossible!

Researcher: Yeah, That's it. But you, you could string that together very positively for your CV actually I think. (0:31)

Julia: What did you say?

Researcher: You could string that together very positively for your CV.....Whole person ... You know?

Julia: Okay. Right! You! I will, at some point.

Researcher: Right! Perfect! I am going to turn off the recording. Hopefully, I am now.

(Ends at 31.28)

* Tricky Trail.

Appendix T: Transcript of Interview with Year One Teacher - Lucy 15th July 2020

Lucy: It hasn't yet.

Researcher: Okay, I wanted to make sure that you had that happens ...

Lucy: This meeting is being recorded. Yeah. Good.

Researcher: I just wanted to make sure that you had got that before I started. Perfect, alright, so, my first question, I wondered if you could describe for me some of the different children's friendships that you have seen in Year One this year.

Lucy: In how they have changed over the year or just in general?

Researcher: Probably both.

Lucy: So, yeah, there are some children that seem to have a friend that they already had at the beginning of the year, from Reception or from Nursery, and then, they stayed very much friends throughout the year. Do you want names?

Researcher: Yeah, you can do, I will change them.

Lucy: Like, for example, there are some of the girls, like, there is a girl called Hemen (0:01) and Cipara and they stayed very good friends throughout the year. And then there were other ones where, it seemed like, children were trying to, work out, things, and they changed a lot. So, for example, there was, there were two boys called Mikel and Ocko and they were both together from Reception, and maybe Nursery, and kind of best friends when they started in Year One. And then, but then that changed quite a lot over the year. And, like at first, there was one of the new children, called Natna and he, kind of joined in with Mikel and Ocko, but he was quite laid back and just kind of joined in. And then later in the year, a couple of, one of the new children, who was called Max, he wanted to be friends (0:02) with Mikel and then also another one of the children wanted to be friends with Mikel. And Ocko just, would get very unhappy if one else was, wanting to be a partner with Mikel, or if he felt that he was not getting his way when they were playing outside. So, that one changed quite a lot of the year and kind of caused them some upsets and things, I think. And, one of them, Max, was, I think, more in control when they were in the playground and Ocko would get upset and those sorts of things. So, there was quite a lot of dynamics in the class with those boys. And some of the other ones who seemed to be a bit more easy-going with who they played with and seemed to play with different people a lot at different times. Um. (0:03)

Some of the children that came at the start of the year seemed to, you know, become more of a group as well, like there was Rayan, and Rose and Efrata. And they, kind of, started off playing more together at the beginning, I think maybe because they had all come in at the same time. Then there was

another boy called Christofer who came, also at, in Year One, he was new this year, and he, I think he at first, his mum was also worried that he was spending a lot of his time on his own in the playground, but then he got to be good friends with Rose and one of the other girls, Sara and preferred playing with those girls. And, Sara also, (0:04) kind of, seemed to be friends with Efrata. Um, (Pause) so they all got to be quite friendly.

And there were some of the other girls that, had been together since Reception or Nursery and they all tended to play together quite a lot, as well, in a bigger ... group, that, kind of, changed more

Researcher: Yeah, Okay. Great, thank you. So, can you, share with me your thoughts on how you think, you've talked a little bit about it in what you've said actually, but, how specifically Year One children make friends.

Lucy: There seem to be, a lot of times they just play together and (0:05) I guess there's a lot of opportunities when they can play together, kind of inside with things, toys on the carpet, or in the playground, or if they are colouring and they seem to JustIf they are playing together and they want to share things together then they start to have those friendships. But I think there are also, they seem to be quite aware of, whose friends with who, and who are their, maybe who are their best friends or who they want to have sitting next to them at birthday party and things like that. And they do seem to have, they do seem to have quite a clear idea of who were their friends, and who weren't and who they wanted to share with and who they didn't want to share with and things like that. Um

Researcher: Yeah. (0:06)

Lucy: Hard to explain

Researcher: Yeah, no, it is. And how, What about how they then, how they then maintain those friendships? How do they, keep them going?

Lucy: I guess partly in who they play with. Who they chose to play games with in the playground. And sometimes they have particular games like those boys, like Ocko and Mikel and the other ones that joined them, they all liked to play these particular superhero games. And so, then some of their arguments would also be about who got to be which superhero and things like that. But because they all had those shared interest in the games that they played together. And, so playing together, or choosing people to be the person they worked with or played with (0:07) was a significant thing.

Or like, with someone like Christofer, or Efrata and Rose it was also, they would play together, liked colouring together, they had similar interests, and the sort of games and activities they chose. And some of the children also got to meet up outside of school. So, I know for example, that Sara and Christofer would go round to play at each other's houses. Rose and Abem

would get to go and play together. Whereas, some children, I know, they didn't get to do that, so maybe that made a difference as well. Whether they got to play together outside of school and visit each other's houses. And sometimes (0:08) I think they did, kind of talk about who's friends with who, and 'Are you my friend?' and that kind of thing as well. So, yeah, I think by, how they played together, and were able to spend time with each other. Um. (Pause)

Researcher: Um, so, as you know, my observations were done in the playground. And I am currently, I am interested in the role that the 'outdoor space' plays in children's relationships. Can you share your thoughts on, on this?

Lucy: (Laughs) I guess, in some ways like (0:09) when you see them out in the playground, and, in some times, their way of playing can be quite fluid in that there's children, are kind of running around, playing a game and then they, someone else wants to join in and they run around too, and they can all join in and through that they end up playing with different children and forming different relationships. So, I think that 'space', where they can run around and get involved in different things, that helps them to, build new friends, friendships, and spend time with other children. So, there might be, like the boys that liked playing the superhero game as well, they were kind of maybe the core group who liked playing the superhero game and then, other ones joined in (0:10) and joined in over the year and some of them became more dominant in it and other ones were kind of tagging on a bit more, sometimes joining in and sometimes not. And, I think, it was mostly through playing those sorts games that the friendships changed, and developed, and in some ways shifted. And the chances that the space outside gives children to opt in to something and then opt out of it and join in with different groups, probably has an impact. And also, I suppose, when children have finished playing outside, at lunchtime or something, and they might come in and say 'Oh, those children didn't want me to play with them today.' or 'That person included me today.' And so, somehow, the (0:11) outside space and that opportunity for freer play seems to have an impact on how they include people or not and how their friendships develop. (Pause)

Researcher: Um, and, what about the, like, the use of the standing, like, the fixed equipment in the playground?

Lucy: Um, I think, it maybe has some impact, like there are some children who, seem just quite happy to do, maybe they want to go and play on the monkey bars, or whatever you call those bars that go across, and so they will go across and dangle off them for a while and they seem to do that quite (0:12) 'independently', not necessarily engaging with other children when they are on it. Although some of the equipment, like the slides and the sort of climbing frame, they seem to often incorporate it more into a game and they are chasing and hiding and things like that. So maybe some of the equipment

seems more like - what they do maybe when they are not with other children, or need something to do on their own, or they just want to do it, and other equipment becomes part of their games.

And I also, I suppose, sometimes it can also, effect who they play with because if they want to play in the little house or they want to play in the sandpit, then they might just go and do that themselves, but then other children will also want to play in the sandpit or in the little house and then they will end up playing together and building things in the sandpit together (0:13) or having a game in the house together. So, some of the equipment they seem to go to more to do things on their own, and other things seem to be more part of their games and other things they seem to mix more.

Researcher: Um..hum. (Pause) Yep! That makes sense, thank you. So, how reflective is what happens in the playground of what is happening in the classroom? And so, what is the impact on learning of what happens in the classroom? You said a little bit about them coming in and saying about 'including' but is there, other things that it impacts?

Lucy: I think, for them, like developing these friendships, is, probably, the main thing on their mind. (0:14) And, if they feel like they have been left out or they are worried about who's their friend, or not their friend, then I think it does have an effect on what happens in the classroom. And if children feel like they are upset when they come in, then (pause) they need to, (pause) even if they seem to settle down and, and you have talked about what happened, then, I think sometimes they are still, maybe focusing on that. So, it could be, that when they are learning – that they are maybe distracted from their learning because what is going on in the playground, possibly.

Also when, in Year One in class, you are trying to teach them about how to work with a partner, how to do paired talk, how to work together in a group (0:15) and sometimes I think those dynamics in the playground can also have an effect. When, like, if you let them choose a partner, then you see that some of those worries about who's friends with who, or things like that, can affect them as well and maybe effect how they want to work with other people. So sometimes, if they don't have a choice of who to work with then it's maybe not as obvious and they will just work with whoever you say. But if you let them choose, then For example, the boy I mentioned, Ocko – if Mikel worked with someone else on something, he might not want to work with another child just because he was upset that, he felt like his friend was getting taken over by someone else, and because of, (0:16) and I think that was because of what was happening in the playground, and he was feeling like he was being left out in the playground but not feeling secure in those friendships and so that had an impact on how he felt about working with different people in class. Um, I think it probably does impact them even if they seem to be kind of getting on with things. (Laughs)....

- Researcher: Okay. (Pause) Great. Okay, thank you. That is actually all of my questions. I wondered though, if there was something else that you were thinking about, knowing what my study was about, that you thought, oh it would be interesting, this bit would be interesting or something you thought (0:17) maybe you thought I 'would' ask you, or, that I didn't ask you, or something like that.
- Lucy: You must be focusing on children coming in from outside of the school and joining Year One and how they? (Pause)
- Researcher: Like, the transition?
- Lucy: Yeah
- Researcher: Yeah. Partly, I think, the impetus for the study was originally was that there is basically one whole class that comes in at that point, because there are sort of 24 kids - 8 in each class. So, it is 'a lot' of new kids into the year group and how they are integrated and it can be a big thing, you know, that integration for the school and how, and how children manage it, when they are so young. I think is, you know, yeah, that was kind of the impetus behind it, I think. So, (0:18)
- Lucy: And I did think it, it maybe, it depended obviously on the children who came in but, um, I don't know if it's just by chance, or if it always happens in Sandford, that some of the children who came in were more of the 'international students' as well.
- Researcher: Right.
- Lucy: So like, Rose and Rayan and even though Christofer and Natna had a parent who was Ethiopian, they also had a parent who was English, and so some of them. Especially like Rose and Rayan they didn't speak Amahric and things like that. So I think, I don't know if that had an effect on whether, on them grouping together more and also on some children like Abem, who also has an English parent, he immediately (0:19) became more friendly with Rose and got on well with, the other, um, Rayan as well. So, I don't know if, whether they were 'International', or whether they spoke Amharic and things, also came into it. Um, whereas, also, whereas there was also another new girl called Biti, who seemed to, integrate more with the children that had already been there. And I wasn't sure whether it was just because of the friendship dynamics, or whether because she seemed more, already part of, like being able to speak Amharic, and being part of 'that culture', and less like she was 'international'. I am not sure. Um.
- Researcher: Yeah. (0:20)
- Lucy: That was one thing I had thought about.
- Researcher: Yeah.

Lucy: And, and also some of the children, like Christofer who, I think, he didn't like the sort of games, that were, like the rough and tumble, sort of superhero games, so it took him a while to find friends, and he got on better with some of the girls. But he also had his twin sister, who was in the other class, so there was often, I think for him, a temptation to, no, I don't know if it's a temptation, but he often played with his sister in the playground, rather than trying to integrate with more of the children in the class, perhaps. So, I don't know if that was also, the fact that they knew each other, he had his sister there. Um, well. Is there any other things? (Pause)

Er, also, (0:21) from the, some of the children, like Rayan and Rose and Efrata, those girls that came in at the beginning of the year, it might just be their 'personality' but they also seemed to work really well with some of the children who didn't have a 'clear' group of friends already. So, some of the children, like Muse who was, already there, he always worked really well with Rose or Rayan or Efrata, rather better than some of the children that were already in the class and that he'd known before. There were also some children like, this girl – Sara, who seemed to get on really well with all the children that came in new and I'm not sure why, she particularly, (0:22) made good friends with all of the children that came in, and some of the other ones didn't as much. Um. I'm not sure.

Researcher: Yeah. (pause) So, if you, obviously, you are going to be in Year One again next year, um, if your, if you... Would you do anything differently?

Lucy: Um.

Researcher: Will you do anything differently?

Lucy: Possibly. Um, so that I guess, already there are some things that you do to try and, to like encourage them to work together, or stories that you think about being kind and being friends with other people. But especially that, (0:23) seeing the way the friendships between those group of boys developed over the year with some of the girls. But maybe, maybe there would be a way to be a bit more proactive in, helping them to think about their friendships, and about the children who are new to the school. Um. Yeah, maybe there is. (Pause) And even it could just be some of the same stories and ideas that you thought of before but, help children to think a bit more about, children that are come in more recently or about how their friendships there are, or how to include them, and things like that. (0:24) I'm not sure.

Researcher: Yeah.

Lucy: But I think it is worth thinking more about it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Lucy: (Pause) And I think also because I was new as well and I wasn't as sure how the dynamics might work and things like that. (Pause) But it does seem like compared to, because this was also the first year that had I taught Year One, even though in other year groups there is always friendships that change and develop over the year, or children that come in new during the year, it did seem more, like there was more going on and more change in Year One. (0:25) Maybe partly because it was Year One, and partly because of, as you say, the number who were coming in new at the beginning of the year. (pause)

Researcher: Yeah. (Pause) Right, okay. Final, final thing. Can you describe yourself for me, so that when I write about you, I can say, this is (Laughs) 'Lucy' is the name ... (Laughs)

Lucy: I'd forgotten that as well! (Laughs)

Researcher: (Laughs)

Lucy: What details would you want?

Researcher: Anything that you would like to give me.

Lucy: Um, just in terms of what I have taught before or .. ? (0:26)

Researcher: Anything, anything that you think would be relevant.

Lucy: I've been class teacher since 2011 and I've taught from Primary 3 to Primary 7, which is like, age 7 to age 12. And since then, but, this was my first year in Year One and most of my teaching has been in Scotland. But I have also worked in other places. But this is the first time I have worked in an international school. And, (pause) I am not sure if there is anything else. (Laughs) (0:27)

Researcher: That's fine. Yep.

Researcher: What kind of teacher do you think you are?

Lucy: That's a hard question.

Researcher: I know! (Laughs)

Lucy: (Laughs)

Researcher: (Laughs)

Lucy: Um, I think I'm, quite calm and, um, quite organised and, um ... I'm, I'm not sure. (Laughs)

Researcher: (Laughs) That's good. (0:28) Yep! Perfect! I think you are calm and organised too! (Laughs)

Lucy: (Laughs)

Researcher: So, right, that's great, let me see if I can get back onto the, onto the main screen, brilliant, alright, so we will stop the recording.

(Ends at 28.18)

Researcher: It should come up with a message for you.

Naomi: Yeah.

Researcher: Brilliant! Okay, cool, alright so I have got a few questions. So, the first one is. I wondered if you could describe for me some of the different children's friendships that you have seen this year in Year One. And if you want to use children's names you can, I am going to change them because I have all their pseudonyms so I will um, I will change them. And I will also just be typing while you are talking if that's alright - so that I have got some notes.

Naomi: Okay. Um, so, one little relationship, friendship - relationship dynamic – was amongst three girls – was it? - Kili, Alex and Amran. So (0:01) because there was three of them, they struggled to kind of, adjust to the fact that sometimes two of them would want to do something that one of them didn't want to do. And it would make the whole group crumble every time and they always needed, it would always turn into like 'You can't be my friend! You can't be my friend!' - that's kind of how they would show that – and then they would always have to come to a teacher and tell a teacher – 'So-and-so is not my friend.' – and then we would have to mediate them through that.

There were the, kind of, mothering relationships like towards Brook especially. Because he is small. I think. Because he's smaller than, like shorter than everybody. He's quite quiet, yeah, he's quite meek. (0:02) So, he didn't really mesh with the boys a lot because of the ... type of play that the boys would engage in. So, a lot of the time he would be taken on by different girls but they would treat him like a baby.

Researcher: Right.

Naomi: Hold his hand and lead him around everywhere and he would just play whatever they wanted him to play.

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: Um. Then you have the boisterous boys. They were, a lot of the time actually, they played, they would encourage each other to kind of, build better things or (0:03) they would encourage each other to, kind of, do more extreme versions of what they were doing. So, maybe if it was building - they would get them try to, who can build the tallest thing or who can build the biggest structure. If it was racing, who can race the fastest. If it was reading, who can choose like, the most interesting book. That was kind of the dynamic amongstmost of the boys MostlyMushil.... Load Ahmud.... Yeah. Those kind of boys, the more kind of,not necessarily dominant characters because they did play very well (0:04) with their peers, like, they did listen to each other quite a lot. But they were just quite strong characters I would say.

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: Yeah.....

Researcher: Great. Okay, no, thank you. That is great. Um, so, can you then share your thoughts on how Year One children actually make friends.

Naomi: Umm. I think, they make friends. So, um,How do I think they make friends? (*Indistinguishable muttering. All said to herself quietly. Then repeats. Then pauses.*) I think when children, for children to make friends, then there's like, it's like a dominant, one child is kind of more dominant, potentially, and kind of (0:05) initiates a friend, like initiates dialogue and initiates, um, things with other children until it is reciprocated

Researcher: Okay.

Naomi: Or until they have had enough.

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah. (Pauses) No, that makes sense. And what about how, how do those children maintain those friendships?

Naomi: They maintain those friendships, I think through resilience because they are learning so much about considering feelings of a different person and it takes resilience to do that. Especially, dependent, if you are not used to it, for whatever reason, because I've seen (0:06) some of the children will go through phases of being with a child and then they will just move on.

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: And I just think it's because they don't have the, maybe it's resilience, maybe it is compatibility. But after a while like, if they are not getting on with somebody or something is not working for them, then they just, unless you have a lot more adult intervention, if they are just left to their own devices they will just move on to a different friend.

Researcher: (Pause) So, um, as you know, my observations were done in the playground.

Naomi: Um, humm.

Researcher: So, I am interested in the role that the outdoor space and the fixed equipment in the playground has on the children's relationships or ... (0:07)

Naomi: Okay. I think it, um, it plays, it plays a big role, in actually, it is almost as if you could compare it to learning a skill discretely so that's when they are like put together in class. For example, maybe you have put two kids together that wouldn't usually play together but they are working well and they are thinking 'Oh! Alright, maybe this could be a new relationship.' And you put out into the playground to see if it is going to work, in practise.

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: So I think they do need that space because I think as soon as you take a child outside it frees them like, physically and mentally. They go into their own imaginative play. The fixed equipment is good because it gives some structure but also the space is (0:08) good because then they're free to create whatever kind of imaginary play they would like to and then it's testing those friendships. Okay, so maybe today we are playing on the slide, let's see how well we can play on the slide together. Tomorrow we are playing Mums and Dads and babies, let's see how well that imaginative play goes well with the physical play. And then it kind of helps them to explore the different levels of their friendship and the different levels that they can play at.

Researcher: Yeah. (Pause) So, do you think, um, like you have just mentioned that, the slide. Do you think certain pieces of equipment are kind of better and more effective than others?

Naomi: Yes. I think some,.... yes. Yes, like a slide (0:09) with the kind of set up of, like a jungle gym kind of thing, is good because it is very reminiscent of the park and I think it gives the children already you know, it builds on these ideas that this is a place to play and they have already formed. Some of them will already have ideas on how to play in a park and take turns in it – or if they haven't been to a park then they can learn at school and then transfer those skills you know into a park and things like that and help them to make friends and play nicely with potentially new children. But I think also it is important to have equipment in the playground that is not too, not too two-dimensional. Like a slide and everything is good because you can make up games with your imagination on a slide. Where as I think, the, um, the jungle gym thing (0:10) that runs along, the long balancing course ...

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: I think that's more, it's kind, more of 2 D – there is not much, play, that you can get out of that it's merely just physical development – I haven't seen a lot of, especially because I'm in the upper playground, on those pieces of equipment they don't get the most, kind of, use, versus the poles. Where the children can swing – and then they start to make up games – and each one, sometimes they are trying to be animals on there, sometimes they are trying to be gymnasts, sometimes they're trying to be ballerinas. It's more imaginative play that kind of combines with the equipment. I think a mud kitchen or something like that would be a better use, a better toy stimulus to put in the playground. Because from there, you know, (0:11) it could be a home, it could be a shop, it could be a café, it could be many things and mean and translate in different ways to the children.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. So, um, what about the sandpit?

Naomi: The sandpit is very popular; the children really enjoy the sandpit. Um, I just think, I don't know if this is relevant to your thing but I just think the location of it is, it's a tricky kind of location and it's not..... Sometimes you'll get, I don't know.it's not. It could be ...used as more purposeful directed play, I think the sandpit and I think if it was used like that it would give children opportunities to explore different types of play because in the sandpit it's a lot of the (0:12) same - filling. It is either filling sandcastles, filling buckets to make sandcastles or they put cars in there for a track. So, there are different ways to use the sandpit. And so, you do get the same type of children going there regularly. And not a lot of PSED and not a lot of sharing happens in the sandpit. So, it could, I think it has the children's interest already but I think it could be used in a better way.

Researcher: And when you say the location what do you mean? Where would you? You mean to move the location?

Naomi: Yeah, because it is behind that shed, so if the shed was maybe, the shed is a bit nothingness anyway, so if the shed was knocked down you would be able to view the sandpit easily from wherever you were in the playground. Just to ensure, you know, nobody is throwing or (0:13) keep a better eye on it. (*Background noise*) – or because I think, when I am on duty in that playground, every time without fail, there are at least two incidents from the sandpit. (*Background noise*)

Researcher: What, what kind of incidents?

Naomi: It'll be, so-and-so is not sharing, so-and-so is snatching, or took my toy or it will be oh so-and-so threw something in my eye but then it's not, because you can't see, when someone is telling you when someone threw something in their eye may it is not you are trying to ascertain, maybe it wasn't on purpose because you are playing with sand and that's what happens with sand. (*Background noise ongoing*) But, yeah, there's those kind of problems. Or then it will be the children that need help to take shoes off because they have got sand in their shoes, in their socks. Um, (0:14) or can we have some equipment for the sandpit because there is nothing here. Or can we have more because there is just one spade in there. (*Pause*)

Researcher: Okay. So, you have sort of, I think, you have kind of answered it. My question is how reflective what happens in the playground is of what is happening in the classroom and you have kind of indicated that it can be a test for, for those things that have started in the, in the classroom.

Naomi: Ummm.

Researcher: And, do you, so what is the impact on learning of what happens in the classroom? (*Pause*) What happens in the playground, sorry. (*Laughs*)

Naomi: Sorry, say that question again.

Researcher: What is the impact on the learning in the classroom from what has happened (0:15) in the playground?

Naomi: Oh, well. (*Sighs*) It depends – so if you are dealing with negative things that have happened outside instantly everybody is, um, talking about it, trying to tell me about it, trying to tell their friends about it. So, negative things I think disrupt more of the quantity, like, more of the children, because they all want to talk about it before they can get settled into the learning again. And sometimes, they feel, if they are part of it, like if they were the ‘victim’ they feel like they need their own justice from the teacher, before they can move on.

But, if it is a positive thing, like, if there has been a friendship – that (0:16) has been reboosted, reaffirmed, in some way and they come in and they are holding hands and they’re really like loving each other. It’s good, but, you have to be mindful okay of where are you going to sit them when it’s time for work because they are a bit, focused on each other right now, so we need to kind of direct back to the learning. But, I think it is important then, just to have your after breaktime routines. Like, I always tell my children, go the toilet, wash your hands, drink water. So, by the time they have done those three things it’s a bit more calm. They like know okay, let’s, we’ve got the time to talk while we are in the toilet, we’ve got the time to take a deep breath while we are drinking water and now it is time to sit down and be quiet. (0:17)

Researcher: (*Pause*) So, that’s, that’s kind of my main questions, I wondered, are there any questions you thought I should be asking, and I haven’t, or things that you have been thinking about knowing that I am going to talk you about what I am going to talk to you about?

Naomi: Um, not really to be honest. I didn’t really think about what type of questions you would ask but I think you asked interesting ones actually that kind of made me think a bit more about what is happening amongst those little humans. (*Background noise*)

Researcher: (*Laughs*) Cool. So, the last thing that I’d like to ask you is, I, I kind of introduce you a little (0:18) bit when I write, as, this is Naomi, which is your pseudonym and so what else could I put about you? Can you give me a few lines that kind of just introduce you to the reader?

Naomi: Um, you could say, I have been teaching for seven years in London, Thailand and then Addis, well Ethiopia. Um. (*Thinking noise made with tongue.*) I’ve always had an interest, you could write, I’ve always had an interest in education and helping people to learn and understand things. (*Background noise*) Before, I even went into, even (0:19) when I was in school myself, I was always like, the one who would help everybody else in the class ...

Researcher: Yeah.

Naomi: *(Laughs)* At the expense of my own work.

Researcher: *(Laughs) (Pause)* Brilliant!

Naomi: Yeah. Is that enough?

Researcher: That's perfect. So, um, I really appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

Naomi: Oh pleasure, I am excited to read your um, Is it your thesis?

Researcher: Yeah, so, What I will do is actually type up a transcript of this and send it to you so that you can read that and then with my observation notes, kind of put it together. Um, I've been looking at what other people have been saying, obviously, (0:20) and then put it together a big part of it at the moment.

Naomi: Nice. Have you been getting some interesting information?

Researcher: So, yeah, I think it has made me think about things in a very different way to how I set out thinking about it, really.

Naomi: Ummm.

Researcher: And, I think, you know, what I am really hoping is that I can come up with a few suggestions, you know of things that we can do as a school that are practical to help facilitate things as well.

Naomi: Yeah. Are you seeing any themes? As well, I don't know if you have spoken to Julia. I know that you have spoken to Lucy already. And even from your own experience like in Year One. Are there similarities, a lot of similarities in what we are saying?

Researcher: Um, yeah, there are some, there are some interesting differences.

Naomi: Umm.

Researcher: You know about it. (0:21) Yeah. It's kind of, but things kind of link. There are a few things that all three of you have said. But, um, yeah, but um, slightly different slants. Which is obviously, that's good. That's kind of what you want really.

Naomi: That is interesting. That will be good. I look forward to reading that transcript actually. Thank you.

Researcher: Cool, well, take care, I am going to stop the recording.

(Ends at 21.26)