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RESEARCHING CHILDREN AS *BECOMING*
WRITERS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL

by

Kate Lucy Smith

Canterbury Christ Church University

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Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Young children's writing activity in English Reception classrooms is framed by a rigid developmental model whereby children are conceived of as 'becoming' writers. However, recent post-structuralist research suggests that writing activity, as an assemblage of objects, bodies, expressions and territories, involves constant change rather than being fixed to particular frameworks.

This ethnographic enquiry focussed on six children in one Reception class during one school year. Deleuzoguattarian ideas were 'plugged into' a sociocultural, multimodal understanding of young children's writing and the children were re-conceptualised as 'becoming': creating and disrupting multiple connections and relations through their actions as writers and research participants. Narrative observations, field notes, photographs, video and artefacts were analysed rhizomatically and vignettes of data were formed into discursive assemblages.

The findings indicate that children's writing within open-ended play in the classroom was a moving, overlapping and connective ensemble, utilising many different modes of expression (drawing, text making, map making, copying, etc.). The writing materials used in these encounters 'mattered' to children: their sensorial qualities, the histories associated with them, and the potential they had to be adapted. Writing activity, however, was often organised by adults into regular discreet phonics sessions where the children's opportunities for material intra-action, social interaction and links to other writing experiences, were limited. Alongside this, discourses surrounding writing in the classroom were reflective of the curriculum 'ideal', and certain modes of expression were privileged.

The conclusions suggest that containing young children's writing within representative acts driven by external outcomes limits the potential of writing to be a sensory, embodied, material, and connected activity. Adults in schools should foster children's playful writing encounters where these elements exist. Effective practices are needed to encourage young children's multiple modes of expression, enabling them to build the language associations needed for their writing to be meaningful and desirable.

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INTRODUCTION

'When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a wood-carver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path for you to follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory.' (Dillard, 1990, p. 3)

This research explores how writing paths are dug and then followed by young children in their first year of school. It is a study about young children as they continually gather together and assemble multiple pathways in their writing, drawing and mark making within a classroom context. I have followed six children's actions as writers during one Reception year in an English school, to find out how writing, as materially embodied text making, becomes socially, culturally and materially meaningful through its function and purpose. What will be discussed within this work is my close examination of young children within their daily writing activities and the complex issues that emerge in researching their lives.

Researching young children's writing in schools – why now?

Young children's writing in England is of governmental concern. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2013/14 results in England, which demonstrate whether children at the end of the early years curriculum have met the expected levels of development, showed that *'As in 2013, the four literacy early learning goals had the lowest proportion of children achieving at least the expected level. More specifically, the lowest proportion achieving at least the expected level was in writing (67%)'* (Department for Education (DfE), 2014b, p. 10).

Even though these results were based on a raised threshold in literacy from the previous year, they demonstrate, in political terms, that young children's writing appears to be lagging behind other areas of development. Government policies that directly influence children's writing practices in schools are concerned with bettering these results by adopting strategies that focus on improving sets of measurable literacy skills. As a result, there is a growing trend to *'fix'* literacy to prescribed approaches in schools (Flewitt, 2013, p. 2). For example, the regulatory framework Ofsted expects government approved

and funded synthetic phonics programmes to be commonly used in many English Reception classrooms (Clark, 2014). However, there are two essential problems in allowing these results to frame what we know about children's writing and how we can advance it. First, the conceptualisation of young writers in school within this data as 'insufficiently good' and 'deficient' in terms of ability undermines an essential principle of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), where children are viewed as competent learners, 'unique' and 'capable' (DfE, 2014a, p. 6). Second, directing pedagogical practices towards the measurable product of learning is misleading if the aim is in fact to improve children's writing, both in terms of their activity and their understanding.

Research tells us that to enhance children's writing in school, the children should be engaged in a multi-stranded, social and cognitive multimodal process, and they should know that writing is about communication and ideas (Dombey, 2013, p. 13). If this is the case, then writing activity in the Reception classroom should be catering for what is needed in terms of the research evidence we have, not external policy focused on measurable outcomes. To enhance our knowledge of children's writing in the Reception year, we should be grappling with theory and research that exposes the 'process' of learning to be a writer *alongside* the political contextual environment in which the children are constrained or enhanced in their encounters to do this.

Aims and intended outcomes

Young children express ideas about their existence as social beings through mark marking: practices of placing, tracing, and scoring signs and symbols. I find these activities and the artefacts that children produce through these pursuits fascinating and wondrous. However, I have been troubled as to why some children who find text-making activity to be so desirous in contexts outside of structured educational settings find it so difficult within them. Recent research by Huf (2013) proposes that children's agency may diminish as they enter formal schooling. It suggests that systems of schooling place children in less competent positions than within the home or early years setting, implying that the frameworks that surround young children in entering schooling, where knowledge about writing is ideologically formed rather than evidence-led, may affect their abilities as writers. My aim in carrying out this research was to find out more about the processes at work as young children create writing in school and to consider whether the writing encounters that they have extend rather than restrict writing production. Doing this enabled me to unpick some of the complex threads that are part of children's literary

experiences, lay them out for examination, and identify the important elements of writing with children. Analysing these elements indicated the important aspects of planning, provision and assessment that need to be considered in educational settings for young children who, on entering school classrooms, already hold expert ideas about what constitutes text making.

This research builds upon a rich legacy of theory and research that greatly enhances and supports our understanding of children's writing activity to be a socially and culturally situated activity (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1998; Gee, 2004; Dyson, 2008; Street, 2013), and one that is expressed multimodally (Kress, 1997, 2000a, 2010; Pahl, 1999; Bearne, 2005; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Mavers, 2011). My aim was to add to the discussion of how young children construct knowledge of writing in school by drawing on the work of Deleuzoguattarian theorists (Deleuze, 2004a, 2004b; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Masny and Cole, 2009; Olsson, 2009; Masny, 2013; Sellers, 2013) and new materialist thinkers (Barad, 2003, 2007; Ingold, 2007, 2011; Bennett, 2010; MacLure, 2013a) to examine ideas about relational material text making. The intention was to further an understanding of children's writing and text making in all its multiplicities, uncovering connections that need to be seen in order for young children's writing to thrive within school settings.

My theoretical engagement focussed on how children generate writing in the external structures that they exist within, but also how they move beyond the boundaries of these. By focusing on children's writing *activity*, as a way in which children make meaning through the production of text as text *makers*, I considered the importance of children creating attachments – joining together ideas and experiences, and connecting with others, materials and spaces – in building and creating knowledge of writing. This was a venture into childhood cultures of activity. I deliberately focussed on how knowledge of writing in classrooms is formed by children, as the actual producers of it, rather than by adults who measure it. My aim was to build knowledge of children as writers from *their* experience, not through powerful adult discourse or secondary interpretation. The analysis and conclusions of this will emanate from the actualities of the empirical data that children produced with me, created within the context of their daily schooling.

Dombey (2013) has stated that we have a social and ethical responsibility to provide support for young children to be able to write based on legitimately conceived evidence in the field. This, essentially, was my purpose for researching this area: to

provide further evidence based on empirical data that will be accountable to children's lived experiences as writers. In so doing, I hope to offer knowledge that supports the literacy education and care towards it that young children are entitled to.

Establishing the gap in research – Young children and their writing activities

In England, young children's writing, as a schooled activity, is framed within the school curriculum, the 'Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (EYFS) (Department for Education (DfE), 2014), and is assessed in terms of the desired goals which make up this curriculum. Young children are imagined within school structures in terms of their future potential (Qvortrup, 2004; Prout, 2005), and their actions are bounded by the conceptual understanding of 'development' and 'literacy' written into the curriculum. This framework creates particular social and cultural understandings in schools of how writing works and what writing is for. However, children as writers are text *making* in a multitude of different ways, not only in response to the structures that conceptualise them but also as a way of exploring the world beyond these.

Studies that focus on young children's reading activity demonstrate that children have a sophisticated knowledge of how texts are created in a variety of forms before they become embroiled in the school discourses that surround literacy. Preschool children are able to create text as a visual whole using a variety of pictures and written symbols to communicate different meanings when they enter into nursery schools (Kenner, 2000). Drawing on cultural practices from home, children construct multiple literate identities, and when they begin school, they adapt their understandings of text making in response to school expectations (Levy, 2008). Methodological approaches that provide further intricate detailing of how children manage the school literacy curriculum and emerge as school writers could build upon this previous research and extend professional discourses further.

Theories of language emanating from Vygotsky's work (1978, 1986) have been rightfully influential in showing us that writing is connected to social and cultural thought. Vygotsky's writing provides us with an understanding of writing activity as a representational act of social thinking. However, writing as language is also an emotional, sensorial, physical and material activity (MacLure, 2013). Important elements of young children's writing experience may be left unexplored if a theoretical framework that

considers language solely as developmental cognition, and writing as a representation of thinking, is adopted without consideration for all the differing dimensions of young children's writing experiences. This research therefore attempted to consider how far social language, and writing as an aspect of it, can be understood as an embodied, material activity that may be *more than* representation.

Children as writers think and make meaning with socially mediated tools or objects (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1994). These material writing objects carry cultural meanings, but also have physical qualities that matter in understanding how children engage with them. Writing is complex and difficult, involving encoding and composing meaning into culturally recognised text with 'stuff'. It is a messy process of social, cultural and material entanglements, and one that fixed frameworks of assessment, external to the writer, may not be able to recognise fully. So, there appears to be a need to find other ways of explaining children's writing activity that extend beyond the structures of the curriculum and the politicking that surrounds it.

The theoretical position presented within this study sits within a sociocultural and multimodal framework, but I have also drawn on the work of post-structuralist theorists and researchers to provide a methodological approach that is able to move beyond the mind/body dualism that separates children's thinking from their bodies and material environment, and can limit our knowledge of how each is connected. There is also a need in childhood research, to re-conceptualise children as writers away from a model which suggests that children are incomplete or failing so that we can improve the descriptions and understandings that we have of young children's literate activity. This research used methodologies that while recognising the structural frameworks that surround children were also able to move beyond these boundaries to create tangible knowledge of children as writers.

Literacy as a field of research is alive with new ideas for methodology (Flewitt et.al., 2015). How we are theorising about young children's lives as text creators is changing. However, as highlighted above there is significant pressure on schools to adopt narrow pedagogical approaches to literacy and writing to provide 'results' that fit within a data-driven landscape. Evidence of how children become literate that sits outside of this landscape is susceptible to being sidelined by external agendas. It is important to persist in demonstrating and disseminating multiple explanations that challenge singular and dominant discourses, and encourage meaningful practices with young children.

Research questions

My initial research question was:

How are children *becoming* writers within their writing encounters in a Reception class?

My enquiry began by examining the concept of *becoming* in relation to childhood and writing in the first year of school. I used *becoming* as a pivotal term in this study to interpret childhood and writing in different ways, and also as a tool to explore how young children as writers, i.e. their productive actions, can be understood both within school frameworks and outside of them. The varying definitions of children as *becoming*, either implied or made transparent in what we think we know about children's writing activity in the classroom context, has been examined within the review of relevant literature and then throughout the study through the methodological approach, the analysis, discussions and conclusions.

In working through the first stages of the research (the review of literature, methodology and fieldwork), significant areas for further enquiry within this comprehensive question were identified and further sub-questions resulted. This progression in the development of the questions is outlined in the proceeding chapters.

These sub-questions are:

How are young children constructing knowledge about 'school writing' with others (including researchers) through classroom writing encounters?

How do young children engage with mediational tools and signs and symbols within writing encounters to re-represent and transform their ideas?

What connections are young children creating through writing activity at school?

Research design

In line with Dyson's (2008) suggestion for researchers, I designed this research to situate myself within the school context with an ear to both the official school practices and children's actual communicative experience. This was a way to understand the

possibilities and constraints of children's writing as literate activity. I have also attended to Cathy Nutbrown's plea that,

Academics working in the field of early childhood education consider what might be gained by breaking out of the confines of more traditional (and safer) qualitative research; pushing the methodological boundaries of research in the field ... so that ordinary stories of the small stuff of childhoods become more familiar. (2011a, p. 246)

I was located alongside children in the classroom, utilising alternative methodological approaches to form new understandings in the field. I have assumed that children's writing experiences are unique, rather than universal, and that the differing stories that children and researchers tell are worthy of exploration. I recognised that my own shifting position as the researcher, and therefore the narrator in this work, was significant in how the knowledge of children's writing activity was created and presented. The knowledge constructed in this study drew on Deleuze and Guattari's work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2004), and used the metaphor of a *rhizome* within this text as a tool for analysis to explore a conceptualisation of the children's writing activity as continually changing and *becoming* different.

Ethical consideration towards the six child participants within the research was a driving force within the design of the research methodology, so that the children's actions, as expressions of language and life, could be heard. I applied a research methodology that was co-constructive, attending to the many ways in which children could be listened to. I also adopted methods and analysis where pathways within the messiness of data construction were created by assembling data into written narratives.

Road map

The following chapter descriptions provide a linear account of how the research questions will be answered.

In *chapter one*, I examine the theoretical and empirical research literature that surrounds children's writing activity, beginning with the significance of sociocultural approaches before moving on to consider multimodal ideas, multiple literacies theory, and new materialist thinkers. Finally, I examine the writing context for young children in English schools in the Reception class.

In *chapter two*, I outline the justification for the methodological approach that I have taken, demonstrating my ontological and epistemological stance. I identify the dilemmas and challenges within participatory methodology with children, and set out the ethnographic and participatory framework and methods that I have used to create an ethical approach.

Chapter three outlines the analytical approach taken, i.e. rhizoanalysis, explaining in detail how this strategy has been used so that children's writing stories can be heard by sifting through, and shifting in, response to data.

Chapters four to seven are each presented as an assemblage, where children's writing encounters are analysed and discussed, and illustrated with vignettes of data.

Finally, *chapter eight* outlines the conclusions, both empirical and conceptual. It considers the limitations of the study and the contribution to knowledge in the field, and it looks forward by making recommendations for future practices and research.

CHAPTER ONE: Children *becoming* writers in an early years classroom – Theoretical perspectives and recent research

Introduction

There is a wealth of research published on young children's language, literacy and writing. All of the research assumes distinct conceptual understandings of both writing and childhood, dependent on the theoretical frameworks that underpin them. This literature review, while acknowledging that there is a range of theoretical positions within the field, does not attempt to include all of these differing perspectives. My research questions are an attempt to find out how children construct writing with other people and objects as part of their social and material existence, and so it is literature pertaining to this area that is presented here. Literature that focuses on, for example, measuring individual writing development, where writing is viewed as being solely '*within the mind of the child*' (Rowe, 2003, p. 259), i.e. psychological and neuroscientific studies, have been considered but are not referred to within this chapter. Instead, a detailed and substantive discussion of published materials, theory and recent research will be examined where young children's writing activity is understood as being constructed within social, cultural and material spaces. That is, as action that is externally expressed through different modes and constructed within material and social spaces.

Seeking out, critically examining, and then structuring this review has helped me to distinguish the significant issues that surround children's understanding of writing in school through the activities that they are engaged in. In this chapter, I provide space to explore the fundamental arguments within established social, cultural and material theory to provide a reliable framework in which to explore how these ideas may relate to current approaches to literacy and writing. I have also drawn on policy publications and literature on Reception class provision to provide an understanding of the political, social and cultural context in which the children within this study are active as writers.

My interest in exploring the conceptualisation of children as *becoming* writers in school, where both the child *and* their writing activity is framed as a *becoming* process, has led me not only to draw from the field of language, literacy and education but also to make links with literature from other disciplines, such as childhood sociology, anthropology and neo-materialism. Integrated within this discussion are structuralist and

post-structuralist arguments about literacy and childhood experience. These differing explanations of literacy are discussed within the final two sections and conclusion of this chapter. The purpose of discussing this, however, is not an attempt to situate myself in either camp and sign up to one 'ism' or another; rather, it is more to use these arguments to bring forward a further critical understanding of the child writer's activity and highlight further questions in the field.

This chapter has been structured into three sections; however, there are significant issues that cross into each section. Each section combined provides a comprehensive and critical examination of the theoretical arguments and recent research about young children's writing activity in school and indicates the questions that are currently posed to gain more understanding and insight into the field of policy and practice. Particular arguments that have arisen through the review of literature have resulted in the identification of emergent themes or areas of further enquiry and are drawn together within the conclusion.

The sections are as follows:

Section one: Young children's writing as socially and culturally constructed – Meaning making through language, thought and tool use

In this section, I will critically examine sociocultural constructivist perspectives, reviewing literature that recognises the significance of social and cultural processes and the importance of situated learning and semiosis (meaning making) in children's writing activity. The literature here emphasises the importance of socially shared language as an integral part of young children's writing encounters, where writing activity supports the construction of thinking and vice versa. It considers both the importance of social relationships and also tools and cultural artefacts as ways in which children extend their thinking.

Section two – Young children's writing as multiliterate, multimodal and becoming different

In this section, I will present current arguments in literacy theory that build on an understanding of writing activity as socially and culturally constructed, but also as a material phenomenon. Here, I include a discussion of how writing can be understood as multimodal, where children's writing activity is explained through the use of different modes as a representational process. I will also introduce recent ideas that challenge the primacy of linguistic structures in how writing activity can be understood, and consider

writing activity to be a moving and connective process of multiple material and embodied engagement.

Section three: Young children's writing activity in the context of a Reception class – Child writers as future becomings

This section will examine the educational structures of the Reception class and discuss how wider political and economic concerns are affecting the writing policies and practices that young children experience within school. Here, I will explore how the social and cultural aspects of writing in the classroom are bounded by a particular future-oriented understanding of young children as *becoming* writers.

Section one: Young children's writing as socially and culturally constructed – Meaning making through language, thought and tool use

In order to fully understand how children's writing has been theorised in recent research, it is important to examine theoretical arguments that consider writing to be a socially constructed process of thinking and meaning making through language. This section provides detailed theories of writing which are routed within the structures of language, where it is argued that young children's writing as a social process is representative of their thinking and given meaning through the usage and value assigned to social signs, symbols and cultural artefacts within particular social situations.

Writing development as social construction – the importance of the social context

In Vygotsky's work (1978, 1986, 1994, 1999) and that of other socio-historical-cultural theorists (Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1994, 1998; Wells, 1986; Rogoff, 1990; Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992; Cole, 1996), the social and cultural context in which children are learning is central to how their language and writing, as an expression of this, is formed. Smagorinsky (2011) states that the word context is often thought of as a physical space or place, such as a school classroom; however, within sociocultural perspectives, the 'social context' relates to the social structures that embody particular cultural values and beliefs within areas where people's lives intersect and relational practices and activities take place. These social contexts often extend beyond place and space. Cole (1996, p. 135)

defines context as a weaving and threading of different parts – people, place, objects etc. – into a coherent connected whole. Blurred boundaries exist between different social contexts as individuals move among them and their cultural practices overlap. Social contexts have an important role as centres of shared activity and tool use, where people actively construct knowledge about the world together. Interdependence always exists between the individual and the social context, as each can be seen as being created by each other (Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 29). The social and cultural context of this study is a contemporary English Reception classroom, and the third section of this chapter will explore in more detail the structural aspects of how knowledge of writing is constructed within this specific context.

A dialectic process

For a more comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky's ideas on the relational dimension between the social and individual, it is important to highlight the dialectic approach he takes within his ontological thinking. Wegerif (2008) points out that Vygotsky, in his work *Thought and Language* (1986), draws on Hegel's idea of struggle between the individual's knowledge of the world and the external society in which they exist. The dialectic process between these two opposing sides, often unsettling and challenging, eventually moves towards a '*totality*' of knowledge where the two sides are fully integrated. This is seen in terms of a progression and development; it is the evolvment of a thesis, as an antithesis and finally a synthesis (Hegel, 2010). Vygotsky (1986, p. 134) often refers to the relationship between the individual and society in these dialectical terms, particularly in how concepts are formed. The individual mind is constantly mediated by the cultural world through movement towards a synthesis. Consequently, Vygotsky would argue that the child's individual development and learning can be understood as a dialectical struggle through the experiences and activities they encounter as they appropriate speech and tool use. I will expand further on some of these ideas when I discuss the concepts of mediation and appropriation.

Many of Vygotsky's own experiments that focused on individual children's development clearly show his interest in the dialectical process. He set up artificial activities that provoked this struggle, challenging children's thinking so that he could study children's development from novice to expert. This, he argued, was a process of dialectical change, as the child's thinking is constantly progressing towards a resolution (Connery et al., 2010). He was interested in the *movement* of development within the

child, from the external social experience to the internal psychological construction of learning. These experiments helped him to consider how this process of internalisation and development occurred.

Thought as word, and words as social thinking

As well as providing a dialectic theory of individual change and development, Vygotsky (1986) also provided us with a detailed examination of how individual ideas and knowledge are formed as a *process of thinking* within the social world. He did this by exploring the relationship between thought and language, specifically the role of speech. Vygotsky wrote that '*a thought is born through words. A word devoid of thought is a dead thing... an empty sound; meaning, therefore is a criterion of "word", its indispensable component*' (1986, p. 212).

So thought and language are intertwined, although distinct, as Vygotsky observes here: '*thought and language develop along separate lines and that at a certain point these lines meet*' (1986, p. 93).

Vygotsky was uncertain about the regularity of this occurrence or how sudden this might be, but this meeting point does lead to a functional change for the individual. Vygotsky was clear, however, that '*thought development is **determined by language***' (1986, p. 94, my bold emphasis). Language provides linguistic tools (speech) that are developed and understood within a sociocultural environment, and this is what drives thought as a socially shared experience, eventually to become internalised. Through speech, thought finds 'expression' and this expression is understood within the social context.

Vygotsky proposed that the development of '*inner speech*', a cognitively invisible process, comes into being from the appropriation of social speech and the cultural meanings it promotes within the social context. An individual child's thought, their knowledge of the world, is transformed through the sharing of social speech. This recognises that communicative practices are culturally and socially mediated, i.e. they are *socially constructed*. Language learning and development, as a constructive process, needs to be understood in terms of how the individual and social worlds interact and connect. This dialectical process occurs through two distinct stages: first, as social exchange *between people*, referred to as '*interpsychological*', and second *within the*

individual as 'intrapyschological' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). What is noteworthy here is Vygotsky's emphasis on the centrality of social relationships as the first steps of learning. The social dimensions of learning play a crucial part in the beginnings of concept formation. The cultural environment of the learner drives an individual's own unique development. Social practices are not only influenced by the cultural context but by all individual action, including communication, which is embedded *within* the social and cultural world. This argument assumes, therefore, that a child's individual cognitive development is *culturally saturated* (Mercer, 1994, p. 93).

Vygotsky developed these ideas further by looking more closely at the relationship between words and thought, referencing Tolstoy's ideas in his *Pedagogical Writings* (1903), where Tolstoy suggested that it can be understood '*as an enigmatic process unfolding in our soul*' (cited by Vygotsky, 1986, p. 218). Vygotsky wrote that,

Word meanings are dynamic rather than static formations. They change as the child develops; they change also with the various ways in which thought functions. If word meanings change in their inner nature, then the relation of thought to word also changes. (1986, p. 217)

Consequently, words as carriers of meaning are changeable and adaptable, can be animated, and are formed within the social context.

Words, signs and meaning making

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986), Volosinov wrote that the philosophy of language was the philosophy of the sign. A sign in this case represents aspects of social reality. As a Marxist, Volosinov understood the concept of the sign as having an ideological role in representing and standing for something within society that has social meaning: thoughts, beliefs, principles or communications. Signs depict consciousness, feelings and ideas within the '*inter-individual territory*' (Volosinov, 1986, p. 12) or between one person and another. Therefore, the function of the sign is to carry meaning. Volosinov argued that words can be viewed as signs that are used between one person and another. However, words have no essential meaning in themselves; the function words have is that *they convey meaning*. Meaning is not integral to the word itself, but with the same understanding that Vygotsky had of words and thought, meaning can change and is dynamic, and words *carry* meanings in how they are used and applied within the immediate social situation. Volosinov went further by explaining that just as

words have no essential meaning, '*Meaning in itself, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality – the possibility of having a meaning with a concrete theme*' (1986, p. 101).

Consequently, meaning is the technical apparatus to convey themes, and it is those themes that are changeable and dynamic. To make sense of what is spoken of, we need to look at what themes are being *aired* through the meanings of the words used.

Thinking through language – the importance of language as 'whole'

Vygotsky was clear that although thought is expressed through words, they are not mirror images of each other and are structured very differently. Thought develops, beginning with the whole, and as speech develops, it is processed into smaller components. Thought will eventually become understood and articulated in terms of the complex semantic parts (words and sentences) and how these relate to each other within the social context. The implication of this relationship between thought and language (or perhaps more accurately *thinking and speech*, as an action) is that thought as a whole precedes the structures of language that thinking can be compartmentalised into. The experience of language that children encounter must take account of the *whole*: thought cannot be built up from semantic parts; rather, it is the other way around. Aspects of language (e.g. speech, reading and writing) are important to experience as functions of the whole process of thinking and meaning making, as otherwise they become components lacking the working machinery to operate them.

Vygotsky's collection of essays which detailed this relationship was originally, but inaccurately, published in English with the title 'Thought and Language'. Subsequently, more accurate English translations have titled this work as 'Thinking and Speech'. His ideas became influential in how educationalists in Britain and America began to consider language and literacy as a whole meaning making process (Britton, 1967, 1970, 1987; Cazden, 1988; Goodman, 2005). The then current emphasis on teaching discrete aspects of literacy, with little relation to each other, was critiqued, and functional aspects of literacy began to be taught as part of the *whole* process of language learning. Britton (1987) argued that classrooms should recognise a child's shared social activity as an important aspect of inner speech, stating that the child needs to have room to be a '*spectator*' of language to understand the complex meanings that are being conveyed. Goodman (2005) elaborated on Vygotsky's theories relating to thought and speech by claiming that making rules of language explicit could be detrimental to learning as a whole.

For example, he argued that grammar and phonics, as the small parts of language, should be embedded within the contexts of the whole meaning making process and not be abstracted from it.

The mediation of cultural tools

Smagorinsky (2011) stated that for Vygotsky, thinking and language cannot occur in a vacuum. It needs tools and signs, for example speech and writing, for it to take shape. The tool or sign becomes the mediated means through which thought is expressed. Wertsch (1991) argued that the most refined aspect of Vygotsky's work is around how the signifiers of language (the tools and signs) are *mediated*. Mediation is the process in which signs or tools develop specific meanings that are attached to them.

Wertsch (1991) identified the processes of mediation as a genetic relationship between the social and the individual which is integral to individual development. This is based on Vygotsky's idea of the '*genetic law of development*', where emphasis is placed on the primacy of the social relationships within a two-stage model of a child's development. Cultural development takes place first in the social (between people) and then subsequently in the psychological (within the child), as an internalisation of the social and cultural relationships and practices. Wertsch argued that mediation, as part of this process of development, is social and cultural negotiation; the conciliatory process that occurs as meaning is made by individuals. Like Vygotsky, Wertsch argues that the meaning making process, mediated by tools and signs, is essentially the means by which human development takes place. There are no specific stages and ages of development, but a constant dynamic struggle of semiotic mediation.

Appropriation of mediational tools and objects through social activity

Human societies have developed a wide range of tools and practices so that we can take part in semiotic mediation or meaning-making processes with others. These tools are used to adapt and develop social and cultural practices, but these semiotic tools also transform us and our human relationships too (Cole, 1996; Connery et al., 2010). Just as words are meaningless without their social use (meanings become attached to words

through social habits), so too are tools, which are also *carriers of cultural meaning*, ones which can extend our thoughts as well as capturing them. As we learn the social significance of cultural tools and objects, and explore the boundaries of their uses, we become culturally existent ourselves.

Rogoff (1990) has argued that children appropriate '*tools for thinking*' as they develop as cultural apprentices. The concept of appropriation is used to describe how a child or adult interacts with the social environment, adopting cultural tools (the means of social interaction) and transforming them to become a tool for thinking (Wertsch, 1985). We can understand the process of appropriation further if we show how it is different from concepts such as assimilation or internalisation, which also provide us with explanations of how an individual takes on cultural meanings and adapts to social norms. Assimilation and internalisation position the thinker as a passive receiver, a bit like a sponge soaking up the cultural practices that surround them. However, '*Appropriation accounts for how people incorporate and reconstruct aspects of a setting into their thinking, without suggesting a wall of separation between person and context*' (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 288).

It is this transformational process between the thinker and the social context in which they are active that provides us with a view of the participant as a social agent. Therefore, children as social participants *make meaning on the world* as they create activities that trigger transformations of artefacts, tools and people in the environment (Scribner, 1997). However, it is important to understand this in terms of other factors that affect the process of appropriation, namely the social context and children's unique characteristics that will form boundaries within which this process can take place (Smagorinsky, 2011).

Young children's writing – symbolising thought through appropriation and mediation

In *Mind in Society* (1978), Vygotsky extended his ideas on the relationship between speech and thought in his discussion on how children learn to write. He raised an important question with resonance today on the limitations of teaching writing as '*finger techniques*' and '*mechanics*' (1978, pp. 105–106), which are technical skills that children have to master, led by the teacher and not by the children's development as a whole. Vygotsky argued that writing as sign development is a complex behavioural function that begins with gesturing. These gestures are initial visual signs by young children or possible

'writings in the air' (1978, p. 107). As children develop, they begin to use tools to make communicative gestures through their drawing and writing, but before alphabetic signs and symbols are understood, gestures symbolise and represent whole aspects of thought or conceptual ideas; for example, a child's drawing may indicate not a symbol but the 'roundness' of things. Vygotsky linked this to the function of representation within play where objects are transformed and carry new meanings. The representational object only carries meaning in how it is used by the child in their play with others. So, a bundle of clothes can represent a baby, a brick or a mobile phone, but it is only through the gestures of the child (the way the bundle is held and rocked or how the brick is held and talked to) that we can understand what the object signifies. The child's gestures with the transformed object represent the child's speech or socially communicative practice.

What is strikingly significant within this process of play is the recognition of the child's agency to transform and imagine. Vygotsky regarded this as 'first order symbolism', which represents the child's voice. 'Second order symbolism' is where the object is transformed by its cultural and historical function. The child refines the meaning of the object further by positioning it within a social context with specific functions. Therefore, the baby becomes the little sister with a name and the child now imagines that she has been left in charge and needs to take the baby to the park. The phone becomes Mum's phone that she uses for her work, but can also be used to talk to the police, and so the play continues. Using writing tools, the child's initial first order symbolism takes place as the child actively gives the writing tool a function to represent their ideas, thoughts and desires. The child uses the tool to transform and represent objects, people and events. This may mean that children use a writing tool's material potential to make marks on paper or screen as a representation, but equally, the writing tool could also become a wand or an aeroplane. For writing as a literate practice, second order symbolism is important as the writing tool becomes an object with specific sign functions that are socially and culturally meaningful. So, a writing tool is used to represent specific social knowledge about sign/symbol relationships that are contextually relevant.

According to Vygotsky, there is a significant shift in development as children begin to use writing objects to represent socially and culturally meaningful signs as a communicative process. In the same way that speech is mastered as a social and cultural practice that relates to thinking, writing can be seen to reflect the mental processing where meaning is made through the appropriation of external signs. For example, the process of drafting ideas or discussing your writing with others before you commit to paper could be understood as the same process that occurs as thought becomes speech.

Vygotsky wrote that '*written speech is the most elaborate form of speech*' (1986, p. 242), meaning that when we are writing, we need to use words accurately and elaborately to form the exact communication to *represent our thinking*. He argues that meaning is made through the dialectical writing process itself, from the external process of thought to the internal, or from the draft to the final copy.

John-Steiner (1995 p.2) argues that today we need to extend our understanding of the relationship between language and shared symbolic systems into more diverse semiotics, for example to map-making, musical notation and visual representations. She refers to this as '*cognitive pluralism*', arguing that the meaning-making processes for these different systems, as acts of representation, are embedded in social practices in the same way that written language is. These ideas will be discussed further as an aspect of multimodality in the next section of this chapter.

The importance of the lived experience – '*Perezhivanie*'

Most of Vygotsky's writings from the 1930s were translated and printed in English by the 1980s, however a manuscript titled 'The teaching about emotions: historical-psychological studies', was not published in English until 1999. Although Vygotsky had hinted in his other work that emotions, in particular motivation, were integral in some way to the dynamic process of thinking, it is only recently that the affective aspects of cognitive development in Vygotsky's work have been explored in depth. Vygotsky recognised in this work that the affective emotional feelings, or the *lived experiences* of the child within their environment, were important to cognitive development and worthy of exploration in understanding children's development as a whole. He understood emotions to be part of an all-encompassing and complex series of interrelationships that exist within human development (Di Pardo and Potter, 2003).

Vygotsky used the Russian word '*perezhivanie*' to describe emotional experiences as individual interpretations or perceptions of events. However, Van der Veer and Valsiner (1994) point out that a simple translation of *perezhivanie* may not be possible as the concept

serves to express the idea that one and the same objective situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived through by different children in different ways. Neither 'emotional experience' [which is used here and which only covers the affective aspect of the meaning of *perezhivanie*], nor 'interpretation'

[which is too exclusively rational] are fully adequate translations of the noun. (1994, p.354)

It is important to understand perezhivanie as the child's lived experience, combining both the process in which the individual 'reads' their environment (the social-cultural context) *and* their emotional responses that are an integral aspect of this interpretation. Perezhivanie provides a way of understanding differences between individuals as they develop meaning of the world. Although meaning-making occurs through the social dynamic, this is processed through '*the individual prism of perezhivanie*' (Connery et al., 2010, p. 12). Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) argue that central to Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie is the emotional aspect of language use between learner and teacher as an aspect of individual human connection within social interaction. What is clear on reading Vygotsky's work is the sense that perezhivanie provides accord between the environment and the individual. Vygotsky explains it thus,

Perezhivanie is a unity, where on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced...and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e. all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie. (1999, p. 104)

Exploring perezhivanie as an integral part of cognitive development acknowledges the fact that thought, action and emotion are structurally dependent, that they are part of the same developmental concept (Bruner, 1987). Not only is perezhivanie associated with the core structures of the mind, but Fakhrutdinova (2010) also argues that it incorporates the highest forms of reflection and consciousness apparent through self-discovery and self-awareness. In this way, the concept of perezhivanie is significant to how children appropriate and mediate tools and artefacts within social activity as a reflective self-conscious act.

Writing as situated meaning-making

Halliday (1975, 2007), as an applied linguist, employs sociocultural processes to highlight the essentiality of linguistic systems to how people are able to represent social thinking in different ways. As children write, they are utilising integrated social and linguistic structures to represent their ideas and create new meanings. It is through this meaning-making or semiotic system that a child learns what it is to be both a social person and a social writer, i.e. how to apply the system of signs, codes and words which make up writing for social meaning. Meaning cannot be fully understood by a child unless the

selected choices of the speaker/writer are recognised within their social environment. In *Situated Language and Learning*, Gee articulates these ideas further by examining how 'language is tied to people's experiences of situated action in the material and social world' (2004, p. 49). These experiences are stored and used to build *model simulations* to help us make sense of the world and prepare us for acting in particular ways. The process of building these specific models is empowering as it helps us to make social meanings. These meanings are '*simulations of experience*' (Gee, 2004, p. 51). Just as children play games as preparation for real life, the experience of these language simulations through play is essential for being able to act and perceive in the social world.

Social constructivism in educational practice – Cultural-historical activity theory

An example of these sociocultural and social semiotic perspectives in practice can be seen in the work of proponents of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). This is an approach to analysing learning as units of action through the cultural context in which social activity and interaction is taking place (Edwards, 2011). In *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*, Cole (1996) argues that cultural tools such as literacy have values attached, and he asserts that applying universal developmental approaches to different societies, with different cultural ideas about literacy, is restrictive. Cole argues that school education (the curriculum and pedagogy) in the West is ideologically 'future-oriented' relative to the demands of the 'elders', who have authority in deciding what will be necessary and valuable for society for the future. Cole gives leverage to the argument that the predominant social and cultural construction of education and childhood is based on a narrow concept of children's developmental progress. He rejects development as the appropriation of superior cultural beliefs, practices and values, and instead attempts to understand language learning and development through cultural analysis.

Cole uses the concept of the *artefact*, as a cultural object, to analyse the interaction between the individual and society. He agrees with Wertsch (1994, 1998) that social uses of mediational tools are central to meaning-making, and how the processes of language and thought can be understood. However, he uses the term artefact instead of tool, as an artefact is able to exist in both an *ideal* and a *material* state (Cole, 1996, p.117). Consequently, an artefact can be an imagined reality and one of matter, both having cultural value. Importantly, the ideal form of the artefact affects and shapes the material form. This may be a useful approach to support an understanding of the role that

children's writing artefacts have within their social context. It could be argued that they carry both an ideal and material reality that is held and extended through social interaction within schooling. There is a connection here between the *ideal* writing artefact and the *becoming* child in school (a conceptualisation of childhood that will be explored in the final section of this chapter) in how cultural expectations and beliefs are attributed to writing and child writers. Within the CHAT approach, the starting point for analysis is how the artefact is used, spoken about and altered by individuals and social groups; the *practical activity* that helps us understand the artefact as object is culturally mediated. Here, we can see that understanding the *relational process* we have with cultural artefacts (both as ideals and material objects) is important in how the '*process of simultaneous enculturation and transformation*' occurs (Wells and Claxton, 2002, p. 2).

The idea of transformation, through mediated activity, recognises the importance of learning communities and the practices within them. Therefore, the primary attention in CHAT research is often focused on the system that provides the historical carrier of culture (Edwards, 2011). The actors who engage within the system are understood in relation to the specific complexities of the context and the affordances and constraints that are in place in how artefacts are acted upon (Wells and Claxton, 2002). Experiences of children engaged in social activity are therefore wedded to and constituted by the tools they use. A good example of this is in how social networking tools are key to how virtual communities are organised and interact. The interesting question here is how the appropriation by users of technology as a social tool is reconfiguring shared social experiences. Technologies, and their uses, can be shown to be extending mediational processes into complex multilayered cultural subjectivities.

CHAT criticises the convergence of political and economic organisational structures in providing a homogenised version of education with measurable standards as outcomes, as this does not recognise local diversity of social contexts and narrows cultural practices (Wells and Claxton, 2002, p. 9). These structures, Wells and Claxton argue, limit the processes of cultural mediation and place the child as a passive recipient of learning. Instead, the CHAT approach is interested in '*the intricate complexity of the unique moment in which a person interacts with an unprecedented material, social, and cultural setting*' (Claxton, 2002, p. 25).

CHAT does not seek to contain the shifting contexts and unpredictability that form the struggles and challenges within mediation and appropriation. It recognises the complexities and change within participatory groups and social contexts, which may have

different goals and values. CHAT views learning and development as cultural action that involves physical, sensory and spiritual *lived experiences*, and as a result, Claxton and Wells argue that views of cognition need to be expanded beyond notions of fixed development within 21st-century research.

What next in sociocultural research of young child writers?

What appears to be significant in this section is the link between the symbolic and representational (as meaning-making) to the material (the social context, relationships and tools). Therefore, it appears to be important to understand *localised knowledge* (Geertz, 1983) and find ways to closely analyse individuals as part of a social group. How young children are encultured into social and material writing activity still remains a mysterious but fascinating process. How we explore complex meaning-making connections as culturally significant acts within places and through relationships is a challenge.

Children as writers often engage in a considerable reflective process, playing and experimenting with structure, form and content as they explore potential possibilities within language (Cremin and Myhill, 2012). It is this agency or implicit desire of children to try out different ways of being a writer that may need to be considered further within the dynamic between the writer and the environment. All writers form subjectivities in relation to others as part of the writing process. All writers, as 'readers' of the social environment, look for the signs and structures on which to frame their own meaning-making process. But, all writers are also moving in response to and helping to change these social structures, signs and symbols to meet their own desires.

The next section looks in more detail at young children's writing as a dynamic transformative activity, and how this understanding of language and literacy, as altering meaning through expression, has been recently problematised by researchers who have embraced a wider understanding of multimodal symbolic systems, materials and bodies.

Section two: Young children's writing as multiliterate, multimodal and becoming *different*

The social and cultural explanation of writing activity has become increasingly concerned with how multiple literacy practices can be recognised. This section will explore the conceptual arguments within current theories of literacy that consider writing as an activity that can be expressed and constructed in multiple ways. The theoretical perspectives presented here differ in how they approach an understanding of language structures and meaning. These alternative arguments are important as they move social and cultural perspectives into new territory by recognising the limitations of theories that perceive writing activity solely in terms of language/linguistic processes of mind, considering instead more distributive elements of bodies and materials. I will unpack some of the fundamental issues within contemporary and contrasting theoretical perspectives in order to identify key areas for further exploration within the study of young children's writing.

Language and meaning – Structuralist and post-structuralist approaches

This section introduces theories that have different approaches to language systems: structuralism and post-structuralism. These terms will be used in this section in relation to contemporary literacy theories, and in order to provide clarity, I will begin by defining them.

Theorists that rely on structural readings of language and literacy argue that language as a structure or system is made of small units at different levels (e.g. sound, grammar, meaning). Language, as a social convention, involves signs that 'signify' particular meanings (Saussure, 1960), and it is the social conventions within different contexts that fix the meanings of what signs signify. As there are concrete conventions for using language, the emphasis in structuralist explorations of language and meaning is on identifying the stable and autonomous structures that are recognisable (Swann et al., 2004). Structuralist perspectives underpin the sociocultural arguments presented in the previous section, as it was the system of language that structured the meanings given to the world. In structural approaches to literacy, meanings remain external to the child but

within the system. Meanings are therefore *'defined by the structures that surround the child'* (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 80).

Taking a different approach, post-structuralism assumes that meanings are not fixed within a language system but are contained within the relationship between one sign and what it refers to. Instead, meanings are networked to other signs, like a shifting and temporal chain. Words and images can all be regarded as 'texts' to be 'read' differently dependent on the shifting contexts in which they are seen (MacNaughton, 2005). Meaning is therefore made externally; it is changing and indeterminate. People do not 'make' meanings through their actions; rather, meanings are 'read' by others. So, there are no objective true meanings but multiple meanings that are linked to society, culture and history, always dependent on the shifting meanings of other signs and flexible to *'difference'* (Derrida, 2001). A general principle in post-structuralist thought is that of change and fluidity rather than stability, so to fix and capture the child's activity as a language user within a structure is pointless; rather, the processes of change and its associations should be attended to (Swann et al., 2004).

Defining writing as a literate social practice

To begin an examination of current structuralist approaches to language and literacy that are used to explain children's writing, I will briefly explore the notion of *'literacy'* within socio-constructivist thinking. To recap, Vygotskian theory argues that children become literate as they derive meaning from print and understand the functions of language as a socially active process (Street, 2013). Dyson's research (1989, 1999, 2008, 2013) has used this framework for exploring children's cultural generation within their writing by demonstrating that school literacy practices are infused with children's own social concerns and interactions. Literacy can be understood as a specific process, *'evolving within and shaped by children's interactions with other symbolic media and other people, including their peers'* (Dyson, 1989, p. 255).

Negotiating print and therefore becoming literate is meaningful as a context-specific *activity* for the child, and literacy can only be understood as part of the interaction surrounding it. Furthermore, Dyson argues that the case studies of children as writers she has researched show that writing development *'changes as children begin to sense new functional possibilities in their activity'* where *'their writing evolves as others*

respond both playfully and critically to their efforts' (1989, pp. 256–257). So, writing as an aspect of literacy is a process of change and transformation.

The realisation that literacy processes are layered with social interaction, *saturated by* and *connected to* all social events, has meant that writing, as an aspect of literacy, has been interpreted as a situated or 'doing' activity (Gee, 2004), an important part of everyday social life. Writing different texts needs to be understood not only through the contexts in which they are practised, but also in how the activity connects and transforms children's social identities (Street, 1984; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Street and Lefstein, 2007). The implication is that literacy is *embedded* within the larger social structures that are part of childhood. The idea of literacy as a socially situated practice places an emphasis on how people use and modify those practices. Gee (1996, 2004) has argued that the way children talk about toys they have or desire, or how they adopt elements of popular culture in their drawing and writing are processes in which social and cultural practices are reproduced. Within this context-specific *discourse*, group identities are formed, and so children take on multiple literacy identities dependent on the context and discourse. 'New Literacy Studies' is an approach to literacy which recognises children's socially situated multiple literacy identities, extending our understanding of literacy practices beyond school literacy teaching. It is an expansive approach that acknowledges a multitude of communication practices within multiple childhood spaces. As Lankshear and Knobel (2011) describe it, *'People read and write differently out of different social practices, and these different ways with words are part of different ways of being persons and different ways and facets of doing life'* (2011, p. 28).

Multiliteracies and writing as representational design

These ideas emanate from The New London Group (1996), who published an article that set out to explore the theoretical basis for a pedagogical approach to literacy that would be relevant to a changing society. Industrialised nations were becoming increasingly diverse societies of multiple languages and cultures, featuring a fast-developing range of communicative practices. The approach they presented was termed 'multiliteracies', and it rapidly developed into multiliteracy theory.

By recognising that literacy is a socioculturally situated practice, the group argued that literacy users and learners need overt instruction to develop their self-awareness and control over the learning process. This is different from a purely metacognitive process,

where individuals reflect on their learning, as it has a social purpose, the function of which is to recognise diverse identities and give a voice to these. So, literacy learning has an explicit role to play in raising social consciousness. It can do this by re-examining literacy as 'design'. Literacy designs are made of the resources (tools), grammars and semiotic systems (signs and symbols) within children's social space (classroom). As children are users of literacy designs, they need the opportunity to see how they function as socially meaningful. As a child writes, they need the opportunity to transform the conventions of design by shaping meaning and re-presenting it, creating a 'recycled' version based on the available design on offer. So, the child can *become the designer* if they know how to use the tools, signs and symbols to create their own version.

However, the child should not be confined to the design structures on offer, as this will exclude the many aspects of literacy that children have experience of; they should be given the opportunity to build on these structures. Children need to be able to recycle designs but also redesign the available designs, and in doing so, redraw the literacy structures that surround them. This needs to be done through pedagogical *intervention*, because the available literacy designs on offer – the resources, grammars etc. – may not offer every child a way of representing their own literacy identity.

Thinking of young children's writing in terms of multiliteracies has been extremely useful in understanding writing as a social semiotic process of redesign (Kress, 2000b, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) that recognises the diversity of voices and identities that exist within literacy practices (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). It allows children's writing activities to be viewed as having multiple forms and meanings. Above all, young children's social agency is recognised in their ability to transform knowledge through the redesigning process.

Multimodality – writing as an ensemble of modes

As well as recognising that children are engaged in multiple literacy practices, there is a need to explore literacy as having multiple expressions. Our understanding of the relationship between language and our socially shared symbolic systems needs to extend into more diverse semiotics. Multimodality, as enquiry, recognises these multiple communicative practices and the modes of operation within this. It moves beyond the traditional linguistic function of language and communication to include all sign making – visual, gestural and textual artefacts – as socially functional literate activity (Jewitt, 2011,

p. 30). Within a multimodal approach, writing is investigated and understood as a mode: a socially shaped and culturally given resource for meaning-making. To draw, write, dance and gesture are all modes which differ from culture to culture. Writing as a *mode* has particular sets of semiotic resources dependent on the social and cultural context. An examination of writing therefore needs to recognise writing *in* cultural context (Kress, 2011, p. 55), foregrounding how different cultural resources within writing activity are formed. Dyson's research (2008) demonstrates this by identifying the practice constraints and possibilities that emerge as children shape their written language usage and limit the diversity of graphic symbols within the curriculum practices of the classroom. This is why the next section in this chapter looks at the context of the Reception classroom, one of the aims of the research questions being to understand how children make writing *in* the Reception class.

Within multimodal thinking, young children's writing as a resource for representation and communication is a mode that has potentialities and constraints, or '*modal affordances*' (Kress, 2010, p.82). The organisational elements of writing – words, sentences, grammar – and the social resources that define how it comes into existence frame what is possible to 'say'. As writing is limited by its culturally defined structures, its regulatory system, children will reach for other modes such as gestures, drawing and speech in their desire to communicate with others. Modes are multiple and overlapping: to understand one mode such as writing, we must consider how other modes function alongside it and recognise the modal affordance that each mode offers children as communicators. This is illustrated in Lancaster's research, based on the multimodal analysis of young children under the age of three (Lancaster, 2007). She argues that although children are aware of the differences between writing and drawing at a young age, and use graphic signs in their own mark making, attempting to define differences between drawing and writing for young children is futile, as they do not operate within the same set of adult assumptions related to graphic systems. Their meaning-making is an *ensemble* of signifying activity; 'writing' and 'drawing' are abstract terms for young children, used by adults to make sense of this multimodal way of communicating.

It is important, therefore, to recognise how modes of image and writing are combined within environmental print for young children (Kress, 2003, Yamada-Rice, 2013). What is significant in how young children create meanings within their writing is how writing is understood as distinct, or not, from visual images, and the relationship between the signs and symbols within writing and pictorial representation.

Multimodality beyond language – recognising the material and the embodied

Multimodal theorists have debated the limitations of language to provide a full description of what constitutes writing as text making. Kress (2011, p. 58) challenges the assumption that language systems are fully expressive of all human communication by posing the question, *‘What other means for making meaning are there?’* Both language and writing are closely connected modes, but other modes such as gesture, image and layout have significant differences. Explaining these differences through representational language alone restricts our understanding of the full meaning that children may be expressing using a range of modes for communication. Multimodal theory supports a more inclusive understanding of young children’s writing activity; while this recognises the structures of language within some modes, it also considers how other modes of communication, ones that cannot be ‘known’ in terms of language description, combine to create an ensemble of meaning for children. Further questions, therefore, need to be asked about how language structures express the exact meaning of a gesture.

Two important ontological aspects of multimodal theory are significant for this enquiry. First, writing as multimodal activity is understood to be *‘embodied, not just “mindful”’* (Mavers, 2011, p. 6). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s (2002) ideas, writing is understood as an embodied lived experience, where the physical act is inextricably linked to the perception and meaning-making of it. All movements of body, gaze, gesture etc. are important as overlapping modes of interaction in young children’s writing: a relationship between physical experience, multimodal resources, media practices and social spaces (MODE, 2012). Second, and related to this notion of embodiment, young children’s writing, drawing and text making are dependent on the *material resources* at hand and the signifying potential they offer (Mavers, 2011, p. 44). Writing is not only shaped by materiality but it is dependent upon it (Kress, 1997, p. 73). The material aspect of writing activity shifts not only in response to availability but also in relation to the conventions of its usage. This supports sociocultural arguments presented in the previous section on the appropriation of tool use and how cultural objects are created. The embodied use of materials is essential to young children’s writing; it is how writing activity is able to exist.

By recognising the embodied material nature of writing activity, multimodal analysis seeks to identify and categorise these as interwoven modes of representation which signify meaning. However, if we acknowledge that writing is an act of physical contact with the world through the lived body, then how can this embodiment, this material experience of writing, be fully understood in terms of signification and representation? Take, for example, the waxy feel of the crayon and the sight of the smudged colour it produces, or the tapping sound of fingernails on a keyboard. Can writing as a sensorial and affective activity be understood as representative or as something else? And how is writing as an ensemble of modes understood as a connected or relational whole?

Multiple literacies theory – writing as non-representational

Multiple Literacies Theory (MLT) (Masny and Cole, 2009, 2012) draws on Deleuzian ideas (Deleuze, 2004a, 2004b; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) to offer a way of understanding young children's writing beyond constituted structural systems (such as language). It focuses instead on how the body affects living systems, and virtual powers operate in terms of their *relational dimensions*. Rather than treating the human body within writing activity as a system of sign generation, organised through sign grammars and purely representational of language structures, the child as a writing body is explored as *non-representational* (Leander and Boldt, 2012). This embodied approach to writing rejects the Cartesian mind/body binary and the consequential hierarchical foregrounding of cognitive processes. It instead focuses on how the body and materials work as an entanglement of forces, the mind being one mode within this (Masny, 2006).

In this conceptualisation of literacy and writing, there is an acknowledgement of the inherent pluralism and broadening out of 'texts' or modes, corresponding with multiliteracy and multimodal approaches. However, MLT as a post-structuralist approach rejects the idea that writing as experience can be rendered a stable category or linguistic system, or that it should be contrasted to previous *a priori* notions of what 'literacy' practices are (Masny, 2009). These, it is argued, are second order interventions that create structure and stasis out of movement and change (Massumi, 2002). The socially dominant reality of children's writing, where language and development is prioritised, creates fixed boundaries and territories around the designated truths associated with its activity. As Masny and Cole argue, '*as soon as one designates the representation of literacy learning as something else, a hole in the actual experience appears*' (2012, p. 4).

MLT seeks to stand back and ask questions about why writing as a form of literacy, is 'mapped' in particular ways within particular contexts. In this way powerful discourses around 'literacy' can be defined, and as a result, 'illiteracy' can become apparent too (Masny and Cole, 2012).

By rejecting a normative understanding of young children's writing activity, whether psychologically or governmentally defined, MLT researchers instead follow the relational aspects of material processes, or flows of production. An awareness of how writing may be structured within classrooms as a representational event is an important aspect of the multiple 'readings' that can be taken of writing as activity. However, multiple literacies theorists argue that although children's writing exists as an aspect of these structures within delineated spaces, it is only bound by them if the conceptualisation of it is too. Instead, MLT proposes that as children are writing, *they are creating multiple conceptualisations of it*. There is a need to recognise the existence of the writer through the multiple relational configurations of the objects of writing (the tools and materials) and bodies, as children are producing the writing itself. As a researcher, therefore, the essential question, in Deleuzian terms, is, what constitutes the *writing machine*?

Unlike socio-constructivist approaches, MLT rejects the separation of the subject and social group, decentering the subject to the extent that the subject himself/herself becomes an effect of events and experiences. The child is not rationalising social and cultural ways of writing, stepping through predetermined processes of change in learning about writing within contexts, but encountering undeterminably '*moment to moment unfoldings*' (Leader and Boldt, 2012, p. 33). The focus here is on how writing activity *moves*, sometimes unpredictably, across various contexts as a constant process (Masny and Cole, 2012).

Assemblages of desire – the writing machine

Theorising about how young children's production of writing may occur using Deleuzoguattarian ideas means exploring two distinct but overlapping concepts: writing as *desire* and writing as *assemblage*.

Desire, rather than being defined as something individual and sexual or insatiably lacking pleasure, is '*a process of experimentation on a plane of immanence*' (Ross, 2010, p.

66). It is conceptualised as both productive and positive, and related to how humans operate externally. It is desire that forces both production and connections between bodies, materials and spaces, constructing multiple unpredictable assemblages of reality. Children are often desirous to produce writing. It is a potent driver, prompting decision-making, tool use and potential transformation (Knight, 2009). We can recognise this notion of desire when we think of the immersive qualities that can be observed in children's writing, text making and drawing. Importantly, children as *desiring machines* are continuously producing and constructing, imagining and acting, and forcing encounters that sometimes push beyond regulatory frameworks.

This production can be understood as an assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (2004), in the French of their original writing, propose the use of the term '*agencement*', [arrangement]. The English translation of this has since become '*assemblage*' and relates to the processes of fitting together or organising (Livesey, 2010). Assemblages are complex constellations of objects, bodies, texts, qualities and spaces that shape the coming together of flowing forces. Although shifting, the relationships between each element as an arrangement can be mapped. Ideally, assemblages are innovative and produce unique ideas as a result of desirous and productive processes. So, literacy as desirous can be explored as an emerging assemblage of connected experiences both corporeal and material, one which is unbound but contributes to sense making by children (Masny and Cole, 2012, p. 98). To understand the production of writing, Deleuzian theorists would argue that we need to trace the connections within these assemblages by mapping the '*paradoxical forces at work*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 12), i.e. not observing what is being signified by children but what the function of the forces within their writing assemblages might be.

Writing as affective and emotional – the sensorial qualities of writing

MacLure (2013a, p. 658) describes sensation as '*The wild element in language*'. It is wild because sense, as something feral and natural, resists representation or adjustment to fit within language structures. In Deleuze's work, *The Logic of Sense* (2004b), to be sensing is to be pre-conscious; it occurs in the moments before we make meaning, a precursor to thought. For example, it is what happens when we encounter a painting. The art affects us on a sensory level: the colour, form and movement in the object bring forth a wealth of

sensations. This occurs before we rationalise these into feelings and express them as language. Our communications therefore follow on from the initial sensorial effect that 'texts' have on us, the text here being a painting. So, language signifies the meanings taken from the sensation, articulating the associations that we have made in sensing: 'the painting is beautiful, awful, frightening, boring etc.' Importantly, in Deleuzian thinking, representational language is not the actual sensation itself; language is secondary.

As children anticipate writing activity and engage as writers, multiple sensations arise in response to materials, people, place, time etc. Deleuze describes this as a collision of bodies (2004b). These sensations produce '*affects*', or changes and transformations, sometimes described as emotional affect, but essentially the definition of affect here concerns the variations that occur as a result or the product of how these things interact (Colman, 2010a, p. 11). What Deleuze's work offers us is a way of recognising and valuing these sensorial qualities within young children's writing encounters, and knowing them as wavering and transformational; these qualities are important dimensions within children's writing experiences that are often overlooked. Taking a Deleuzian approach means that what we notice should shift away from the form that writing takes to the nature of the encounter itself (the processes) and what this brings about in terms of children's *becoming* (Verevis, 2010, p. 250). Attention needs to be given to the many ways in which writing encounters as sensations are assembling, interacting and resonating (Masny and Cole, 2012). Further explanation of becoming as a conceptual tool will be addressed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Two challenges are presented in how we might begin to explore sensation within young children's writing. First, as sensation is something that is essentially changing and by its very nature fleeting and transient, how can we externally observe and identify writing encounters as 'sense events' and trace transformation within children's experience? Second, how is it possible for us to articulate these moments through language if words are insufficient as an explanation of sensation within these events? A response to these problems is explored within chapter four, which outlines my approach to data and analysis.

Writing as the coming together of children and matter

Bennett, in her book *Vibrant Matter* (2010), describes how the conventional way of describing materials as 'non-living' objects is by assigning them meaning through their

social context, namely as a result of intentional human design. For example, a pen as an object is understood through the habits of usage and what it is afforded, corresponding with sociocultural arguments and multimodal approaches. However, Bennett takes a different view by arguing that we should be looking at materials differently, and instead consider them as visible entities which have an energetic vitality, or '*thing power*' (Bennett, 2010, p. 5). This approach attempts to bring both humans and objects closer together, because '*if matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimised, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated*' (Bennett, 2010, p. 13).

The notion of bringing both the user of the object and the objects itself together, not in terms of affordance but as something different, corresponds with the rejection of fixed binary conceptions of the world. Questioning the boundaries of the object and subject, where each start and finish, has been used to frame enquiry within other disciplines, for example cybertechnologies and environmental studies, where the human and material worlds are merging. Within these fields of study, a redefinition of how human and non-human elements exist together, one which breaks down dualist concepts, brings greater clarity to understanding the world. These arguments are useful for questions related to children as writers, because children as subjects often utilise technologies as objects. An examination of how these are bound together, their *mingling*, is important to consider when thinking about how children construct ideas within their writing encounters. It leads to questions about where the boundaries are between the child writer and the writing object, and what the relationship might be between them.

Barad (2007, p. 33) coins the term '*intra-action*' to explain how things are mutually constituted. Barad argues that rather than viewing entities as discrete and in terms of their preconceived separation, exploring how phenomena are formed through their *interactivity*, we need to re-think how divisions between humans and non-human objects have occurred as *intra-active*. To understand different elements within writing activity, for example the writing apparatus and the social child, we need to investigate *how these elements emerge* from their relational entanglements as intra-activity. What becomes known by children from writing activity, the phenomenon of it, Barad would argue, is formed through this intra-action as an entanglement of bodies and matter. This is demonstrated within Kuby et al.'s (2015) research of children's writing in relation to space, time and materials where it was noted that children's use of materials or artefacts appeared to unfold in the moments that the children were using them, rather than being predetermined. The children's activity was desirable and expansive in how they worked

with materials, to the extent that their communication was inseparable from the material entanglements that they encountered. Kuby et al. concluded that understandings of writing need to expand to legitimise expansive ideas about materials and children's desirous intra-action with them.

Children's writing is formed by being in existence with objects, part of being within the material world. As Barad states, '*We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world*' (cited in Jackson and Mazzei, 2013, p. 117). Being of the world means that we need to recognise the productive and agentive qualities of materials. But to what extent can post-humanist and new materialist theory, where children's writing practices are viewed through a prism of biophysical matter, help us to make sense of language as socially and culturally constructed? Rautio and Winston attempt to overturn the common argument that children play with language by stating that '*Language is one "thing" that plays with children*' (2015, p. 18). This reconceptualisation sees language as a material form which has agentive power. Meanings result from the material form of language, not in what is abstractly shaped through signification. It is language's formation as a material entity, its dynamic existence, which children intra-act with in writing activity. To understand this material form of language, we need to consider how it is produced and how that production comes into being as human expression.

Writing as wayfaring – producing movement

The anthropologist Tim Ingold writes that human life is a life of making and producing that '*undergoes continual generation in currents of materials*' (2011, p. 30). Being human is about bringing things to life, a material involvement where the qualities of materials are continually being shaped and reshaped. Materials, he argues,

cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined, but practically experienced...To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate. (2011, p. 30)

Ingold suggests that humans shape the world through practices of inhabitation within, and as part of, the material world; people make things by being immersed in the material world. As a way of explaining how knowledge is shaped by people into culture, Ingold emphasises the practice of *doing, making, creating, storying, drawing, writing*: in

other words, human *action*. Writing is a state of being in the world, part of human existence as '*materials confront the creative imagination*' (Ingold, 2011, p. 23).

Children's writing activity can be viewed, therefore, as human intra-active material production. Children create lines and marks (tracings) on solid surfaces with technologies and their bodies. These are tracings of manual gestures created as a continuous movement, by dragging or pulling of an implement (Ingold, 2007, p. 120). Ingold explores the inherent movement of written gestures further by adopting the artist Paul Klee's explanation that it is the line itself that '*goes out for a walk*' (Klee cited in Ingold, 2007, p. 73). The notion of children's writing as a process of production, moving along a pathway through changing environments, is particularly useful when considering how children move into different writing spaces, for example in a Reception classroom. By adopting Ingold's ideas, child writers can be viewed as travellers or 'wayfarers'. This conceptualisation of children's writing activity views them as following tracks through different environments, continually on the move, looking for perceptual and material sustenance as they go, and tracing new pathways or lines as they progress (Ingold, 2007, p. 76). Writing as wayfaring is therefore not about connecting different dimensions in writing by finding the shortest route from one to another or moving from each fixed point; rather, it is essentially movement itself.

Ingold's work brings together an understanding of material cultures and language gestures that help us to relocate children's writing activity as unbounded rather than destination-oriented. It helps us to consider how the act of writing, like drawing, weaving, singing and storytelling, is a way in which humankind walks the earth. It also corresponds with the range of arguments presented in this section that state that children write multimodally as an expression of their ideas or as an embodied sensory and material movement.

To conclude this section, I would like to go back once more to the different schools of thought in relation to language, or the *isms* that I referred to at the beginning. There appear to be overlapping ideas in the literature about how young children's writing as language contains multiple signs and multiple meanings. There are, however, distinct differences that relate to the fundamental idea of where meanings and signs are made, either fixed within the language and thinking systems or unfixed and networked to other associated elements (sense, materials, bodies etc.). These contemporary arguments may mean that sociocultural theories of language which relate entirely to word and thought may not be enough to explain all aspects of young children's actions as writers. These

differing approaches do, however, all recognise that children's writing activity and meaning-making are constructed in social, cultural and material contexts. In the next section, I will look in detail at the environment in which children are placed in their first year of school: the Reception class. I will uncover the implications of this contextual framework for children's writing activity, where certain activities are privileged and particular understandings of young children's writing are created within the school structures.

Section three: Young children's writing in the context of the contemporary Reception class – Child writers as future *becomings*

Within the social and cultural structures of an early years classroom, young children come to know what it is to be a writer in school. As previous discussions of sociocultural theory imply, as active participants in classroom life, children are constructing conceptualisations of writing in response to the organisation, resourcing, and adult and peer discourse that they encounter on a daily basis. In these localised spaces, children are engaged in literate activities which hold particular value in response to the wider literacy agenda in England, resultant from political and economic concerns. The children's experiences are directly affected by these external structures, even if they are not bound by them. This section examines the particular literacy context of the Reception class in present times, which has informed the image of the young child writer as being of economic potential and where children are understood to be *becoming* writers in terms of regulated frameworks.

The economics of early literacy in the Reception classroom

'As countries transition towards knowledge-based economies, policymakers need to consider what can be done to develop their stock of human capital...Put another way, as countries increasingly compete on the basis of their talent and human capital, they need to invest in all their people as early in life as possible.' (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, p. 31)

The political and economic forces within early years education in recent years are a direct response to an economic perception of children as a future 'stock of human capital': a narrowing of our conception of young children (Wells, 2009). Comparative international

reporting (OECD, 2014) of children's results in literacy have fuelled political concern about English children's relative achievement and the effect that this will have on the nation's future global success in trade and industry. The educational experience of young children in Reception classes has been affected by policies that view the site of education not as having a wider social purpose but as a place where commercial skills, knowledge and values are learnt, and children are perceived in terms of their individual economic potential (Ball, 2013, p. 14). Thinking of early years education in terms of 'market-place efficiency' has two significant effects on young children's experience of learning about literacy. First, it changes the language and thinking around literacy practices so that certain authority is assigned to particular types of literacy: ones that are recognised as having value in a competitive globalised economy. Second, the practices of everyone engaged in these types of literacy learning, both the educators and the educated, are monitored and assessed using measures of accountability and methods of surveillance (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p. 80).

A simple example of how wider economic concerns around the creation of capital is affecting young children's experiences as literacy learners is in the current focus on the fine detail of print literacy as opposed to visual literacy. There is conflicting evidence to show that teaching young children the segmented parts of print literacy gives them an advantage in learning to read and write, and may in fact be damaging to their metacognitive and social needs (Whitebread, 2011). However, print literacy and the teaching of its component parts through synthetic phonic instruction are prioritised over other aspects of literacy learning, and often introduced to children before they enter formal education. Elements of visual literacy, such as drawing, rather than understood as integral features of multimodal writing activity, are viewed instead as a developmental precursor, and as secondary to the more important formalised process of writing symbols (Hall, 2009).

School structures and the child writer as emergent *becoming*

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) argue that the structures of childhood, schooling being one of them, present childhood experience as universally determined and reduce the fluidity of social relationships to fixed systems of measurement. Children existing as writers within these immovable structures are actively constructing their own lives in relation to others. The social structure itself constrains, confines and moulds this process (Cosaro, 2003). Even though children are active creators of cultures, effecting changes around them, their

ability to demonstrate their agency is limited by the structures that surround them and the roles that they are assigned to.

Alderson (2003) argues that structures within school, such as the curriculum and learning relationships, still predominantly construct children as vulnerable, ignorant and unreliable, in contrast to adults who are wise, informed and dependable. Adult decision-makers reinforce this approach to working with children by relying on behaviourist methods to regulate accepted social behaviour and developmental models to quantifiably assess and test individuals against these structures. The curriculum, informed by developmental psychology, is clearly future-oriented: '*it wants to know how small people become big people*' (Mayall, 2002, p. 22). This emphasis on young children places them as writers who are '*human becomings*' rather than '*human beings*' (Qvortrup, 1994, p.5), where their experiences are only valued or given meaning in relation to what they will be and not what they are now (Lee, 2001). This provides a fixed binary based on adults as '*knowing*' and children, by means of this conceptualisation, existing only in terms of how well they are progressing as '*becoming knowledgeable*'. Although constructing children in terms of biological measures of individual growth and the scientific truths of developmental psychology have been heavily critiqued in recent years (Burman, 2008), this paradigm has persisted in educational structures due to its correspondence to economic and political models of development.

The child viewed as an *emerging* writer based on the developmental processes of learning (Clay, 1975; Mayer, 2007) is a dominant approach in school classrooms. Here, children's intentional representative mark making is understood in relationship to conventional adult writing activity. There is continuity within the process of learning to write and the developmental frameworks that have been developed in order to categorise literacy knowledge and skills (Rhyner et al., 2009). Although '*emergent writing*' practice acknowledges the intentions of children in early mark making as a communicative action, and that what may be described as '*scribble*' holds value (Clay, 1975), it maps these creative experimentations to norms of development from the unconventional to the conventional. Teale and Sulzby, in their influential text *Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading* (1994), state that writing is part of a linear emergent process. There are fixed stages of writing, but children can pass through them at different ages and in a variety of ways. Teale and Sulzby recognise that writing development is continual from birth and that there are no pre-writing stages. However, it is quite clear in their work that they understand the becoming process as one with an end stage: '*children do **become** literate*' (Teale and Sulzby, 1996, p. xx, my bold). Although stages within

development may be recognised as important, emergent theories position children in relation to adult competences and therefore adopt a deficit model of the child who is ‘not there yet’. As Teale and Sulzby state, children are involved in an emergent process which is ‘forward looking’, heading towards a time when they will be able to ‘*do so [writing and reading] conventionally*’ (1996, p. xx).

Exploratory mark making processes from birth, which indicate intention and desire, are contained within this understanding of writing as emergence, the argument being that with the correct support, and by following a universal trajectory, a child will eventually end their *becoming* writer phase and *be* an adult writer. Convention is seen as a fixed goal for writers to aim for and cultural perceptions of what convention is, and how it might be experienced, are not questioned.

Writing activity as policy representation – curriculum and phonics

Notions of young children’s writing, within the statutory (Department for Education, 2014b) and non-statutory (Early Education, 2012) guidance for teachers, draw predominantly on emergent theories of literacy, and writing is conceived of as an individually constructed, developmentally staged activity. Most significantly, the models of assessment within these curricular documents can be used to make the children and teachers accountable, and their performance measurable in relation to fixed expectations. The child’s development is structured through individual assessment and levels of progress against universal norms described as ‘*best fit judgements*’ or ‘*typical development*’ (Early Education, 2012). Consequently, what a teacher notes as they assess children’s writing activity is allied to a particular teleological structure with an end point(s): specific levels of development expected from the outset (Standards and Testing Agency, 2014). The observation, assessment and planning cycle used to monitor and organise children’s writing activities is conducted as a movement towards the completion of stages towards the hoped-for final outcome, in other words, the *ideal*.

Within the English curriculum framework, the ‘Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage’ (Department for Education, 2014b), which outlines practices with children from birth to five, the Early Learning Goal (ELG) for children at the end of their first year of school is that they are able to,

use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple

sentences that can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible. (2014b, p. 31)

This descriptor defines what teachers perceive to be the '*ideal learner*': a child who is working to a good level of progress in relation to the pre-described outcomes (Bradbury, 2013). Not surprisingly, to meet these prescribed outcomes for four- and five-year-old children, many schools employ teacher-led strategies. These approaches tend towards the teaching of separated and stratified stages, related to measurable components of writing, phonics, spellings etc., rather than offering broader language activities that promote the connective whole of literacy learning.

As an example, it is common for children in English Reception classes to encounter regular time and spatially bound activities based on highly structured, phased synthetic phonics programmes such as '*Letters and Sounds: principles and practice of high quality phonics*' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) or *Read, Write Inc.* (Mislin, 2011). These daily phonic sessions are in line with the wider national move towards the adoption of Systematic Synthetic Phonic (SSP) approaches, as an aim to improve literacy by increasing phonological awareness and memory. The focus is on phonemic awareness and the function of letters, i.e. graphemes to represent phonemes within spelling (Lonigan, 2006). Within these sessions, aspects of language and literacy are taught as components and fragments of the 'whole' with the intention of building knowledge about reading and writing in segmented bits; in other words, it is a process of developmental steps. Children following these strategies within Reception classes are regularly assessed in relation to the phonemes that have been covered. Even though children are asked to write as a regular feature of these sessions, I have found no evidence in my review of literature that demonstrates that phonics programmes have a positive impact on children's writing.

Viewed through the curriculum framework and the corresponding policy strategies to support it, children's writing output in the classroom, i.e. what children are producing, has become a collection of cultural objects with certain values attached, having both an *ideal* (expected and hoped-for) and material (*real*) state (Cole, 1996). Writing as school literacy, enshrined in policy, is therefore imbued with ideology and employed to particular ends (Smagorinsky, 2011). It has become a future-oriented striated procession of writing events that are anticipated by, and pinned down to, a predictable conclusion.

Performativity and goal-oriented assessment – writing as determined and measurable

Kathy Short argues that '*we aim too low by focusing on literacy*' (2014, p. 123), meaning that school literacy, condensed within a simplistic understanding of the 'nuts and bolts' of literacy learning and mapped onto a framework of testing, is not enough of a literate experience for young children. School literacy has become separated from what it means to be a *literate person*: a person who is able to think and transform their mind and life through the illumination that literate activity can provide. Short's argument is that the problem with literacy within schools is that its meanings and purpose have been manipulated and narrowed by an increasingly competitive economic agenda; the consequence is that the opportunities for young children to be and become a literate person in school have contracted. This has affected the way that writing as literacy is practised. Writing, as literacy practice, instead of being a way of exploring the world, of taking risks and experimenting, where creative thought, form and function are explored, has been reduced to a limited, assessment-oriented, quantitative existence. Knowledge of literacy as a process of diverse social practices within material places, related to language, has the ability to '*contextualise people, their relationship with each other and to themselves, and the texts they produce and consume*' (Bloome and Wilson, 2014, p. 198) but this is not being noted.

Roberts-Holmes (2014) argues that early years teachers' assessment practices have become increasingly data-driven in line with the policy context of raising standards and wider school performance culture. These policies have a reductive effect on the provision for, and experience of, children in school. For example, phonic booster activities are planned for as a way of producing 'good data', while other experiences in Reception classrooms are put aside. Baseline assessment of all children as they enter the Reception classroom is currently being introduced, replacing the summative assessment tool, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP). There is concern that this formative process of assessment will lead to further reductionist approaches to conceptualising children's literacy and therefore their writing activity in the early years.

Young children's performativity related to a narrow political agenda around literacy and the education reforms that have resulted are not unique to England. Goodman (2014, p. 25) has argued against the imposition of test-driven literacy programmes in the United States, where teaching has become focused on teaching the skills that the test 'tests'. By retesting after drills and practice, quantifiable progress can

be externally demonstrated. This has also been shown to be the case in the Year One phonic test in England (Clark, 2014, p. 151). As children's literacy progress can be shown to have been made, the policies and strategies are seen to be successful. Alternative knowledge about literacy is then debunked and blamed on children's supposed illiteracy in the past.

Writing activity in classrooms that is more than school literacy – informal play writing

Although children's literacy activity in schools can be seen to be increasingly regulated by external political forces and segmented into measurable practices, the open-ended experience of writing, through the provision of play, is also provided for in a Reception class. Play activity, although divided into different spatial practices related to curriculum structures (Rautio and Winston, 2015), remains a key feature of young children's learning in early years environments. It is enshrined in the 'Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' as an '*effective*' learning process (2014b, p. 7). Whether this is because it is seen as having a function in terms of developmental and social progression, which supports more formalised curriculum learning, or something more ambiguous is debatable.

Play provides unique opportunities for young children's writing to come into fruition. Hall and Robinson note that children write to pursue and sustain their play (2003, pp. 124–125). Children's playfulness provides the intensity and purpose to write. The action of writing in play activity is often a result of children's desire to author the play itself. Both role play and text creation are concerned with authoring and provide a very powerful writing encounter when combined. Although teachers tend to misuse children's play for their own future-oriented educational goals (Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008), children have different views of play that are centred '*on having fun, being outdoors, being with friends, choosing freely*' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 49). Children's subjective experience of text making and drawing within play, which Huizinga (2014) describes in terms of feelings rather than outcomes (excitement, tension, surprise, togetherness), is an aspect of young children's writing experience in their first year of school that supports a very different approach to children's text making. Lieberman (1977) argues that as play is free from structure, play activity combined with writing can be unconstrained and impulsive. As well as being a physical, social and cognitive process,

it manifests joy and humour. Playfulness as something spontaneous is action that moves beyond the expected or outside of particular construction of meaning that is expected in relation to those actions.

The Reception class – Teacher interaction with children

In their research about children's experiences in the Reception class, Moyles and Worthington (2011) noted that although the EYFS promotes play as a way of offering children rich learning opportunities, the reality is that teachers are focused instead on curriculum delivery. Important elements of play and literacy, for example collaborative and open-ended dialogue opportunities, are therefore missed as teachers spend time on teaching children what Moyles and Worthington refer to as low-level skills. The pressure on teachers' pedagogy comes from narrow views of assessment linked to government initiatives, as has been argued above, rather than on improving understanding of the complex nature of play and learning.

Payler (2007), in her research on four-year-old children's participation in both preschool and Reception classrooms, observed that teachers offer distinct interactive opportunities to children, opening up and closing down both verbal and non-verbal '*interactive spaces*' between themselves and children. The communicative modes that teachers apply to control this space matter in how opportunities for children to participate and co-construct their identities as learners are enabled, or not. Interestingly, Payler noted that the younger children in the Reception class had far less opportunity to participate in more 'open spaces' with teachers, as their interaction was much more controlled and limited by outcome-focused interaction.

Moyles and Worthington's paper, alongside Payler's research, opens up the debate about what children are actually doing and experiencing in Reception classes in England as a result of where the teacher's gaze is being directed. These studies indicate that play and co-constructed learning is mediated by curriculum expectations and external frameworks, the focus of which affects the experiences that young children have in their first year of school.

In summary of this section, the structural organisation of young children's writing activity within schools has become increasingly regulated by powerful educational policy, framed within the curriculum, which in turn influences the assessment and control of

teaching practices towards *'ideal'* writing activity. However, the Reception class is still a place for playful, multimodal writing experiences, which are perhaps valued differently and are sometimes counterintuitive to expected literacy learning as they offer young children different spaces in which to *become* writers. The early years classroom context therefore offers children formal, performance and goal-oriented activity as *becoming* writers, alongside playful, more uncertain and creative activity as *being* writers. Although adults, myself included, may conceptualise these ways of providing writing experiences for children differently, as Clark (2014) has indicated, what may need further consideration is how young children themselves make sense of these assorted practices and what effect these practices have on their own attitudes to literacy and writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has demonstrated the complexities inherent within the processes of construction that exist when young children are creating text in classrooms. There is common ground in how this is understood by theorists, but also some significantly differing perspectives.

In summary, social constructivists suggest that when young children write, they are symbolising thought. Their meaningful actions, tool use and artefact creation is an extension of this socially constructed process of shared thinking. The social space in which this occurs – where words have particular meanings and children engage in both official and non-official cultural production – has significance in how children's own developing conceptualisations of writing activity occur (Dyson, 2008). Multimodal approaches build on the ideas of socially situated learning theory, emphasising the multiplicity of modes that are used by children to re-represent their ideas of the world in specific spaces. Multimodality recognises that children afford differing meanings to particular tools and actions to represent their thinking; this is a process that is constantly modified by the social and cultural values attached to the object. As children's activities as writers are multimodally expressed, there is a need to consider the diverse ways in which they signify meaning through their writing activity.

Multiple literacies theorists and new materialist thinkers take a critical approach to how language is privileged in representative approaches. These writers acknowledge social structures and their influence on social and cultural meaning-making, as these inform the way in which dominant ideas of writing are conceptualised in social contexts

and are therefore important in understanding how writing is 'read' by others. These new theories, however, question the privileging within literacy theory of cognitive development and the linguistic systems that are in place that represent children's thinking. These approaches, which look beyond language structures, argue that there is a need to break down binary notions between people and things, mind and body, and acknowledge the connectivity within writing activity as a process that involves multiple constructions of objects, bodies and spaces. They recognise materially embodied feelings and senses, elements of experience which transcend the structures of language in how children are being and becoming writers. However, the multiple elements that children are engaged in when they write can be interpreted differently by applying some of these ideas of materiality and embodiment, and this is helpful in expanding an understanding of the intricacies and multiple meanings of young children's writing. This is particularly important within the educational system where literacy is narrowed into performance targets, and young children's experience of the classroom when they first enter school is one where writing and being a writer is idealised and contained within predetermined and measurable outcomes.

This literature review has raised questions about the limitations that may exist if one solely relies on structural approaches both in terms of theoretical arguments put forward in the field and in how practical provision for child writers is experienced. The social and cultural values that both adults and children are active in creating within these social spaces matter, but to know how these values come into existence, we may need to expand our narrow views of literacy contained within the structures. It appears that it is possible to learn more about children's writing activity by adopting some of these more recent re-conceptualisations of literacy, where materials, objects and bodies intra-act, and find ways to look at young children's writing beyond structural assumptions. Adults do not experience being writers in schools, children do, but it appears that in nearly all of the research on children's literacy and writing in their first year of school, children's voices, their ways for them to share this experience and co-construct knowledge in the field, are missing. Adult-researchers within all approaches have presumed that by observing what children do, it is enough to secure the knowledge needed. This leaves the question of how, as adults, we can construct an understanding of children's lives as writers in classrooms with, rather than apart from, the children themselves. The answer to this question will be explored further within the next chapter on methodology.

To conclude this review, and as a way of moving forward into the next chapter, I will define a different conceptualisation of *becoming* from the one that is inherent within the

school curriculum; I will use this different definition to explore my research questions in the coming chapter(s). I have argued that the literature related to literacy policy and assessment practices in an English Reception classroom predominantly constructs the *becoming* child as a future-oriented image, and that both childhood and young children's writing activity are linear and fixed. The problem with this way of thinking about child writers as *becoming* is that it limits the definition of writing that is on offer, omitting any understanding of the complexity of writing processes and activity that has been presented in this chapter. I am adopting an alternative notion of *becoming* as a strategy for fracturing the assumptions that surround young children's school writing.

Reconceptualising young children as becoming writers

As has been examined and discussed in the first two sections of this chapter, young children's writing activity is a continual process of construction and transformation. Prout writes that children and their cultural and social activity should be viewed '*not as a unitary phenomenon, but as a multiple set of constructions emergent from the connection and disconnection, fusion and separation of these heterogeneous materials*' (2005, p. 144). To fully explore this growth and movement, it is helpful to consider a very differing view of becoming, one presented by Deleuze and Guattari to be used as a conceptual tool. *Becoming*, for Deleuze and Guattari, is never a means to completion but a constantly changing process that cannot be reduced to being something else (2004, p. 263). They write that,

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 263)

Young children's writing activity, as Deleuze and Guattari would describe it, should be understood as multiplicity, defined by the '*number of dimensions it has*' (2004, p. 275), rather than it being defined by how it can be understood in relation to units of measurement or in comparison to other practices.

Using this concept of *becoming* as a research tool, it is possible to explore the multitude of dimensions and connectivity in childhood experiences, and attempt to focus on the processes, i.e. the '*unfolding of action*' within children's writing activity (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, p.510). This way of thinking about children's *becomings* as writers

acknowledges the fixed structures that surround children in school but shows how this limits our notions of what literacy can be. Instead, it offers an exploration of the continually emerging writer within *and* outside of the expected frameworks. Within the school structures, Deleuze and Guattari would argue that child writers are *becoming* in two ways: by '*becoming-the-same*', establishing the existing order, and by '*becoming-other*', escaping and inventing new ways of thinking which lead away from what is already categorised and understood and shared (2004, p. 262). They write that these inventions or demarcations from what is already known are the 'lines of flight' that we take, the *detritorialisation* away from and towards something new (2004, p. 312).

Rejecting a universally applied and predetermined model of *becoming* and instead espousing Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of it will support an exploration of children's writing which corresponds with the themes that emerge from the literature presented in this review. These themes:

- are ever-changing and transformative;
- involve multiple meaning-making beyond systematic boundaries;
- are driven by children's desires within localised social and cultural contexts; and
- are a construction of social, material and embodied relational encounters between adults and children, physical objects, environments, and institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: Methodology

Introduction

Denscombe (2010, p. 136) argues that for robust and coherent arguments to emerge from research activity, the philosophical direction that underpins it should be clearly accountable. All aspects of research – the questions, kinds of data required, what can be qualified as worthwhile evidence, and the purpose for the findings – are answerable to the foundational philosophical approach that the researcher takes. My role, therefore, is to develop an approach that provides a coherent thread of thinking, building from an epistemological and ontological foundation to create the theoretical approaches and tools needed for research: a ‘methodology’. This chapter has been written as an explanation of how my methodology has come about in this way, and will justify why the approach presented here is needed for this study. To demonstrate further rigour within this discussion, I have taken a reflexive approach (Etherington, 2004) which acknowledges my own positionality stemming from my personal and professional self, i.e. my ‘*stance*’ (Dunne et al., 2005, p. 84). I have attempted to provide transparency by recognising that my choices are ones which fit best with my own social reality or the human experience I have of ‘*being in the world*’ (Standish, 2013).

Within this chapter, I will demonstrate how my interpretative research design, methods of data construction, and ethical considerations have sought to answer questions about how young children’s writing is socially, culturally and materially constructed. The methodology presented, created in response to the examination of literature in the previous chapter, adopts socio-constructivist and post-structural conceptualisations of young children as writers in school, and seeks to explore the differing realities that might exist for children in *being* and *becoming* a writer, rather than pursuing the certainties of universal experience. My approach is not to try to define exactly what writing is; rather, my approach is to find a way in which to explore the multiple possibilities within its emergence. To ensure that there is an opportunity to open up rather than close down these possibilities, and to demonstrate that my research is responsive to a fully multimodal and multiple understanding of young children’s writing activity and is ethically authentic, I have examined in detail how young children’s voices are heard in research activity, and how their participation in context can be understood and carried out.

This chapter will not include a description of how I planned the analysis of data. This aspect of the research is connected more fundamentally to the following chapters that include the findings, analysis and discussion. This will be explained fully in chapter four.

This chapter has been organised into five sections as follows:

Section one: Research design: ontology, epistemology and conceptual framework

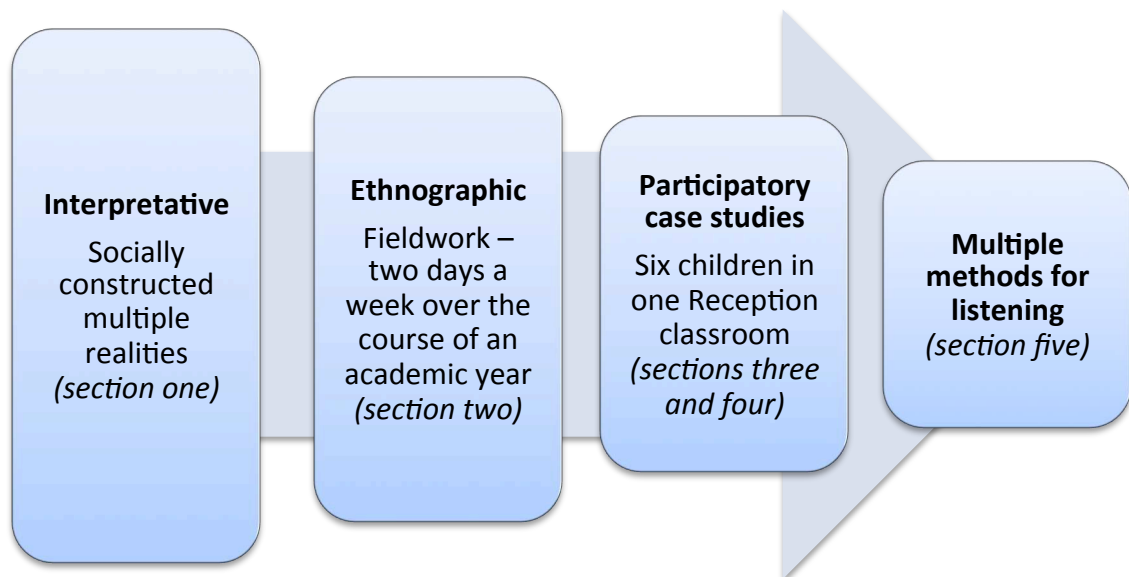
Section two: Ethnographic principles and social context

Section three: Reconceptualising participatory methodology with young children

Section four: The ethics of participation: listening to children as case studies

Section five: Ethnographic participatory methods

The diagram below shows each aspect of the methodological design that will be presented.



Section one: Research design – ontology, epistemology and conceptual framework

This section explains the philosophical perspective that I have adopted in developing my methodological approach. In so doing, I will examine assumptions related to ontology and epistemology, which are of central importance in developing a process of methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I will present an ontological argument that there are multiple expressions of reality, as well as an epistemological argument for how knowledge of the world is socially constructed through multiple dimensional forces. This section introduces ways in which knowledge within the field can be sought using a conceptual tool, the 'rhizome', and examines the part that researcher intuition plays in constructing understanding. These approaches provide the framework of thinking in which the research design and methods will be situated.

Exploring my ontological position – the social self

Different ontological approaches tell very different stories about the same aspect of the social world (Mason, 2002). The ontological perspective I assume here is that the reality we create is a continuum of our own experience, one that is interpreted by us and guided by beliefs and feelings about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). I have recognised my own personal biography and how that affects my understanding of the world. However, I also understand that my experience is modified within the social world in which I exist. In this way, I make sense of who I am through the interactions and responses I have with others, and I argue that this is the same for all humans involved in the research process.

Mead has stated that, *'The organization of the social act has been imported into the organism and becomes then the mind of the individual'* (1934, p. 178).

The 'self', Mead argues, arises within the social world. Reality, therefore, is understood as the incorporation of social activity within the individual, through the processes of engagement and connection that we have with others. It is through these relationships that we begin to explore the meanings we assign to what we do and how we do it.

Adopting this explanation means that my own '*positioning*', alongside those of others, within the social context is worthy of exploration, as this will give me a deeper

understanding of how I interpret what I hear and see. Goffman's (1990) work has shown that the '*performances*' that are made within the social contexts in which I will be researching, and the roles assigned to me and others will influence my interpretation of reality. As a researcher, I need to be aware that the reality I perceive may be tempered by the role that I am playing, within the context in which I am *performing*.

Furthermore, when there is an attempt to understand the reality of ourselves in relation to others, it is possible to recognise the multiple interpretations of that reality within the social world. The reality that others create through their own unique experiences may overlap and have similarities to our own, but these realities are never identical: they are always different. In fact, individuals often tell several stories, sometimes competing, about their own lives dependent on context, changing their subjectivities in relation to others (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 4). Not only are there many truths about young children and writing to be told, but these are not fixed or constant. While recognising this, it is also important to acknowledge that some stories or narratives are considered by society as worthwhile authoritative accounts, while other stories are silenced (Foucault, 1977, cited in MacNaughton, 2005).

Alongside what is familiar and predictable, dissimilarities and discontinuities exist as part of the process of human perception of reality, and the way in which reality can be explored. We could choose to understand this process in terms of corresponding or correlated events, where human experience is categorised and even reduced into coded or measurable units. However, if we focus merely on this systematic categorisation of reality (Olsson, 2009, p. 25), we may ignore the complex process of individual engagement within the world. It is tempting to find patterns and themes to make sense of our observations. However, neatly 'fitting together' events that occur in fleeting moments of time, and finding particular causes and effects that match with our own reality may ignore diverse and alternative readings of the world by others, which may be useful in expanding our understanding.

The idea that it is possible to *represent* the 'truth' of events as externally independent from us has been rejected within postmodern thought (Dahlberg, et al., 2003, p. 25) and has been replaced with the view that individual realities are *constructions of representations*. Therefore, humans have a distinct role to play in producing meanings from what is experienced. It may not be possible to stand outside of our own historical and social context to claim truths related to the world and others; however, it is possible to explore how these realities are constructed, whether they are

related to literacy, childhood or researcher activity. So, the processes of creating meaning from human experiences within the social world, whether this can be predicted or not, must be the focus for understanding reality.

The construction of multiplicities

It is useful to think about how reality is constructed as the *production* and *direction* of events (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 9). This allows a way of understanding the world, not as systematic and linear categorisations of lived experiences, but in terms of process(es). It highlights movement and change within human experience in encountering the world. Thinking about realities as fluid and shifting means that we can move the focus away from trying to define being and existing, in terms of identifying central organisational structures, as an attempt to unify and consider instead the ‘multiplicities’ of lived experiences. Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus* that a ‘multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows)’ (2004, p. 9).

Acknowledging the reality of *dimensions* as the multiplicity of human experience provides us with a way of understanding the connectivity of human thinking. Not only does it allow for the significance of relationships between things, events and people to be of importance, but it also embraces change and unlimited modification. We cannot make sense of reality through a fixed binary distinction, between individual/society as separate, but through the connectivity between shared language and the body: a blending of both the individual and the social. The expansive connectivity in aspects of people’s lives as an ensemble links to ways in which multimodal theorists have understood children’s writing activity. However, even if we accept that human action (as multiplicity) is made up of networks and connections, a problem arises in how our experiences of reality are ‘told’ and ‘heard’ within the social structures that are used to rationalise it, corresponding with the ideas of Mead (1934) and Goffman (1990) that were discussed earlier. Our realities, shown as ‘performances’ for others, take on the type of social organisation that others can understand, with shared features that they can relate to. Silverman (2013, p. 155) cautions against thinking that by observing human experiences as researchable activity, we are able to explore individual realities. Rather, what we are able to do as researchers

is instead demonstrate the organisation of a 'tale told' in which the teller and recipient are crucial to the story and the narrative that unfolds. The organisational elements selected to enable the children in this study to tell their stories as writers will unfold in the following sections.

The epistemological approach

I have already explored how our existence within the world is understood as dimensional and is given meaning by individuals through shared social language within moments of activity and change. This can be understood as directional and fluid. So, given these assumptions about our reality and those of others, I will now focus on how I can *know* about reality so that my research questions may become answerable. I will briefly highlight key aspects of my epistemological approach, which will be explored more fully within the following sections.

First, knowledge about the world is constructed through the social environments in which we exist (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1994; Cole, 1996; Claxton and Wells, 2002). Our sensory experiences related to how we feel and act are mediated through activities and objects that have cultural significance. To be able to explore this, we need to recognise how subjective and objective truths are shared and socially constructed through language. As learning about language is culturally situated (Gee, 1996), exploration of the social context is significant in knowing about the experience of those within it. Therefore, as we co-construct knowledge about the world with others, we need to explore the flow of interaction and dialogue between each other and within the situated environment to make sense of our experiences.

Second, I argue that our own experiences are intertwined with others in a way that makes it difficult to separate and locate ourselves as *divided from*, or *unconnected to*, the '*other*'. In constructing knowledge, we are constantly referring to the knowledge of others. The connectivity that can either provide discontinuity and/or build connections between us is significant to how an ethical and transparent approach to knowledge construction is developed. Knowledge of the lives of others involves ethical consideration towards the research subject as the '*other*' person(s) within the knowledge construction relationship. Associated with this, my third point relates to how we locate, recognise and give voice to others within the research. There are significant problems in how we hear and see what others are experiencing, especially those whose social agency is constricted. It is impossible to fully comprehend the lived experience of another, and yet to ignore

individual voices within the research is even more ethically problematic. I recognise that knowledge is constructed with others, but how do I register the research subject as a distinct and separate being within this process? I agree with Bakhtin that unique individual expressions or 'utterances' are shaped within the social context, and that *'Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others'* (2011, p. 294).

Creating knowledge of a social situation must acknowledge the processes of construction in which these unique human 'utterances' are contextually formed. If knowledge is shaped by and through others, then the anticipated reaction and dialogue between the participants and the researcher is essential to understanding how shared knowledge is being formed. Although the 'voices' of others are meshed together in this way, the research subject, their influence and agency should be the starting and finishing point in making meaning of how the mesh holds, tightens and changes. This is often seen as a dialogical process of meaning-making; however, this social process could be further understood as a 'conversation'.

Hodgson and Standish (2007) argue that it is through conversing with others, where careful attention is given to differences, that discoveries can be made. The *'turning point'* of thought, or *'swerve'* within conversation between each other, is immensely important in *'tuning in'* to alternative voices and expressions of multiple realities. What happens in moments of communication affects what we know, so acknowledging how subjects are active in the process of knowledge construction provides opportunities for understanding the interactive process between both the researcher and the researched. Taking an *emic* approach that allows for detailed interpretations to emerge within the context of the research (Dunne et al., 2005) will mean that the participant's 'voice' within the dialogue is central to making meaning. Allowing meanings to emerge through conversation and letting others lead this process, enables us to recognise how the self engages with the social world, and through this process changes how knowledge of reality (or realities) is constructed.

Finding a way to know about the world – The rhizome

To further explore how knowledge may be understood as a social construction, I draw once more on Deleuze and Guattari's writing (2004). Deleuze and Guattari offer a critique of the familiar image of knowledge as a developing tree that progresses in a linear, fixed

and determined way. A tree has pre-established connections and a hierarchical structure where knowledge follows a logical route, beginning at the roots and heading towards the trunk, branches and leaves. This equates to a tracing and reproduction of knowledge about the world through an existing privileged structure; it is knowledge as predestined. Deleuze and Guattari state that the '*arborescent system preexists the individual, who is integrated into it at an allotted place*' (2004, p. 18). Alternatively, knowledge can be explored as a process akin to the growth of a *rhizome*.

Like a tree, a rhizome is a living and developing biological structure; however, it is not prone to cultivation and predictability. A rhizome bulb or tuber has no central structure; rather, it appears as a series of lateral developments, shooting out new roots, or *becoming* a part of a never-ending dynamic process. As Deleuze and Guattari state, '*there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or route. There are only lines*' (2004, p. 9).

These lines are uniquely unpredictable and can overlap, separate or spurt in one direction and stop. So, rhizomatic growth can be broken, or ruptured, but will begin again by building on older lines and developing new ones. Deleuze and Guattari summarise that,

the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple...It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. (2004, p. 23)

Constructing knowledge of the world using the concept of the rhizome means that it is possible to explore knowledge of what it is to be and become a writer from and through multiple directions, 'mapping' the processes of expansion and variation without a constant reference to expected outcomes. Using the concept of the rhizome within this epistemological approach works in unison with a sociocultural perspective. Although the focus may seem to rely heavily on the individual as *becoming*, rather than the individual's interaction with social and cultural context, it does not negate social processes; instead, it enhances the complex nature of this process by realising sometimes hidden connections between social and cultural dimensions and other elements. The rhizome can become an epistemological *tool* to explore the interaction between the inner human world and the outer social and material world, as '*lines of flight*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 10), and support an understanding of how these directions are mapped. In line with my ontological approach, it enables a process of social construction that recognises pluralities within learning moments and embraces other ways of seeing as meaningful. It is possible to

relate this to Hegelian thinking in terms of finding meaning within experiences that are decentred from pre-established pathways: *'Hegel's philosophy teaches one not to look "up" to universal principles, but to look "into" the specificities and singularities to determine realities, and to find sense within things, events and practices that are pointedly non-universal'* (Russon, 2010, p. 22).

This idea of constructing knowledge of the world through the unique dimensional qualities of activity has helped me to consider the dimensions that I possess as a researcher. Looking into these aspects of research, which are exposed when adopting a subjective approach, acknowledges my unique position and how this is connected to data creation and knowledge formation. These epistemological considerations, i.e. how the personal may be part of the research performance, have led me to explore the role of intuition in knowledge construction.

Knowing about the world – Taking an intuitive research position

Atkinson and Claxton (2008) argue that intuition is important to what is 'noticed and noted' by teachers and practitioners. The interactions I will have with children throughout the research process, i.e. what I will *listen to* and *hear* during data construction and data analysis, will be informed by my intuition. Intuitive memory and feelings associated with past events as a former teacher, either conscious or unconscious, affect the decisions and actions within the research, even if these are framed within the research design and led by the research questions. The role of intuition, I argue, will be integral to my data construction. The question is whether my intuitive process will support the validity of the research or threaten it.

Betsch defines intuition as a process of thinking, and explains it thus:

The input to this process is mostly provided by knowledge stored in long-term memory that has been primarily acquired via associative learning. The input is processed automatically and without conscious awareness. The output of the process is a feeling that can serve as a basis for judgments and decisions. (2008, p. 4)

Intuition is seen here as a slow learning system, a process of actively making sense of events based on previous experiences and influences. Importantly, intuition highlights the essential and powerful feelings at play within this intuitive processing, and this is why it is sometimes the feelings of 'rightness' or 'wrongness' that are so instrumental to how we decide to act in certain ways. This is the somatic, or physical

understanding, of whether things feel 'right' as part of a sensory response that one may have to different situations; it is a sensitivity that is derived from heightened attentiveness (Gendlin, 1981, cited in Claxton, 2006, p.356). Intuition is not made of a sequential process of thinking; instead, it involves parallel and overlapping thoughts and feelings that give an unconscious impression of how to act and behave. It is not deliberately ordered, and therefore it is not possible to compartmentalise the processes at play. This is problematic, of course, as multilayered processes cannot be broken into segments for examination and critique. Nor can aspects of thinking as an intuitive process be controlled and the effects minimised, as unlike other reflective ways of thinking, it partly remains an unconscious activity. The feeling of being 'right' about the choices and decisions we make can vary in strength, dependent on context and the influence of others. These feelings are not able to be understood in an abstract form separated from the where, when and how of the moment in which they occur. In response to the difficulties of exploring these '*ambiguous glimmerings of understanding*' (Atkinson and Claxton, 2008, p. 38), it would be unwise to argue that decisions made within the research process have validity simply because they *are* intuitive choices. For intuitive processes to be valid, a deeper exploration of how intuition as memory and associative learning, which can support and is integral to the actions and events within the research process, needs to occur. If understood more comprehensively, intuition might help to expose the intricacies and layers of meaning- making that both the children and myself as the researcher are involved in.

Janesick defines intuition as '*immediate apprehension or cognition. Intuition is a way of knowing about the world through insight and exercising one's imagination*' (2001, p. 532).

Here, intuition is viewed as something 'in the moment', a sudden perception of the world which gives rise to our unique ability to make creative connections. Janesick refers to Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) ideas on creative flow to illustrate the importance of researchers seizing the creative moment and the autobiographic nature of research as creative action. If intuition is seen to be a seed for creative thinking, then it may have an important role to play in how new meanings emerge and ideas are developed within the research process. Atkinson and Claxton (2008) argue that intuitive insight can help practitioners to find creative solutions to the problems they face, highlighting that these intuitive responses often occur randomly and outside of the structured reflective activities that are the normal part of professional work. So, it is possible to understand

the role of intuition as not only a multifaceted process of thought, but also as integral to the imaginative and creative process, part of the creative 'flow' within research. Janesick writes that,

the role of the qualitative researcher is of critical importance because the researcher is the research instrument. If we can help describe how we use our intuition and creativity in our research projects, all of us benefit. Like the artist who uses paint and brushes or the dancer who uses movement, the qualitative researcher uses many techniques as tools to ultimately tell a story [...] By understanding how we use intuition and creativity, we may widen our vocabulary of understanding the role of the qualitative researcher. (2001, p. 533)

Using intuition to explore how we express ourselves as researchers – to understand the processes of thinking, acting and feeling that are in operation within research activity – is important, even though it may not be possible to pin down or measure how these insights are formed. The essential ambiguity of intuition can be seen to have value within research; however, if it is thought of as a *synthetic* way of knowing (Claxton, 2006), this provides a sense of the structural *whole* of interlocking processes in intuitive knowledge building, involving people, actions and spaces. The artist Paul Klee described using intuition as a process of knowing that works alongside more constructive rational thinking:

We construct and keep on constructing, yet intuition is a good thing. You can do a good deal without it, but not everything. Where intuition is combined with exact research it speeds up the progress of research. Exactitude winged by intuition is at times best. (Klee, 2013, p. 18)

Intuition, therefore, is of importance in how knowledge is constructed within research. It provides a way of making transparent transformations within the meaning-making process, and helps us to examine the intricacies of data construction and analysis. Intuitive choices can be based on moments of high sensitivity towards something, or as Atkinson and Claxton (2008) suggests, through rumination and slow extraction of meaning over time. Intuition is integral to the process of constructing researcher/practitioner knowledge and plays an important role in what is seen, heard and felt, which in turn influences the actions the researcher takes. It must be stressed, however, that as a holistic process of thinking, intuition, like all thought, is inextricably linked to the social and cultural contexts in which it is formed. Intuitive decisions and preferences are not individual responses standing alone and separate, but they are formed through shared beliefs, values and practices with others. What to 'take note of' or not as children are engaged in writing activity in the classroom will be understood within the cultural and

social context (past and present) that has shaped my experience, memory and associated feelings into intuitive thought.

Section two: Ethnographic principles and social context

This section discusses how decisions have been made in establishing the research strategy. The research design presented here recognises the interpretative approaches outlined in the previous section by adopting ethnographic principles as ways of making sense of the realities of others in social and material contexts. This section explains how these principles have influenced my choice for using child case studies, validating this choice as a way in which the multiple dimensions of children's experiences can be heard and told.

Exploring ethnography

Ethnography as a subjective and interpretative approach to research is concerned with meaning-making, where knowledge of an area of research is justified through the depth of inquiry, and where the researcher's role is recognised in affecting and shaping the research process. Common threads exist between an ethnographic approach and my theoretical framework as both are centrally interested in providing a deep exploration of the relationships between individuals and their social, cultural and material contexts. Applying ethnographic assumptions and perspectives in this research, which looks at children's everyday experiences as writers within a school context, has helped me to create a uniform research design in which complex social, cultural and material theory can be constructed. I have adopted the principles of ethnography as a foundation on which to develop a methodology that will support and extend socio-constructivist approaches where multimodal practices can be observed and Deleuzian tools can be applied, enabling a deep and fertile exploration of young children's writing experience.

By adopting an ethnographic approach and exploring ethnographic assumptions here, it is possible to raise and examine significant methodological concerns that are particular to this research. These are connected to the limitations and possibilities of the:

- participant/researcher engagement and the construction of 'voice(s)';
- formation of shared social, material and cultural knowledge; and
- ethical approaches taken towards children as research subjects.

Contemporary ethnographic writings, e.g. critical ethnography (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005) and feminist ethnography (Stanley, 1990; Clough, 1994), have extended methodological boundaries within ethnography by challenging how the researcher and the subject of research as *'other'* are recognised and represented in research, as well as highlighting the need for research to engage with reflexivity and social justice. Furthermore, certain recent ethnographers have engaged with postmodern thinking in challenging authorial power, and they have attempted to expand methodological boundaries by finding different ways for the *'stories'* of others to be told and heard (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Below, I will outline the significant ethnographic principles that have been adopted within this study and explore some contemporary writing in the field in an attempt to pursue and further my methodological perspective. I will also highlight some of the epistemological limitations that I have found while attempting to explore and understand children's experiences using a purely ethnographic approach.

First, I will detail the ethnographic assumptions that are contained within my methodological approach.

Adopting ethnographic assumptions (1)

According to Hammersley (1998), ethnographic research carries with it three broad and overlapping assumptions that are often combined as part of the researcher's methods of enquiry: *naturalism*, *understanding* and *discovery*. The first, *naturalism*, is centrally interested in the relationship between human behaviour within *'natural'* settings, and is derived from the anthropological roots of ethnographic enquiry. Naturalism assumes that the experiences of people *within* their normal daily goings-on should be a central focus for researchers interested in human activity. Importantly, what is implicit within a naturalistic enquiry is that human social action is understood to be an *interactive process* between people and their social environment (Denzin, 1997). Both elements need to be observed and understood in relation to each other. As part of preserving this naturalistic approach, the researcher should minimise the effect that they have within the *'field'* of research. Fetterman (1989) states that the researcher's approach to the social environment should be like *'walking softly through the wilderness'* (p. 120), a phrase which suggests that the researcher should be sensitive and responsive in their actions and relationships within the space in which the research is taking place so that *'naturally'* occurring activity can be preserved. However, questions have been raised about how possible it is for researchers to minimise their presence within the research field,

especially in regard to the influence that the observer/participant relationship has on everyday activity and interaction (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

A naturalistic enquiry that is concerned with the study of social life in real life settings recognises the connection between context (place, space and environment) and human activity, and emphasises human experience in how people make meaning of their lives (Brewer, 2000). Hence, to fully engage with this humanistic approach, the researcher's own experience – i.e. their own activity within the context and how they construct and represent what is observed – needs to be recognised in how meanings can be understood as both creation and re-creation. The influence that the researcher has does not detract from understanding the field; instead, it may in fact enhance the complex interactions within it.

Adopting ethnographic assumptions (2)

The second ethnographic assumption that I have found to be valuable within this study focuses on how '*understanding*' is created. The anthropological foundations of ethnography suggest that at the heart of research there should be an exploration of how culture plays a part in how humans behave and adapt. That means that the cultural beliefs, values and activity *within the research context* need to be explored in depth, as this is integral to how individuals and groups might interpret and understand each other and therefore how knowledge is shared and formed within the social group and by the researcher. Wolcott suggests that this focus on the research context '*opens the way for the ethnographer to present human social behaviours more, rather than as less complex, to keep explanations from being simplistic or reductionist*' (1999, p. 79).

This '*understanding*' seeks to build and tell the stories of individuals and groups *through* cultures and social practices within specific contexts, often encompassing as much detail as possible. In this way, ethnography ontologically and epistemologically corresponds to my research design, as it seeks to explore human interpretive meaning-making processes as shifting and changeable, shaped by social, cultural and material contexts. It is through documenting this process (observing, describing and analysing), in a multitude of ways, that understanding can take place. Knowledge of the social world is created through the capacity and potentialities that humans have to create meaning. I agree with Brewer's explanation of humans as actively '*endowing meaning*' to their world,

These meanings are always bounded by the structural and institutional location of the person, but people possess a 'practical consciousness' – that is, a body of knowledge that enables them to know social life from the inside – and they possess the discursive capacity to articulate this understanding. (2000, p. 22)

So *understanding* the social world in this sense comes through an exploration of knowledge that children have about their lives. Their capacity to express language through multiple communicative practices with others could be a method of unlocking this.

It is also worth noting the representational crisis of recent years within ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997). It would be naive to presume that the understanding we have of others is a 'truthful' reflection of their lives, and that understanding is developed externally to the researcher's own creative and transformational processes within the textual description. As Bruner (1986) argues, our understanding comes through socially constructed units of meaning that relate to the expressions we make of the experiences we have. In Bruner's thinking, we can explore understanding through the narrative stories that we tell of others, as a process of *textual understanding*. The ethnographer *creates understanding* as a slice, a retold and performed interpretation of events and activities.

Adopting ethnographic assumptions (3)

The final assumption that I have adopted as a principle is that research should be a process of '*discovery*' (Hammersley, 2007). This rests on an inductive approach being taken by the researcher, where a broad approach to an issue is examined, eventually becoming more of a focused enquiry in response to the research activity. This method has been expanded fully within 'grounded theory' approaches (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2003). Here, theory as an inductive process of thinking develops through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development. This is research knowledge that is formed not from a preconceived theory, which can be tested and modified, but with an assumption that by carrying out practical research, theories surrounding human behaviour are embedded in the data. Therefore, captured data should be multilayered, contain the voices of many and take multiple forms. This is not a rapid approach to research, as it requires the researcher's time and resources to be spent on initially '*scouting the territory*' (Wolcott, 1999, p. 202) and immersion within the field of study. The concept of discovery begins and ends with the data and how this is then described in terms of the '*thick description*' of its events (Geertz, 1973, p.27).

Discovery within ethnography takes place *through* the process of ethnographic writing; this is why in recent times, ethnographers have become focused on ethnographic writing as textual, the text being a place for discovery about themselves and the lives of others, as a blending of subjective and objective realities (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997).

I have adopted these three ethnographic assumptions as underpinning principles for my choice of setting, strategies within fieldwork and methods of data construction.

The choice of setting – The school

The school selected was a community school within a small town in a coastal region of South East England. The school was chosen because of practical considerations, its proximity to my home (not too far but not on my doorstep), and its size and mixed social intake, which increased the likelihood of offering a diverse group of children to select a sample from. The school was also chosen as it provided a supportive environment for the research. The senior leadership team was interested in the research focus (as writing was an identified area within the school improvement plan) and methodological approaches that I had chosen which focused on children's voices in writing. I approached the deputy head teacher initially, building research relationships with the school from this level, to make sure that the project would be more sustainable. My first meeting was with the leadership team and then separately with the class teacher to discuss the aims of the research and project management. I visited one Reception class throughout the school year, two days a week, to become both observer and participant within the field of study.

Initial explorations within the field

To explore my research ideas before the year of fieldwork began, I visited a Reception/Year One class at the same school once a week, building research relationships with staff and children. I developed a sense of my role as a researcher within a busy classroom, got to know the school and classroom routines and activities, piloted specific methods of data construction – e.g. photographs, research conversations and observations – and began to make some initial reflections about children's writing activities. I was able to explore some of the practical and technical limitations and opportunities open to using different technologies with children in different spaces.

I found that the time spent watching, thinking and writing reflections during this year helped me to prepare for some of the larger issues relating to research with children, e.g. research relationships, ethical considerations and participation. These initial reflective thoughts and notations within the context of research encouraged me to probe more deeply into the complexities of my intended role as a classroom researcher. This reflective process will be discussed at length in the next sections of this chapter.

My 'self' as a researcher in the classroom

In entering a field of research with a background as a classroom teacher, I am a '*biographically situated*' researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). With this in mind, I have identified distinct challenges that relate to the validity of the research process. In attempting to *re-explore* the school literacy environment, I have to reinterpret a 'known world' and examine a recognisable area by repositioning myself. This raises the question of how far it is possible to reassess the familiar, if the familiar is built on memory informed by deeply engrained experiential knowledge. Coffey (2004, p.21) has argued that by critically approaching social enquiry as insiders, social explorations should enable us to '*make the familiar strange*'. Brewer (2000) highlights the problem of pursuing a binary approach as either an insider or outsider within research. Knowledge is never neutral of the historical and cultural context in which it is created, and the researcher is an active part of that. So, it is important to recognise, rather than negate, my own professional experience, as well as explore how this multilayered approach affects my research role.

Ethnographic methodology values the researcher's own responses within the activity of research as significant to knowledge construction, otherwise known as self-reflexivity (Coffey, 1999; Etherington, 2004). This focus on the 'self' as having instrumental meaning within the research process has led me to examine not only the researcher's gaze and the process of re-representation of others (as previously discussed), but also the development of the researcher's situated role(s) and relationship(s) within the field of study. Developing a reflexive approach to researcher interactions with participants, contained within specific social and cultural contexts, has furthered the understanding of research relationships and the responsibilities related to how these are represented in writing (Spencer, 2001). Unlike methodological approaches where interaction between people during research activity can be fleeting, within ethnographic

approaches, the interaction, both dialogical and co-constructed, between the researcher and the subject during research activity has particular significance.

Section three: Reconceptualising participatory methodology with young children

This section examines the dilemmas of children's participation in ethnographic research. I focus initially on the complexities, tensions and ambiguities that exist in the formation of adult (fieldworker) and child (research participant) roles within the research context. Following this, I apply conceptual tools to outline my own participatory strategy as a response to these problems, and find a way of researching children's lives as writers. By tackling these problems and providing solutions, I have ensured a rigorous approach within my methodology, where children, identified as participants, are participatory in how they are engaged in research.

The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child – Children's legal rights to participate

The participatory rights of children to have their opinions listened to, and to be able to express their voice in decisions about their lives, is clearly enshrined within the wording of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). The notion of children's participation is not just represented within Article 12 but embedded throughout the UNCRC documentation, which also highlights the importance of children's empowerment through freedom of thought, legal representation and access to information (Lundy, 2007; Skelton, 2007). Within the UNCRC and other associated documents and agendas (UNICEF, 1990, 2004), the child is constructed as socially and culturally agentic, autonomous and capable. The Convention argues that social and structural changes should take place to empower children to have a 'voice' in decisions and participate in choices made about them. Freeman asserts that the root of participation as outlined in the UNCRC is in *'the normative value of autonomy, the idea that persons have a set of capacities that enable them to make independent decisions regarding appropriate life choices'* (2009, p. 386).

However, the limitations of these ideas being operational and effective are reliant on the binary roles assigned to children and adults, which remain unquestionably

fixed within UNCRC documentation. The Convention makes clear that it is the right of children to be heard but not to be given authority over adults. Children are represented as social beings with rights, but still situated as separate from the cultural activities of adults (as parents), and viewed as developmental beings or adults in the making. For example,

the Convention recognizes that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions. (UNICEF, 1990, online)

Throughout the Convention, the role of the state and the adult in relation to the child is viewed as one of 'parent', as one who protects and provides; for example, children have the right to adequate standards of living, to be able to attend primary education, and to have protection from exploitative working practices. The aim of the UNCRC is to offer children a life where they are encouraged to participate and *'to say what they think in all matters affecting them'* (Article 12, 1989), but at the same time, this process should be looked after and overseen by authoritative adults. Constructing children and adults in this way immediately creates tensions: roles assigned may become oppositional, and participation may be limited in relation to children's social capital, power and adult interests.

Skelton (2007) highlights the importance of 'authentic' participation for children rather than tokenistic participatory gestures within institutions that may do harm in claiming to listen to children when it is the adult agendas that are clearly channelling both the process and the outcome. Lundy (2007) argues that barriers to implementing children's rights to participate often emanate from the concerns that adults have about childhood: that children lack capacity to make decisions, that giving children control will undermine authority, and that efforts to support children's participation would be better spent on education in a broader sense. These concerns are also located within the UNCRC itself, which although clear in its bold statements of legal rights to participation within Article 12, holds contradictory constructions of childhood that may undermine the fundamental principles inherent in developing children's choice and participation.

Children's participation in ethnographic research – the challenges

Generational ordering of adult/child roles within research (Alanen, 2001) has led adult-researchers to carry out research *on* children or *about* childhood. Recently, however,

childhood research has undergone a paradigmatic change (Kellett, 2010). Contemporary research into children's lives has sought to identify and redress generational power imbalances, focusing on how researchers work with children as participants in generating new knowledge about their lives (Clark, 2001, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2005; McTavish et al., 2012; Mazzone and Harcourt, 2013).

However, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) have cautioned that the danger of participatory research is that it can become yet another regulatory tool in children's lives, legitimised by adults in the belief that children are 'empowered' by the tool itself. They argue that the emphasis within participatory research with children is that children '*take part*' within a '*predefined activity*', but this may actually '*constrain the possibilities for them to act*' (2008, p. 507). The unexpected action of a child within research activity, actions that are not predetermined by participatory procedures and design, and may even be subversive to adult authority and intent, provide a rich insight into a child's desire, and this should not be overlooked. Children may screw up data and manipulate the tools of research to meet their own needs. These aspects of communication and involvement, although 'challenging' to the 'participatory' research organisation, are also ways of participation and need to be considered by the researcher. This somewhat blurs the boundaries between how we view participation and non-participation. Is the child participating or not by refusing to be a performer in the researcher's chosen participatory methodology? If they do not participate, is this a failure of a participatory design? Further clarity is needed around the conceptual language used to justify participatory research intentions, and how the terms '*participation*' and '*non-participation*' are applied in research methodology with children.

The notion of offering children '*empowerment*' within participatory research with children has been challenged by writers concerned that it is based on an argument that power can somehow be redistributed between adults and children (Christensen, 2004; Gallagher, 2008; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). This argument assumes that children require adult empowerment to construct knowledge about the world and communicate it. However, as the field of childhood studies has argued so vehemently, children are actively engaged as agents of knowledge creation with or without the say-so of adults, and so this approach to empowering children may unintentionally undermine the construction of children that it seeks to explore (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

Taking a 'least adult role' – problems of authenticity

Researchers of children's lives have often attempted to take a 'least adult role' as a way to overcome the power imbalance in research with children and create a bridge between the adult and the child (Cosaro, 1985, 2003; Mandell, 1988; Warming 2011). Here, researchers have 'acted' as children, being childlike in their play and actions, and flexibly submitting to the authority of others, both adults and children. It is argued that by taking on this 'least adult role', and giving children the ability to define and shape researcher activity, the researcher is able to *'blend into the social world of the children'* (Mayall 2000, p. 110), operating as children do and sharing their secrets.

Adopting the 'least adult role' in research is underpinned by the assumption that children's experiences of the world should be pursued through an exploration of their actions and not through adult presuppositions (Buchbinder et al., 2006) and rightly calls into question adult superiority. However, the suggestion that researchers should suspend all adult-like characteristics except for their size appears to be a rather naive approach for adults to take. As a strategic process of pretence, there could be something unsettling about the adults engaging with children in a 'least adult role', as the adults gain familiarity and trust from children by 'performing' in particular ways. Albon and Rosen remark that the 'least adult role' requires the researcher to be an 'actor' and *'is based on a series of potentially patronising assumptions – for example, that children can be "duped" into a belief that an adult-researcher is a child'* (2013, p. 36).

Children understand the constraints and possibilities in place within generational power relationships within specific contexts. As Mayall (2000) explored in her research conversations with children, they have an awareness of how their choices and ideas are controlled by adults, and therefore the diffusion or dilution of these child–adult relations within specific contexts is not as easy as an adult-researcher deciding to become a lesser 'adult'.

However, when researchers are able to position themselves as children do in their material and social environment, insightful data can emerge. Warming (2011), in her detailed ethnographic research into children's lives at a Danish day-care institution, gives one example of when she successfully engaged with children in a 'least adult role' when she invented a magic game during a teacher-led activity where the children had become bored. She chose to position herself in a subordinate role within the activity by sitting on a small chair alongside the children, and began to empathise with their resistance as she

too became bored and frustrated with the teacher. The significance for Warming of her 'least adult role' within this activity was the feeling of difference that she encountered, and empathy that she gained, of the children's physical, bodily experience, one that could not be accessed as a participant adult observer. Although Warming's sensitive approach has enabled her to experience aspects of the children's lives and reflect on these, the argument that by being 'less of an adult' in research with children you will be able to realign power between adults and children, and so reveal the realities of children's experience, is problematic. The quality of Warming's research lies in her ability to reflect honestly on and shift her interpretations of her 'least adult role' in the field, rather than using it to uncover particular truths about the children she was working with.

Rethinking adult/child roles – rejecting fixed binaries

As has been argued, the 'least adult role' assumes a permanent binary position within adult/child relationships and ignores the complexity of roles that change in response to particular activities. As a way of disrupting this dualism, Christensen (2004) argues that researchers need to re-question their 'adult' role in research activity with children by considering in much more detail how adulthood is socially and culturally constructed within social spaces. She has explored what she terms the '*unusual type of adult role*', one that involves the adult-researcher seen as '*other*': a role that is negotiated and renegotiated throughout the process of the study. This is a more ambiguous and changeable adult role, and is built on a serious endeavour to understand the social world from the perspective of children, '*but without making the dubious attempt to be a child*' (Christensen, 2004, p. 174).

Additionally, Dahlberg et al. (2003, p. 43) argue that the child cannot be understood as a state of being just waiting to be discovered. Using a fixed ontological category to examine childhood in research will essentially lead to fixed outcomes and expected trajectories (Stryker and Yngvesson, 2013). The role of the researcher-adult should be to disrupt these conceptions and introduce a more dynamic perception of adults and children, operating both singularly and collectively within research activity (Sellers, 2013, p. 67). An alternative approach to the dualism of adult-child relationships is to re-imagine both adult and child as socially constructed, historically contingent, culturally situated and contextually bound (Canella and Viruru, 2004).

Fluid and responsive interactions

A useful way forward here is not to focus on the set 'roles' that the adult-researcher and child play within research activity but to look instead at the developing experiences between them, the disparities on offer and the changing processes that *become* different through dialogical interaction. It is the shared social spaces within research, and the dynamic relationship between people, materials and activities within this, where knowledge is constructed and understood. Adults and children shift within multiple roles, both active and passive, as part of this. Hedegaard and Fler write that it is the,

researcher's meaningful understanding as created through this interaction, that becomes the 'data' in this interaction. This interaction can go from being rather passive, to engaging in a dialogue, to the other end of the spectrum where children are given tasks and do these together with the researcher. But even when the researcher is rather passive, he or she has to conceptualise himself or herself as part of the setting in which the children's activities take place. (2008, p. 49)

Acknowledging the multifaceted roles of both adults and children within research, rather than identifying and pinning these down, means that I can explore the actual changing *activity* that forms processes of meaning-making and understanding between people in research. This works to support the concept of the *becoming* child, outlined in the previous chapter, as it is rooted in an understanding of both the adult and child participants in research as fluid, sometimes collaborative and oppositional but always transforming to something new.

A strategy for participatory research with children – research with children as *becoming*

This critical examination of children constructed as 'participants' has been helpful for me to plan a more rigorous and critical approach to participatory and ethical practices with children. It has led me to re-conceptualise the important participatory role that children have in constructing knowledge of sociocultural, material experience. Participatory experiences in research allow both adults and children to consider the shared thinking that they are engaged in. In agreement with Clark (2011), knowledge should come from participatory *generation*, not from participatory *extraction*, meaning that children's ideas and actions, their meaning-making activity as knowledge creators, should be centrally important and understood in relation to the wider opportunities for them to actively participate in particular contexts. Participation, defined as sharing and partaking in

activity with others, cannot be fully understood if taken out of the context of the localised activity in which it is socially and materially constructed, and is rooted within changing social relationships. Dyson (2013), in her research on children's participation as writers, argues that we need to study children as '*located somebodies*' (p. 406) related to social context that frames events and dialogue with others. Each child must appear as a *somebody* in how they participate, not by regulating participatory behaviours and closing down avenues for expression, but by exploring differences in how participation can be read. This recognises that participation does sometimes fit with adult agendas, but can also be unpredictable, passive and sometimes disruptive, and all of these ways of being a 'participant' are socially, culturally and materially meaningful for both adults and children.

Becoming as something temporal and transforming is a useful conceptual tool, not only for understanding young children's writing activity but also for exploring research activity as it allows researchers to explore the changeable dimensions and forces that form research activity between adults and children. Adult and child roles within research can be seen as establishing both '*becoming-the-same*', by locating consistencies in relationships based on previous experiences, and '*becoming-other*', thus challenging these consistencies through an inherent desire to disrupt and break off relationships and develop new ones (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). As Lee (2005) argues, it may be the space between these two aspects of child–adult relationships in research, i.e. the differences and separations, that are worthy of study, as these show the multitude of roles that are played.

The participatory role that was envisioned for children within this study has not been dependent on the external structures pertaining to recognised adult-researcher activity. Rather, the participation by the children is viewed in terms of *becoming*, recognising the fluidity within the shifting roles of people, places and other elements that inform the understanding created between the subject and the researcher. Although I advocate this approach to participatory methodology, it is also important to recognise that I, as a professional adult-researcher, have written and re-represented this experience for other adults into fixed text. I have always therefore been '*gazing with some power*' (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 115) over the participatory events, both during and after. How these stories of children's writing activity can be told, as authentic accounts, has led me to examine the ethics of research with children in developing procedures so that their experiences are able to be heard. This will be discussed in the next section.

Section four: The ethics of participation – listening to children as case studies

Axiological considerations in conducting research with children are at the heart of the discussion surrounding children's rights to participate in research. This section will outline the ethical approach that I have adopted as a researcher of children's lives through all stages of the research activity. Having troubled over the problems that exist in participatory research with children and recognised the responsibilities that arise as an ethnographic narrator of children's experiences, it is important that I now demonstrate how I intend to hear and tell children's stories. In doing this, I will explain why I have selected individual case studies of children to frame my enquiry and why I see this as a way of ensuring that the dimensional qualities within children's activities can be heard.

Ethical compliance

This research has conformed to the ethical requirements set out for researchers both from the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) and Canterbury Christ Church University (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d). In line with university processes, I submitted a proposal to the education ethics committee before my fieldwork began. This proposal demonstrated in detail how my research strategy would safeguard children, by ensuring:

- free and informed consent;
- privacy and confidentiality;
- minimal harm; and
- inclusivity and social justice.

Letters to parents, providing them with information about the study and offering opportunities for informed consent, were also agreed by the university's ethics committee (see Appendices 1 and 2). Parents were updated at the end of the study to notify them of developments and continue the dialogue with participants (see Appendix 3).

Within the field of study, i.e. the school, I have adhered to all procedures and policies, such as child protection and confidentiality, so that my research activity was

compliant with the practices in place for keeping children safe. I also obtained clearance to work with children through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) which the school organised. The children adopted pseudonyms of their choice, deciding that they would like to be referred to in my work as colours. The six children in the analysis, discussion and conclusions are therefore referred to as Red, Green, Blue, Yellow, Gold and Silver. A written report and presentation of research findings was given to the school leadership team and governors.

Procedural elements are an important way to ensure that basic ethical expectations of researchers working with children are met. However, to demonstrate methodological rigour, a far deeper level of ethical design needs to be considered, one which interrogates how children are heard as research participants throughout all aspects of the research study. Renold et al. (2008, p.429) have argued, for example, that informed consent practices are different from '*ethics in practice*'. As consent needs to be renegotiated over time, procedures and existing orthodoxies for making sure that this aspect of research activity is ethically sound need much more transparency and critique. Considering ethics in practice, i.e. how ethics is situated within the research activity, is integral to all adult decision-making and needs further exploration.

Ethical listening – *more than* following procedures

Finding ways in which children are able to be involved in narratives about areas of their lives is an important communicative democratic practice (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002) as these stories are so often ignored. By hearing children's voices, it is possible to unlock further understandings of their changing meaning-making and experiences (Clark et al., 2005, p. 183). However, there are constant metho-ethical challenges within this. I concur with Nutbrown's argument that '*we are never "done"... with these issues*' (2011b, p. 11). As a researcher of children's lives, I always need to be on duty, scrutinising these troubling issues, to ensure that as an adult I am seeing, hearing and sensing the layers of childhood experience that need to be heard so that the best decisions about their lives can be made.

The ambiguity within research relationships between children as 'participants' and the adult-researcher has challenged me to find more nuanced approaches to *listening to* and *hearing* children within research. Meeting the systematic ethical requirements of the university has supported an initial recognition of ethical responsibilities, but by being fixed to universal and generalised structures, the 'day-to-day' ethical decision-making remains hidden. Procedural ethics support my accountability to others, but they are not

enough to ensure ethical rigour in this research study. Below, I have outlined my response to the ethical complexities that exist within the relational movements between myself and the children in order to develop an ethical research framework. This approach has recognised the limitations of positioning myself and the subjects of research within fixed structures. My aim is to ensure that the research encounters with children:

- are careful and caring;
- are ethically reasonable *in situ*;
- are interested in, rather than discounting of, the differences that will always exist between people and events in research activity; and
- demonstrate open listening so that stories are crafted in response to the voice of others.

The ethics of listening *carefully*

According to Noddings (2012, p.772), taking a caring ethical approach means that the moral imperative should lie not in how individuals are catered for but in how relations are formed. In a *caring* research encounter, one party acts as a 'care giver' and one as 'cared for'; however, no assumptions should be made by the researcher of the care that should be given. There is a mutuality in this relationship, as the affective response of the 'cared for' towards the 'care giver' is important in completing the circle of a caring ethical relationship. Noddings argues that caring relationships should not be reduced to empathy but they require dialogue and thinking: a way in which different parties can exchange positions rather than taking prescribed views of each other's needs (Martin Buber, 1965, cited by Noddings, 2012). What is important in developing ethically rigorous research is building relationships through reciprocity and listening with attention to the care needs of others, rather than attending to what we think we know.

The child as '*other*'

Levinas (1987), by contrast, argues that in our research relationships with children, as '*other*' than us, reciprocity is an impossibility. This is because an absolute and unchanging difference exists within a field of research, between 'I' (the researcher) and 'You' (the child). The children in this study, even after being assigned a participatory role, are recognised as '*infinitely unknowable*' (Todd, 2001, p. 66). This is to avoid relating

preconceived certainties about them within the research encounter, which according to Levinas would mean applying '*totalising knowledge*' of them (Levinas as cited in Cheeseman et al., 2015). This has presented an immediate epistemological challenge within my research methodology. How can research relationships that are intended to create co-constructive dialogue recognise the concrete division that exists between the researcher (I) and the child (*other*)? However, Levinas, by so forcefully fixing and acknowledging the distinct separation between myself and the children, has made me look in depth at the ethics of the research relationships that have been formed. Rather than finding strategies to 'move closer' to children, I have instead identified our differences, and as part of this, I have contested the certainties that I have associated with myself as a researcher and the children as participants. This process has meant that I have preserved and respected the '*otherness*' of the child rather than attempting to negate it. I have attended to dialogue in this methodology, not as a way of bridging the gap between the adult and the child but as a way of understanding how it has been formed contextually, particularly in relation to other '*totalising knowledge*' about young children that exists in school contexts. I have recognised dialogue as a space to learn from the '*other as different*', and so develop a more honest and valid co-constructive approach to participatory methodology.

My ethical position is based on a knowledge of children that is always partial, where children are always *other* from me, and where voice and dialogue is able to be disruptive of what is already assumed. This can be described as an 'ethical research encounter', where care towards children as research participants occurs in the moment: as immanent and difficult to predict. The roles and positionality within the research relationships, within and outside the field, are fluid but respectful of the *otherness that was always existent*. In co-constructing research with children in this study rather than making an attempt '*to grasp at them [the children]*' (Dahlberg et al., 2003, p. 273), I have recognised, rather than dismantled, the asymmetry between myself and the child participants.

Open listening – *hearing* the child as '*other*'

What children say and what is actually heard by adults often privileges certain powerful discourses around childhood (MacNaughton, 2005). A researcher's participatory listening framework, often unintentionally, leads to further regulation, categorisation and governing of the child, rather than opening up new discourses around them. In her examination of these concerns, Clark et al. (2005) counter these arguments by aligning

with Dahlberg and Moss (2005), who draw on the pedagogy of listening in Reggio Emilia preschools. This proposes that listening to children should not only be a means to participation but also an '*ethic of relating to others*' (Clark et al., 2005, p. 9). It enables the debate around listening to children to move from a rational argument about fixed universal rights to one which is more nuanced, responsive and human.

This notion of ethical listening has required me as the listener/researcher to consider the multifaceted way in which social listening comes about, not only as dialogically respectful but also as emotional, sensory and changing. The children in this research not only have a right to be listened to as '*other*', but they also have a right for their *actions* of participation, understood in terms of relational ethical movements between adults, children and the materials of research activity, to be listened to.

The many ethical dimensions of listening have required me to step away from assumptions and expose myself to ambiguity. This approach to listening is expressed by Rinaldi below, in an echo of Levinas' ethical philosophy,

Listening is not easy. It requires deep awareness and at the same time a suspension of our judgements and above all our prejudices; it requires openness to change. It demands that we have clearly in mind the value of the unknown and that we are able to overcome the sense of emptiness and precariousness that we experience whenever our certainties are questioned. (2005, p. 20)

Davies (2011) advocates a personal sense of 'open listening' to others that enables the listener to see events differently, thus '*becoming no longer the self one was before*' (2011, p. 123). Davies argues that by open listening to children, the researcher is looking to see and hear anew by '*continual openness to the not-yet known*' (2011, p. 129) as a means to escape closure or foreclosure. This is a mobile way of listening that does not seek to fix identities and roles; rather, it aims to find ways to evolve as a researcher and knower of children. This is a challenging idea as it means working against habitual patterns of response. However, open listening embraces difference and corresponds with the Deleuzoguattarian notion of *becoming*, in that knowledge of the other is created as a space in which new movement and invention are generated. Open listening within ethical encounters of *becoming* is a methodology of listening to children as participants which, by recognising movement and change, has epistemological validity within my framework of enquiry.

Connected case studies – *listening* to six children’s stories

Human subjects of research are highly complex and unique beings, and so to explore these intricacies, I have planned to work with six children as individual ‘cases’. Considering each child involved as an individual case acknowledges and allows for small but significant non-replicable and non-generalisable activity to be valued and examined in depth. This is useful in uncovering and penetrating the many layers and dimensions of children’s writing engagement which are often hidden from sight in classrooms.

Finding ways to listen to children means acknowledging the limitations that exist in how it is humanly possible to listen properly. Concentrating on fewer children is a practical solution to accessing the often unseen activities of children and being able to listen with care. This intensity of observation and listening, on a few rather than many, means that a more thoughtful approach towards the dynamics of data capture in the field can emerge. I have been able to be flexible in when, how and even if research methods should be applied; this is particularly important in providing ethical research relationships with young children. Taking a case study approach means that intuitive responses towards the research subject can be examined in depth. Having the opportunity not only to listen properly but also to focus on how I am able to ‘*tune into*’ children (Hodgson and Standish, 2007, p.110) supports reflexivity during data construction and analysis.

Yin (2003) states that the particular strengths of using case studies within research design are the opportunities for gathering and accessing a range of evidence and applying overlapping methods so that the ‘how’ and ‘when’ of a case can be explored. Thomas (2011) expands this idea further by arguing that case studies allow for a variety of angles to be explored; he refers to this as multidimensional ‘looking’. It is possible to see the correlation here between this research approach and multimodal theories, where children’s utterances within many forms are recognised. Multiple sources can be used to provide a chain of evidence where explicit links can be drawn between the research questions, the data and the conclusions (Yin, 2003, p. 83). These *connections* and *links* between data are important aspects to explore within the analysis, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Thomas also argues that cases within research can be explored as contained within, like an object wrapped up. So, each child as a ‘case’ is separate and enclosed, a unique person, and it is within them that the focus lies. This maintains the importance of

individual sensory experience and the significance of beings as separate entities; however, it is much more complex than it first appears. The 'case', although contained within the child's individual activity, is always reliant on the relationships and interactions with others, outside of themselves as the 'case'.

Traditionally, child case studies have been used by psychologists to measure individual children's cognitive functioning and behaviour (Burman, 2008). This is a 'within child' model and has limited use in gaining understanding of writing processes as a social and material construction. The case study approach I have adopted does not contain the children within a state of separation, unconnected to their environment; rather, it is one where the children are viewed as unique but connected, and involved in exclusive writing encounters. The complex dimensions of the child's experience and activities are constructed through the interactions with others outside of each case. Each child is therefore seen as a dynamic, moving case that interacts with other children, some of whom are included in the study as other cases and some are not. The child as 'contained' within the case is a useful starting place to explore the relationships and dynamics of human interaction and the 'leakages' and obscured lines that exist between the individual and the social, cultural and material context.

By focusing on six children within this research design, the co-constructed movement and shifting processes of materials, bodies and contexts within their writing activity can be examined in depth. However, this examination of children as separate cases will still only provide fragmentary stories or encounters to work with. Although many dimensions of children's activity can be explored using a range of methods and multiple times, it will never provide a child's 'real' story or provide '*completeness*' (Thomas, 2011, p. 23).

The case studies (the selection of six children)

Twelve (just under half of the) parents and carers in the selected class returned the consent forms agreeing for their children to be selected for the study. The teacher and I selected the children together so that she could be informed of the process and also so that she could share with me her knowledge of the children as this might have affected their selection. My intention was not to select children randomly but to create a diverse sample of six children who represented the class. Children who the teacher felt may be emotionally, socially or educationally affected by having extra adult attention were

withdrawn from the selection. As the children had all just begun school and were in a period of transition, we were particularly conscious not to disrupt or add to any distress within this process. For example, one child was felt by the teacher to be particularly 'clingy' with adults, and we were concerned that further adult attention might not be supportive in her start to school. Another child was taking a while to settle into a social group and we felt that the research methods might invade the social spaces that she was developing with other children. To avoid confidentiality issues, one child was exempted from the sample as I knew his family, and one child who had special needs, who was already engaged with multiple agencies, was also withdrawn. Both the teacher and I felt secure that the six children selected as 'cases' could be described as representative of the children within the class as a whole. We had a sample which had an equal number of girls and boys, and mixed ages across the year, including children born in autumn, spring and summer.

Listening as retelling – stories that are not stolen but *re-crafted*

Les Back (2007, p. 8) argues that to listen to others is not merely to transcribe or empty people of their expertise but to develop a critical and artful openness to others. Rather than presenting texts, or children's voices, as disembodied, there is a need to grapple with the sensory nature of how we tell or describe what we are able to hear. Building on ideas for pursuing the qualities of '*thick description*' in social research (Geertz, 1983), Back writes that the words and images of participants should be '*produced through deep sociological listening...that theorise as they describe and describe as they theorise*' (2007, p. 21). This is the serious art of crafting a story. The onus is on how dialogical listening as theoretically significant is reconstituted in terms of the complex realities of the people that the researcher has been close to. Back's argument is useful as it recognises not only the ethical immanent situated interactions between participants and researchers, but also how these are then staged through time as they are reconstituted. In my craft of writing, and through verbal presentation, I have attempted to keep the children who participated in this research close by. Although their voices and movements have been reconstituted through my own interpretative analysis, I have been careful to develop analytical and descriptive procedures in which the essence of them as the subjects of research is lucid. My listening to children is founded on a relational ethics which respects difference, or *otherness*, and so in reporting their responses, I have embraced the unexpected, the unspoken silence, as well as what the children have clearly articulated. Finding ways in

which it was possible to listen and hear with all my senses through methods of data production has been a significant aspect of this approach.

Section five: Ethnographic participatory methods

This section details the tools that have been selected to listen to the case study children. It introduces the methods of participation for the children and researcher that support the conceptualisation of children's writing and research activity with others as a process of *becoming*. Here, I outline the multiple methods approach used to construct data; this approach seeks to create numerous spaces in which children can be heard. I explain how these methods are used within the '*writing encounters*' I have with children in the early years classroom.

From methodological approaches to methods of fieldwork

The move towards participatory research, based on notions of consultation and collaboration with children as research subjects, has led researchers to focus on developing 'child-oriented' methods that are able to extend communicative possibilities for a wide range of children. For example, the Mosaic approach (Moss and Clark, 2001; Clark, 2005; McTavish et al., 2012) utilises a range of adaptable research methods with often very young children, including photographs, map-making, drawings, child-led tours, observations, artefacts and interviews. Clark (2011) asserts that these methods enable a participatory research design where children's views and experiences are reflected on, and the meaning-making process is co-constructed by *all* participants, both children and adults. In addition to this, Einarsdottir (2007) notes that as children are not a homogenous group, researchers should be creative in how they utilise different methods that suit individual children's competence, knowledge and interests. However, Thomson (2007) argues that participation of children in research should not be limited to the use of particular 'child-friendly' methods, as participation is not inherent in the research methods themselves. Thomson suggests that children's participation needs to be embedded in the social-spatial interaction between participants, namely how children are invited into the research arena and how they are facilitated by the adult-researcher.

Janzen (2008) also challenges the assumption that by using methods of participation, it automatically means that children are fully participating within research.

She argues that although post-modern constructions of childhood do exist within research, where the child is positioned as a co-player in the construction of knowledge, identity and culture, research involving children as participants generally maintains the image of the child as reproducer, not co-producer, of knowledge, identity and culture. According to Janzen, research with children still tends to situate children as passive recipients, especially within school, where the child's narrative is often constructed through the interpretation of the adult teacher/researcher observer, and the research therefore supports the development of the teacher's narrative rather than the child's. Janzen's analysis of literature was carried out in 2006, and recent research with children has furthered our understanding of the complex participatory role that children do have within the process of research, namely one that is dialogical and co-constructed but still child-oriented (Carr, 2011; Hunleth, 2011; Marsh, 2012; Dyson, 2013). What remains relevant within Janzen's argument, however, is that researchers should make the adopted conceptualisation of children transparent and demonstrate how it has shaped their design, methodology and analysis. By articulating the image of the child that the researcher holds in making research decisions, the assumptions that are held by adults about childhood are laid bare and questioning of these underpinning constructions can take place. In response to this, I have clearly stated how I conceptualise the children within my research as *becoming*, as constantly changing and adaptive, and that this *movement*, which is inherent in all humans, is in response to social, cultural and material activity. My methodology and analysis have been created based on these notions.

Tools to construct data

Generating data with children as participant's challenges researchers to be creative (Einarsdottir, 2009). It is not an easy option but contains many possibilities, including the potential for disrupting and challenging researcher assumptions. The methods selected for this study have been designed in line with the ethnographic principles outlined earlier and have been framed by my intention to hear children's voices within the classroom by acknowledging activities that are often perceived to be unremarkable and mundane (Mavers, 2011). The techniques I have adopted are in common usage in early years and school settings for assessing children's learning:

- field notes;
- research conversations;
- photography and video; and

- collection of artefacts.

These techniques were chosen as they would provide a rich picture of the children's writing activity but also would not disrupt normal classroom routines.

All the research tools, apart from my reflective field notes, were selected as a means in which data could be socially and materially constructed together with children. The methods chosen were dialogical, reliant on the sharing of spoken or written words, and visual. The visual methods were included as a means in which the production of children's material and embodied expressions, which may be lost through textual representation, could be explored. I was also conscious of the role of sensory data as a means in which to listen both to and with children (Rinaldi, 2005; Warming, 2005; Pink, 2011). My field notes also attempted to capture responses to sensory elements of data, if not the sensory data itself, as these elements could be considered non-representational (Dicks, 2014). I will discuss this argument in more detail below.

The methods listed below should be viewed as connective and overlapping, producing fragmentary, partial accounts which have been formed into a web of connections (Geertz, 1983). How these connections are then assembled within the research analysis is the focus of the next chapter. These methods have often been used simultaneously by the children and myself in the classroom, and there has been a blurring of ownership, particularly in reading the visual photographic data later, in acknowledging who has actually produced each image. However, my own researcher story that is articulated in my field notes is distinctively mine in demonstrating how, through reflective processes, I began to reconstruct data into initial stages of analysis as the research progressed.

Field notes

I kept field notes for two reasons: to capture activity and to create reflexivity. Throughout my time in the field, I kept a journal where I kept narrative observations, reflective notes and random thoughts in situ (Clifford, 1986). Generally, this writing was focused on describing the dimensions and connections within the children's writing encounters, namely what processes were occurring. Adopting Pink's (2011) argument that sensorial qualities exist within research encounters, I also noted the language that children were using and their sensory responses. I wrote down my own intuitive reactions and movements in response to the children. The activity of writing field notes, as a method of

constructing understandings within the research process as it commenced, supported deeper levels of comprehension which were expressed through the text.

By writing regularly in the field of study, I have been able to capture my changing and developing understanding of the method of writing, both as a writer myself and in watching others write. I was able to expand on descriptions, by articulating links between theory and practice, and reflect on my own positionality, taking a reflexive approach to external and internal events (Etherington, 2004). However, as Thompson (2014) has troubled over, I became increasingly aware throughout my time spent in the classroom of the pitfalls and problems of documenting activity and creating a narrative which was purely a personal construction rather than a participatory one. The method of field notes was important, but other methods also needed to be utilised to guarantee participant 'voice'.

Research conversations

Research conversations with children, as opposed to interviewing, allows children to control the pace and direction of the discussion (Mayall, 2000, p. 121). With a responsive researcher, there is an opportunity to create mutual understanding and develop shared meanings. However, the researcher needs to be sensitive to how children may, as they anticipate adults' perspectives, articulate contextual expectations (Hviid, 2008). Eide and Winger (2005) argue that the child needs to be nurtured within the research conversation, and to do this, the researcher needs to have certain competences – e.g. insightful, interested and creative, purposeful and flexible – and have previous knowledge of the children and their interests. Above all, the researcher needs to be a '*humble interpreter*' 'tuning into' the changeability and movement within the conversation. Intuition plays a part here in providing the appropriate researcher responses to each individual participant.

The research conversations with the case study children were both planned and occurred spontaneously. Generally, I had one-to-one conversations with the children that focused on an aspect of writing activity in class or an artefact, e.g. the children's log book. These conversations occurred within the classroom and in the corridor outside if the noise and interruptions of the other children impinged on our ability to talk. The conversations were initiated by myself but also by the children. Research conversations also occurred as a group activity, involving two or more of the children, for example as a way in which to engage children in taking photos. These group activities allowed for a negotiation of

shared meaning-making to take place, although the significance of events for the children and myself was sometimes very different. The conversations were audio taped and then transcribed. I also took accompanying notes at the time to illustrate the children's expressions through physical movements, for example their gestures, posture and ways of moving, and their emotional responses, which would have remained hidden if I had solely relied on verbal recordings.

Photography and video

I regularly used a digital camera to capture writing encounters visually, as photographs and video. I have also encouraged the children to use the camera regularly so that they could make decisions about what was important to them. The advantage of creating visual images as data is that the images are not able to be narrated (Back, 2007, p. 100). That is, they stand alone as serious expressions, without being reduced to textual explanation or implied signification. As field notes and conversations are heavily reliant on language, photographs and video have offered me a different way to see events in terms of how children's writing activity is composed. As children's writing is understood to be multimodal, photography and video allows for these multimodal actions and responses to be evidenced (Dockett and Perry, 2005). Viewing the images of children's writing activity in this study, in both photographs and video, has drawn an emotional and aesthetic response from myself and the children. These are therefore methods that highlight the relationship between sensing data and understanding it (Back, 2007, p. 96).

Using visual methods also allows for critical exploration of experiences that are often taken for granted (Patton et al., 2011). The photographic and video images taken by myself and the children have become the focus of discussion in research conversations, where the images created are used as '*production texts*' (Mitchell, 2011, p. 50). In this study, the children as participants have been able to interact with the photographs and video to explore their ideas, resulting in an iterative approach to producing new ways of understanding. However, these images have always been viewed as fleeting and partial expressions that are understood in relation to other encounters, outside of the action that is fixed within the visual frame.

Artefacts as evidence

It is important to note that these visual methods resulted in visual artefacts: photographs that were printed out and video that could be watched multiple times. Other artefacts in this research include children's drawings (also a visual medium), children's written communication, their writing tools and props, and other connected material resources that the children used in their writing activity. I have recognised artefacts in terms of their usage, as objects that were mediational (Wertsch, 1994, 1998), and allowed for intra-activity (Barad, 2003, 2007). Artefacts may possess sensorial and material qualities for the children (Pink, 2011). Artefacts used as evidence may show the children's personal historical, social and cultural narrative both before and during the writing encounters. Artefacts are connected to people, place and other objects, and therefore as objects they contain and emit multiple meanings. Silverman (2013, p. 51) points out that no data is '*natural*', as it is always mediated by the presence of the recording equipment, in this case the camera, the pen, the notebook and the iPad. It is important to note that these are the artefacts of research too.

Observing and participating in '*writing encounters*'

In this section I have shown *how* I have listened to and heard children as writers through the methodological framework that I have created; however, I also need to articulate *which* children's activities as writers I have tuned into in the field of research. I use the term '*writing encounter*' here to describe the activities that the children were engaged in and which I focused on to provide answers for the research questions posed. My definition of a writing encounter borrows from the notion of an encounter with the child as '*other*' in terms of my ethical stance (Levinas, 1991), but also incorporates co-constructivist, multimodal, multiple literacies and post-structuralist ideas. Essentially, the writing encounter occurs *with others as a multiplicity*. A writing encounter is different from a writing event. An event is a fixed and planned activity, and the term assumes stability and singularity. The notion of a writing encounter recognises multiple dialogical, cultural and material processes of production, offering the possibility of examining cultural codes, conventions and material practices as hybrid (Hallam and Street, 2000). A writing encounter is unique but operates in connection to other encounters.

The idea of exploring children's writing as an encounter recognises that writing can be understood as *activity*. Activity is the mediating process by which learning about writing and engaging in cultural, social and material experiences of writing occur, but it is

also fleeting, changing and *becoming* new. It contains bodily, sensory, material, cognitive and social action; it is always shifting and transformational. The meanings of these encounters, as representational acts (Mavers, 2011) or as processes of life production itself (Deleuze, 2004a), are of central importance within this study. The methodology that I have presented in this chapter was framed to allow an unbound exploration of this to ensue. By identifying and conceptualising young children's writing through their encounters with multimodal ways of becoming a writer in this way, a workable strategy of research in the classroom has been provided.

Methodological conclusions

In summary, the methodology outlined in this chapter recognises that as a researcher, I am producing an exclusive set of interpretations of young children's writing activity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My knowledge, and that of the child participants, has been understood to be constructed in the same way that a rhizome continuously grows as a connected network. The research design has adopted ethnographic principles for carrying out research in the classroom, namely naturalism, understanding and discovery, where my own intuitive positioning is recognised.

I have problematised children's participatory methodology to create an approach where children's sociocultural and material actions as participants are understood to shape multiple cultural and social meanings within a specific context with an adult-researcher. This approach highlights the relationships, responses and material connectivity between the adult and the child, and the children to each other. My research activity is guided by ethical values of otherness, care and listening.

The multiple methods adopted ensure that children can be heard in their multimodal writing activity. Reflexive processes are recognised in how data is constructed. Writing encounters as a framework in which to listen to and hear children as writers was developed in correspondence with sociocultural and material understandings of children's writing activity. The children in the encounters are viewed as socially situated *becomings*, creating multiple meanings in their activities as writers and research participants.

Theoretical and methodological concepts emanating from current literature and research were used in this chapter to support the justification of choices in research design and organisational strategy. The approach I have taken to create ethical

participation of young children in terms of *becoming*, one which recognises the relational and dimensional qualities of writing and research through *encounters*, will be expanded in the discussion of analysis in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: Approaches and description of analysis – Using rhizomes to form assemblages

Introduction

This chapter will outline the theoretical and conceptual approach that I have taken within my analysis. It seeks to provide a justification for my chosen analytical tools and practices by explaining in depth how these will enable me to create new knowledge about young children as writers in school. Creating a separate chapter to describe the analytical process is an unusual way to structure the first part of a thesis; however, it is important that there is enough space within this work to explore the choices of analytical processes so that the following chapters of data analysis and discussion, i.e. how they have come to be produced and the style of their presentation, can be fully understood. Containing my analytical thinking within a separate and distinct chapter provides a bridge from methodology to analysis and discussion. This chapter is essential in connecting the conceptual framework emanating from the review of literature to the methodological design, the central findings and the discussion in the following chapters. It can therefore be viewed as an analytical conduit between research data and research knowledge.

This chapter contains two sections. The first section discusses the theoretical underpinnings and justification for the analytical approach that I have developed. The second section describes the analytical procedures and practices that I have carried out.

Section one: Approaches to analysis

Attention needs to be given to the choices that adults make when analysing raw data that has been generated with children, particularly in how this data relates to theoretical understanding. Within my approach to data analysis, I have grappled with these issues by critically interrogating the processes of data analysis, including my own position, and thought hard about the techniques that are used to show how data becomes evidence which is then theorised through processes of abstraction and explanation. By understanding data as a complex overlapping relational process, not merely as a set of

procedures, I have found that it is possible to 'tune in' more precisely to the multitude of ways in which children's narratives can be heard. In this way, data that may be contradictory and therefore 'sidelined' by narratives that are looking to correspond with what is already known can in fact inform the story that is told.

A rejection of systematic coding – 'Re-presenting' stories

'Conceptual and theoretical work should not climb to a level where the voices of the people concerned become inaudible. Rather, theoretical ideas and concepts should hover above the ethnographic ground in order to provide a vocabulary for its explanation.' (Black, 2007, p. 21)

The methodology that I have developed has attempted to find ways to listen to children and their ideas about writing. Problems surrounding the construction of children's narratives, particularly the production of children's 'voice', have been critically discussed at length in the previous chapter. These considerations have fed into the creation of a set of analytical procedures regarding how the data in this study has been primarily organised and then critically examined. Thoughts surrounding how children and adults engage in a co-constructive and intuitive production of knowledge, where the presence of the researcher in dialogue with children is recognised, are woven into my analytical method. My approach could be described as a *'listener's art'* (Black, 2007, p. 21), where openness to others is crafted through a *'democracy of the senses'* (Black, 2007, p. 8). This technique of listening to children starts by creating relationships and spaces in which to hear others, as has been planned through my choice of methods and ethical framework. But then it also develops *through the narrative* that is formed as a result of this interaction, as an encounter which has an ethical dimension (Clark et al., 2005, p. 6). The aspects of analysis selected here are a response to finding ways to attune to the voices in the data, extending the ethical relationships that were developed in the field onto the page.

In traditional ethnography, researchers make rational arguments by searching through data for similarities and patterns that are then organised into codes, thus allowing themes to emerge. Distinct areas for discussion are formed through this thematic approach and this appears to be a useful way of offering a comprehensible story for the reader. However, Holliday (2007) offers words of caution to researchers who may be tempted to use themes to mould raw data into neat bundles. He describes this process

as *'packaging and repackaging to produce a finely coherent text in which the ragged edges of the original social setting are clipped off and disposed of'* (Holliday, 2007, p. 165).

An approach where fragments of data are systemised into categories is problematic if the writer's account of complex human activity is driven by the organisational system (the analytical stages) that they are working with. MacLure (2013c, p. 168) describes this as *'the "grammar" always pre-existing the phenomena under investigation'*. Analysis that codes and successively categorises data into hierarchical relationships and arborescent or 'tree-like' logic assumes a way of thinking that is *representational*, in that data is understood as stable and constant, and so by following a staged process of detailed analysis, it can be systematically classified. All differences and all irregularities are subsumed and rendered as inaccessible, hidden within the system, which is standing in for or representing the world. In MacLure's words,

Within the schema of representation, things are frozen into place allotted to them by the structure that comprehends them – in the double sense of enclosing them, and of rendering them comprehensible. Coding does not allow that things might (will) deviate and divide from themselves to form something new. (2013c, pp. 168–169)

The process of developing fixed categories will *in itself* omit differences and so an approach of cataloguing and categorising will seek merely to *contain* the data within particular structures (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013). Although the outcome can be acknowledged as an interpreted retelling by the researcher, what is actually presented is a version of reality that is final: a set of events reconstituted as a completed story.

However, Bruner states that stories as narrative retellings should be considered as unfixed: *'Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future. But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete'* (1997, p. 270).

Although narrative explanations created through data analysis enable us to understand connections between events, these retellings are constantly changing and are always incomplete accounts. In fact, the process of analysing and 're-storying', the raking back and forth over data as interpretation and reinterpretation, is *essentially* a process of alteration and modification. Once we recognise that explanations of children's lives are arranged *in relation* to the timeframes and frameworks for thinking in which they occur (or are situated), and that these structures are open to alteration and interpretation, it is possible to analyse data as a partial story or fragment within a continually moving process. This is not to suggest an epistemologically relativist standpoint; rather, it is a more

reflexively informed one that looks beyond fixed stages that are *'ruthlessly linear'* (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 179). Alternatively, it is possible to consider the process of analysis, and the stories that emerge from this, as part of a continuum where ideas are constantly *re-*presented rather than an attempt to represent a completed narrative.

The established and fixed understanding of children's writing activity in classrooms is formed in relation to the educational structures that surround them, as demonstrated in chapter one. Children are not bounded by these structures necessarily, but what is seen and noted *is*, as is what is *not*. This research, therefore, having established how external school structures frame an understanding of children's encounters with writing into 'completed' events by compartmentalising language and measuring children against the expectations of these events, seeks to counter this. I have set out research questions and developed a research design that moves beyond a structural interpretation where children as writers in school are 'contained' to an approach that perceives children as *multidimensional writers* engaged in a process of continual *becoming*. Therefore, my analysis of data adopts a strategy that explores this process of movement in relation to a wide range of external and internal connections. By adopting this conceptual framework, I reject the idea that young children's writing activity can be reduced to coding, categorising and systematisation.

Analysis as doing, creating and connecting

'We learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalising from the ordinary.'
(Harraway, 2008, p. 3)

My analytical approach grapples with the dynamic, messy and somewhat contradictory nature of data, both as material that has been constructed within the field, as a situated encounter, and how this material is re-interpreted at later stages of the analytic process. Although aspects of data and how they are understood through phases of analysis may be separated by time and location, they are part of a connected network of events brought about through a combination of text, visual images, cultural and material objects, and memory. The process of writing itself during the different stages of analysis, in a variety of forms to serve different functions, has been important in how my analysis has taken shape. Holliday (2007, p. 122) identifies this to be *'writing as investigation'*, and namely as *'an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact'*.

As the writer of the research, my words are not an objective description but are always written *in relation to* the data. I am not separated but *entangled* within the analysis that I carry out (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013, p. 6). My presence is not as an 'analysis filter' for data to flow through, but gives meaning to the data within the analysis, as I act upon, respond, build ideas and voice them. Therefore, the analysis of abstract text, visual images and cultural objects must encompass an exploration of how these relations and entanglements are formed. This heightened sense of reflexivity, a critical awareness of the interpretative processes within the analysis, will be discussed in relation to how the data is perceived and understood as evidence in the following chapters.

Identifying areas for discussion is not a neutral activity that naturally materialises over time. Rather, the areas form aspects of a narrative about the world that is *authored*: personal constructions of events that are dependent on a range of factors. As Holloway writes, '*Knowledge is not and cannot be neutral, and accounts of histories are always shaped by the intellectual heritage, social position and intellectual intent of their author*' (2014, p. 388).

My changing position and my subjectivity towards the data are essential to this process of authoring. The analysis presented here is enveloped by my own intuition, theoretical understanding and conceptualisation, and can only really be regarded as a fleeting fiction of the social reality in which the data was formed (Geertz, 1983).

However momentary the story that is told may be, it is important that the fiction being created is coherent and that the theory and argument created is reasoned through evidence. To ensure this, my analysis has remained data-driven in that the practices that I as a researcher and the child writers as participants have engaged in, i.e. the action and events of 'doing' the research, have formed the theoretical and conceptual ideas presented. This empirical rooting, not theory built from the ground but through the roots of the data, is central to how I have explored and experimented with different ways of knowing children as writers; it has been a process of production and connection. This way of thinking about the research subject as someone who produces events in life (Deleuze, 2004a) links back to sociocultural theories of literacy that stress the importance of researching children involved in writing as *active producers*. This is based on the proposition that '*as individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production*' (Marx and Engels, 1977, p. 42, cited in Ingold, 2011, p. 3). For this reason, the data itself, the activity of its creation and my own reflexive activity in

interpreting and recreating the stories emanating from it have remained centrally important within my analysis.

This focus on action in how data is analysed has allowed me to create conceptual explanations of events using an emic approach, similar to grounded theory, where theory is built up inductively through continuing interaction with the data. However, unlike grounded theory, my analysis does not follow a circular sequence of steps; rather, it has been a process of tracking connections, taking decisions based on my own intuitive responses, and providing an inductive process of building theory *in relation to* pre-existing theory or a shaping of ideas through interaction with it. My aim in using this approach is to keep the research subjects in close proximity based on an ethical need to maintain the subject as a whole person rather than making sense of them through fragmentation. By doing this, the data that the children have produced – i.e. the stories that they have shared through their language, with their bodies and uses of materials, and contained within text and visual representations – is not diluted or splintered. This ‘thick description’ has needed patience, accuracy and critical thinking, where theory has been informed by, and created through, the descriptive practices on offer (Black, 2007, p. 21).

Understanding data as an *assemblage* or *meshwork*

To support an ‘un-fragmented’ approach to analysis, I return to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) notion of ‘*assemblage*’, which I previously explained in chapter one, as the conceptual approach taken within multiple literacies theory to understanding children’s writing desire. Analysing data as an assemblage recognises the shifting relationships between each element in its production, but also suggests that instead of thematising these elements, we can create an understanding through their arrangement and connections. This can be viewed as a map, detailing forces and movement, and will be discussed as a strategy in further detail in this chapter. Ideally, assemblages are innovative and produce unique ideas as a result of desirous and productive processes. As Marcus and Saka write, using the idea of an assemblage to understand the social world ‘*generates enduring puzzles about “process” and “relationship” rather than leading to systematic understandings of these tropes of classic social theory and the common discourse that it has shaped*’ (2006, p. 102).

What is important to consider is that there is no division or separation between the elements within an assemblage as they are part of one movement; an ‘*assemblage, in*

its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows and social flows simultaneously' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 23).

Making sense of these aspects means establishing, rather than de-establishing through segmentation, the connections between data, drawing out the multiplicities from how they are ordered. As an alternative to dividing the elements of production within children's writing encounters, which would lead to a disintegration of the whole, these elements as data can be understood in terms of how they are assembled. Ingold (2011, p. 63) proposes a corresponding idea that if data is viewed as activity, it can be made sense of '*as a meshwork of relations*'. This meshwork is created through '*the binding together of lines, not in the connecting of points, that the mesh is constituted*' (Ingold, 2011, p. 152). So, it is how these encounters are brought together as a whole, viewed as an assemblage, that provides the focus within analysis.

What is inherent within this analytical approach, however, is a '*certain tension, balancing, and tentativeness where the contradictions between the ephemeral and the structural, and between the structural and the unstably heterogeneous exist*' (Marcus and Saka, 2006, p. 102).

As the researcher employing this approach, I am aware of the problems in creating an analysis that essentially seeks to move beyond structural ways of seeing the world but needs to do this within the structural boundaries of a written thesis, where conclusions, endings and finalities come to fix these emergent heterogenic processes into an expected framework. However, the analysis in the following chapters illustrates how data as an assemblage can be presented and used to locate important and often overlooked social, cultural and material activity.

Rhizoanalysis as anti-hierarchy

My raw data has been analysed using rhizoanalytic methods, where both the data and the analysis are framed within an emergent relational assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Rhizoanalysis is an analytic tool based on the features of the 'rhizome'. It provides a way of mapping and networking the production of knowledge. I have argued in the first section of my methodology chapter that the concept of the 'rhizome' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) is useful in seeking to extend the knowledge we have of young children as writers, as it challenges universal linear models of development and recognises writing

activity as a process of continual change and emergence. The etymological meaning of 'rhizome' draws from 'rhizo', meaning to combine form, and 'rhizome' to describe a type of plant. As an analytical process of action, rhizoanalysis seeks to investigate the world as if it were an organic structure of roots and shoots, always budding and becoming new but sometimes impossible to predict and disruptive to previous growth. Within rhizoanalysis, there are no generalised points of reference or cause and effect to be located (MacNaughton, 2004), no comparisons or stages of the analysis to work through, no categories, themes or codes to be evolved; instead, there are lines to be followed and dimensions to be created that provide a shifting and emerging plurality of thought. The rhizome is persistently mobile and resistant to change, and has the potential to rupture established frameworks which rely on *a priori* codes (Wohlwend and Handsfield, 2012).

The logic of the rhizome means that rhizomatic thinking,

has neither a beginning or an end, but always a middle from which it grows...the rhizome connects any point to any other, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature...it is composed not of units but dimensions, or rather directions of motions. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 23)

My analysis has included the creation of rhizomatic formations, or lines of *becoming*, that demonstrate the multiple relational energies between language, emotion, objects, etc. within social spaces as an open and continuing system of thinking about young children's writing activity. As Colman argues, '*There are no singular positions on the networked lines of a rhizome, only connected points which form connections between things*' (2010b, p. 232).

This analytical process therefore serves to overcome rigid structures and binary thought which construct children into regulated bodies within school systems.

Deleuze and Guattari state that in rhizomatic thinking:

- '*any point can be connected to anything else and must be*' (2004, p. 7);
- multiplicities are used in place of unities, that have '*neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes and dimensions*' (2004, p. 90); and
- that ideas may '*be broken, shattered at a given spot, but ... will always start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines*' (2004, p. 10).

This is an analytical process understood as a constant movement: a deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of conceptual understanding (Masny, 2013, p.

340). This idea will be examined more thoroughly within the assemblages of writing encounters presented in the next chapters.

Within early childhood studies, researchers have used techniques of rhizoanalysis to explore children's play (MacNaughton, 2005), the curriculum (Sellers, 2013) and pedagogical documentation and children's experimentation (Olsson, 2009). MacNaughton outlines a clear approach in using rhizomatic logic in the classroom by looking for unlikely connections between diverse data fragments and external 'texts', including ourselves (2005, p. 123). So, fragments of data can be re-examined through other texts, for example an article, a piece of literature, or another fragment of data. The idea is to 're-see' what is *becoming*, and this can start anywhere, either by locating 'texts' of the child or generating new 'texts'. These juxtaposing texts provide a disruption and make us look differently at what may seem apparent. I have also chosen to juxtapose data fragments in creating my analysis, but the approach I have taken to text creation is different. I have intentionally grappled with differing elements within the data production to provide a way of tuning into the different texts that the children have generated, and in so doing, I have also generated new texts. In creating this analysis, I have used cartographic and mapping processes where children's everyday writing practices, both as representational (in relation to the social and cultural structures that surround them) and mobile (in how they flow, disrupt and emerge), are traced and followed. I have not tried to emulate the methodological and analytical approach of others as doing this would only contradict a rhizomatic approach that seeks to *detritorialise* and move beyond known territory (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 559); rather, my analytical procedures have emerged as a response to the process of analysis itself.

The rhizome explored as cartography – diagrams and maps

'The map is open and connectable to all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by the individual, the group, or social formation.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, pp. 13–14)

The characteristics of a rhizome are not *'amenable to any structural or generative model'* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 13). Rather, they can be understood in terms of a map creation. The rhizome is not the *tracings* of a map that has come before, although structural tracings do exist within rhizome mapping and should be added to the 'rhizome

map' as a way of exploring the paradoxical forces at work (Masny, 2013, p. 3). Instead, the rhizome is the making/creating/construction of a map. So the principles of cartography, the actual activities of mapping – i.e. connecting dimensions, extending lines with multiple entry and exits adapted towards the field of study – are useful analytic procedures. Seen as a rhizomatic journey, mapping is like a trail that can be followed, connecting with other trails. It is not re-traceable, as it can be erased over time (Honan, 2007, p. 535), but allows the researcher to highlight these connective forces.

An alternative but corresponding approach is to consider this as a diagrammatic process. Zdebik (2012) argues that the diagram provides a method of visually threading the organisations to incorporate what cannot be contained in the structures of language. He proposes that the diagram is a '*generative device*' (2012, p.5) that demonstrates the push and pull between form and matter, displays relations as functional, and is not a precise representation (a static tracing) but acts as a metaphor (an image of potentiality). A further explanation of how I have utilised these cartographic processes within my analysis is outlined in the next section which looks at my analytical procedures.

Avoiding signification – mapping children's writing activity

'Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 5)

When Deleuze and Guattari rejected the idea of writing as signifying and perceived it instead as an activity of connections, lines formed into assemblages, they were alluding to writing as a process of transformation. Writing is never the mere repetition of signs and symbols, although this is often how it is 'read'; rather, it is a representation of something new. Deleuze and Guattari rebuff the 'quantification of writing' within linear thinking. They suggest a re-examination of the function of writing, not in relation to the measurable units used to signify points, orders and fixed notions of progress, but as something that, although fragmentary, is always related to something else.

It is worth revisiting a summary of the arguments presented in the literature review at this point. As has been discussed previously, writing activity that young children are engaged in within school is often perceived by adults as signifying an educational aim, and writing is measured and quantified in relation to the signs of fixed educational outcomes. The writing child is quantified, for example in terms of the curriculum,

knowledge of phonemes and graphemes, how they sit at the table and how they hold a pencil. As has been argued by sociocultural theorists, these aspects of school writing (and many more) are the *signs* of writing and therefore define what writing *is* in the classroom. However, this limits our understanding of the task, the function and the process, and the multiple meanings of writing for children that is a materially embodied as well as culturally significant activity. Leander and Boldt have written that when children are engaged in literate activity in school, *'The "event" is given meaning by the "literacy" within it, rather than by its own moment-by-moment unfoldings'* (2012, p. 41).

So, conventionally our understanding of children's writing comes not by analysing the event itself as a literate encounter, but through the structural dimensions of literacy itself, and this provides the meanings that are assigned to children's activity. This is 'literacy' that has been *'territorialised'*, made stable and bounded within a particular territory (Masny, 2013, p. 340). Writing as a process in which school literacy (which is inherently developmental and outcome-focused) is *signified* means that the writer is *significant* only in how they are proceeding from point a to point b through the structures that form 'literacy'. These literacy structures appear to be located externally to the child and close down the possibilities of understanding children as *becoming* writers, where literacy can be understood as a continuing process of external and internal connections which construct new ways of thinking.

Multiple literacies theorists have used the rhizome to explore the process of *becoming* within literacy activity, not towards an endpoint but as continuous human investment (Masny and Waterhouse, 2011). Rhizoanalysis helps to map how literacy, in all its many social, cultural and material forms, intersects with human *becomings*. It explores connections between different literacies in children's lives, focusing particularly on how data has *become* within literacy experiences, as this movement, or the motion of language, is a process of both stasis and change (Leander and Boldt, 2012). By utilising rhizoanalytic processes within my analysis of literate activity, I have avoided imitating *signification* within literacy events, or re-representing processes of measurement already in place. Instead I have explored the processes in which children are engaged as writers as a connective map, or an assemblage, resulting in an analysis that uses a lateral and local logic to produce multiple possibilities.

Language, writing and rhizomatic thinking

Social constructivist thinking has been critiqued for favouring structural frameworks of language to the detriment of all other elements of material existence (MacLure, 2013a). However, writing (even if understood as a multimodal activity) is an activity in which cultural signs and symbols are used to communicate with others. It is a language system. Although post-structuralist readings move beyond this regulated system to find further understandings, there is no denying that language structures and school structures in which they are made sense of exist. I argue that what is more important than pitting structuralist and post-structuralist approaches against one another is to recognise the process of 'construction' within action and production which these differing theories offer. My reading of Deleuze and Guattari's work and others who have used their ideas as tools for research is that the notion of constructing – the constructing of networks, rhizomes, assemblages and maps – is a central feature of their writing. What Deleuze's ideas allow is for language and writing as a socially and culturally constructed process to be interrogated as a force in relation to a multitude of other material, geographical, sensory and physical forces. I have used a 'keep and combine' approach to this, by exploring elements of social constructivist theory and 'plugged these into' the assemblage of Deleuzian ideas that I have found useful methodologically. It has allowed a depth of analysis to take place, exploring both the discontinuities that exist in theories that seek to explain children as writers but also the continuities in thinking too.

Vygotsky has written about children's writing that,

Together with processes of development, forward motion and appearance of new forms, we can discern processes of curtailment, disappearance and reverse development of old forms at each step. The developmental history of written language among children is full of such discontinuities. Its line of development seems to disappear altogether: then suddenly, as if from nowhere, a new line begins, and at first it seems that there is absolutely no continuity between the old and the new. (1978, p. 106)

Vygotsky is describing rhizomatic processes at play here. Although he argues that there is continuity to come in the child's development as part of a dialectic process, I would question this in line with Deleuze and Guattari's argument that it would be a *territorialisation* of the child within signifying regimes (2004, p. 560). Vygotsky recognises that the process of becoming a writer can be understood as a complex map of disrupted lines and dimensions. This Deleuzoguattarian thinking does not disregard situated social learning but expands the potential for exploring these processes.

Using the rhizome as a conceptual tool in analysis supports important and uncomfortable questions about the meaning of qualitative research practices with children and the areas of their lives that adults choose to focus on. For example, Wohlwend and Handsfield (2012) have been successful in using the rhizome for analysing social constructions of young children as users of digital technologies, looking at how their social actions can be understood as both a convergence and divergence from digital literacy discourse and practices. As a researcher using rhizoanalysis, I have had to deconstruct rigid lines of thought around children as writers in school and become aware of the subtle lines (the ones where children are seemingly empowered but still governed) and how these lines overlap (Olsson, 2009, p. 61). I have been able to create new '*lines of flight*' or zig-zag cracks across rigid and subtle pre-existing lines (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 p. 238).

Rhizoanalysis – making meanings of writing through action

Rhizoanalysis recognises *immanence* as a quality of meaning-making and transformation, in that the meaning(s) of writing is contained within the process of doing it, i.e. the actions of the moment. By using this approach it is possible to understand how young children create meaning(s) as it is produced. This focus on activity also links to sociocultural perspectives, as the meanings that children make of writing are created *with* the materials and people which make up the encounter itself. Meanings are localised to that which is happening: they are shared and situated; therefore, the processes of explanation recognise this, rather than creating different meanings through 'higher' systems and transcendental principles which occur within other analytical approaches. Deleuze and Guattari explicitly referred to their own philosophical method as '*geophilosophy*', an approach which '*privileges geography over history and stresses the value of the present-becoming*' (Semetsky, 2004, p. 230). Using the rhizome through cartographic exploration and following lines of connection, tracking movement and changes and avoiding repetition offers me the opportunity to further my own conceptualisation of children's writing *becomings*. This approach recognises the physical, sensual and emotional data (St. Pierre, 1997; Lind, 2005) that can emerge within writing encounters, and rather than seeking to discount this data, the approach instead explores the data in relation to what language and writing may mean for young children.

Section two: Description of procedures within the analysis

Not stages of analysis, but directional movements

If our understanding of children's writing can be understood rhizomatically with no beginning or end but only a middle, as *intermezzo* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, pp. 23–25), then how do we commence with the analysis? And where does it end? This section outlines my analytical strategies and reflects on the procedures taken as a way of answering these questions.

What is fundamental to rhizoanalysis is that it is not '*amenable to any structural or generative model*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 13). So, I have not invented a structured set of procedures to follow; rather, my analysis has progressed through different movements in my thinking. I am not able to identify the exact beginning of analysis, as it cannot be separated out from data construction, or even the initial theorising that I was engaged in before I entered the field. These overlaps and merging of ideas will be explained more fully in the following description of the analytic movements, and also within the discussions that have resulted from the data analysis in the next chapters. However, what has been clear is that the analytical procedures as a process of critical thinking and scrutiny emerged from my initial intra-action with texts and visual images, and then continued as a creative process that responded to the connections and networks of meaning-making that the processes of interrogation and theorising brought forward. This process is detailed below through four differently located but overlapping movements within my analysis of data.

First movement/s – Creating trails through

I have constantly shifted my analytical focus in response to research activity, a process of reflexive thinking in regard to my positionality and the processes of construction. The interpretation and analysis of data through all its different incarnations has been highly dynamic and emergent. Below is a reflective piece which describes the processes of how data has been constructed, and how at the time of writing I began to order my thinking in response to it. It illustrates how I was interrogating and questioning this theorising within

my initial analysis, and how my decision to loosen these constraints by being more engaged in data generation as a process of immanence, developed.

A reflection on the 'tagging' of notes

In my fieldwork, I used *Evernote*, an app for recording audio, photographs and different texts on my iPad. This had the advantage of enabling me to immediately capture writing activities in the same 'notebook' within a particular time and space as fragmentary 'notes'. So, for example, one notebook contained an observation of one child at the writing table, the transcription of a research conversation with another, photographs that children had taken of their learning log as an artefact, and photographs of the classroom, all of which occurred around the same time. I found it useful in providing a system of assembling elements of writing encounters.

When I completed a 'note', I was able to 'tag' it with words or phrases. My intention was never to use the tags as codes. I was not attempting to create themes within the data through the tags; however, tagging was an interesting reflective activity, as writing a tag for a note required me to locate the connections that I was making. The words and phrases I chose related to my thinking at the time. Looking at the tags that I created, I could see that I was forming connections between my observations and the theory and research that I was reading and writing about at the time. The tags as 'descriptors' also seemed to be informed by intuitive thinking processes as well. Having written a narrative observation of Silver, I tagged it with these words: *action, consent, interaction, objects, shouting, transforming*. As I was attempting to think rhizomatically and recognise the rigid lines in place, I was uneasy about interpreting this data as evidence to support the theories I was reading about. Instead, I interpreted these tags as representing what I was looking for, and listening to, at the time of observation. My reading was framing my thinking and what I was noticing. This was helpful in strengthening my theoretical understanding, but it also meant that my understanding of the data was narrowing. Another example of this is in how the research conversation that I had with Red was tagged: *behaviour, relationships, ethics, researcher role*. It clearly represents the reading that I was engrossed in at the time, which was about research with children and participatory methodology. I recognise that these tags were a link, a connection with my reading, and perhaps that is what the process of tagging offered me,

namely the security and affirmation that I was on the right track and reassurance that my theorising was making sense and fitting together.

During this period of fieldwork, I noticed that when my focus shifted away from theoretical tomes, I was more 'tuned in' to the activities of the children, and the tags I used became more random, associated more with the things the children had done, physical objects or 'impressions' that I had been left with. For example, an observation of Green making a snowman with shapes is tagged as *cbeebies, language, penguin, playgroup*. I began to tag more in this way by 'tuning in' to the action, rather than the theories of others. I became more confident not to 'make sense' of what I was seeing purely in terms of the theoretical framework I was situated in, but to let my thoughts meander and follow the children's lead. The 'texts' of data can often constrain our 'reading' of what has occurred, and this is what I noted above. I was initially looking for signification within the observations that I had written as a way of linking what I already knew, and I began to challenge my own fixed relation towards the data and look for ways in which the data as territory can be '*deterritorialised*' or freed up as a means of production (Parr, 2010, p. 71).

Analysing the tagging process itself was an important process of understanding in how I was connecting experience, elements of data and theory in my thinking. It led me to conclude that fragments of data, even splinters that emerge from the data itself as this tagging procedure was, can be understood through the relationships that the researcher is forming both externally and internally. It is the lines that connect these distinct elements of data construction that need to be interrogated to uncover the multiple layers of thought that occurs when analysis takes place.

Second movement/s – Interrogation of texts and visual images

What was at the forefront of my emergent analysis was how to understand the data as portraying the writing child outside of the 'bounded spaces' in which they are structurally imagined, and to challenge the orthodoxies of the child constructed developmentally in relation to the curriculum. When the fieldwork had been completed, I began to interrogate the data and note my responses. I printed out field notes, observations, transcripts and photographs as 'raw data', as I wanted a hard, physical copy to move around and interact with. I wrote, drew and added post-it notes with questions, directional arrows and underlining as a commentary. As I 'read' the data, it spurred

associated memories and feelings that I had encountered within the classroom, and this was also noted. It also forced me to question how I was making sense of the children and their writing through the data, which involved looking back at a past event. I was continually asking questions, such as: How am I remembering these children and the classroom? Why did I observe and note these things? How can I show the relationship between this text and photograph, as a moment of something much more fluid? How can I talk about this without stultifying the energy which helped to form it? What was apparent was my heightened awareness, a personal meta-discussion that I was having of the interpretative processes in using data to tell a story, where relationships are at the forefront. My concern was in how a story can be told through data that has become removed from its making, and how I would be able to interpret it into something vital again.

Recurring issues began to emerge into key areas, for example around ethical positioning, the children's interest in my use of technology, and what being a '*good learner*' in class meant to the children. I began to develop an overlapping and extensive thematic list of features that I had noticed appearing in the data. Elements of the list grew, merged, and as I wrote, I was creating connections between the key areas. There were limitations to this as specific elements did not fit, and I began adding tiny details from one piece of data to multiple themes. I began to ask myself whether apart from being an initial process of reflection, was it a useful analytical step. I was aware of picking the observations, transcripts and field notes apart to look for identifiers, but I needed to look more closely at how the data as a whole fitted together.

Fragmenting the data into generalised key areas was useful, as it prompted me to consider how I was making judgements about data by taking it apart and bringing it together again with other data as an interpretive process. However, it limited the potential of understanding what the forces of connection between these aspects of the research were. I wanted to explore the energy amid the data and create a way of analysing what was connecting the different flows of production within the children's writing.

Third movement/s – map creation

Martin and Kamberelis write that, '*In drawing maps, the researcher works at the surface, creating possible realities by producing new articulations of disparate phenomena and*

connecting the exteriority of objects to whatever forces or directions seem potentially related to them' (2013, p. 671).

Mapping as a process of analysis opens up the potential for exploring discursive, social, material, emotional and sensory formations to understand what has and is happening within writing encounters. What cartographic analytical methods offered me as a researcher interested in children's activity as users and creators of writing was a means to explore how discursive and non-discursive modes of expression link (Semetsky, cited in Masny, 2013, p. 85), and how semiotic chains as multimodal expression were organised within socially situated activity.

I mapped whole events by following connections and associations in the data. This provided a way of exploring the energy within activities, which fragmenting the data into key themes would not allow. My maps traced over already established connections in children's movements, language and activity, but also created new connections and relationships. The meaning of what was happening in children's writing was demonstrated through the lines *between things*. I built a visual interpretation of the relations between the data that included the directional lines as motions of production that run between them. This is where I located energy, action and transformation in the children's experiences as writers. There was something almost rhythmic and musical in the process of map creation that went beyond language and allowed a different way of thinking about seemingly recognisable and therefore 'known' events.

Fourth movement/s – Writing encounters re-presented as an assemblage

By creating maps of encounters, and opening up ways in which the processes existent within the children's writing can be viewed differently, I was asking the question *what makes certain moments in children's writing possible?* A more comprehensive understanding of the complex construction of the forces *between* things, not just the things *themselves*, started to take shape through mapping and this could help to answer this question. I was concerned that in presenting the ideas that were emerging from these rhizoanalytic procedures, in a textual form, I would not be able to preserve the vitality of the children as research subjects. Additionally, I did not want to compartmentalise and splinter the totality of the children's writing activity or the processes of research that

framed how the writing encounters and the construction of data as interpretation and reinterpretation had come about.

I began a process of writing which in its own construction, ordering and precision provided further analysis. From this, I created areas of discussion into assemblages. These assemblages grew from worrying over particular vignettes of empirical data. Like Masny (2013, p. 344), I selected 'vignettes' of writing encounters because they were intensive 'texts', read by myself as 'disruptive', and were essential for creating new connections of thinking. Why I selected the particular aspects of data to be illustrative vignettes from the multitude of data that had been created will be justified fully in the discussion that surrounds them in the following chapters. The rigorous exposition of the vignettes as 'texts' involved an overlaying (a sort of mapping together) with other literature. The idea behind this was to disturb a dominant structural charting of children as 'writers in the making'. My idea was to interrupt this pervasive discourse, articulated through language and relationships, by juxtaposing children's subjectivities as writers with adults' subjectivities as writers and to see what this new trajectory produced. For Masny (2013), this kind of analysis, the assembling of vignettes, is a process of interpretation; furthermore, it asks, what does something mean?

This use of vignettes, as short impressionistic scenes focusing on one specific moment, has been intended to provide the reader with a brief and vivid description of writing encounters. By being presented within a discursive assemblage alongside other vignettes, an explanation of the energies and networks being formed by children as they write could be expressed. This process of assemblage, the bringing together of research elements, recognised each movement of rhizoanalysis that I had been engaged in: reflexive writing, re-interpreting, mapping and theorising. Issues emerged from this, questions were raised, and assumptions were challenged, but the children's actions as writers remained intact and whole within the vignettes, and their meanings became more crystalline in being assembled together into an analytical discussion.

Reconstituting material data: Writing the assemblages

The assemblages produced have been made up of multimodal data, namely photographs, artefacts and narrative observations, and are presented here not as single parts or

fragments but as an amalgam. This is communicated through one single mode of expression: writing. The assemblages are essentially discursive examinations of how I as a researcher have 'moved' alongside the data, and how the research materials (data and tools) have been understood as intra-active and changing. The process of writing has been used to express this whole movement, enabling a full exploration of the co-production that was taken *with* materials and others. This is not to privilege textual data over visual data, or to reduce the meanings that visual data may offer as different ways of young children 'saying about' or 'becoming-with' writing. This has been considered thoroughly through the different aspects of analysis. However, to 'show' the visual materials or photographs of artefacts, even the analytical maps used to explore meanings, would not 'show' clearly how these meanings, as forces and intensities between people, sensations and language, had come together as a whole encounter. Instead, it would demonstrate solitary fixed aspects, providing a misleading narrative. For example, if the maps that I produced as a process of analysis were given to another to 'read' for meaning, it would be difficult to know how these meanings have been produced or what has been understood from this work. The importance of these materials needs to be understood through the process of production, and further information is therefore needed; writing has been selected as a way to provide this information to the reader.

Writing has been used here as a tool to 'slow down' and reveal layers of action which are sometimes left opaque within interpretative research methodology. I was cautious not to present my data and analysis as distant from myself, which Taguchi (2013, p. 708) describes as separating the book/thesis from the 'real world': the researching 'I' representing reality at arm's length. The process of re-representing through writing has made transparent my own metacognitive and intra-active engagement with the multimodal materials that formed the 'data' and 'analysis' in this study, demonstrating how I have brought these aspects together. Writing was a tool for constructing my own thinking, and a way in which to 'tell the story' of how the connections between events have been produced. This began within the field as 'close-up' reflective notes, as '*inscriptions*' (Clifford, 1990, p.51) of encounters, some of which were included as catalysts for other writings to follow and included within the assemblages. It was also an essential feature in how I transcribed the conversations with children, and these are also included. Writing has therefore been a productive process of reflection and communication, a way of 'speaking out' these ideas and exploring an understanding of data in a reconstituted form. This seemed particularly useful as a way in which to 'tune into' or 'hear' children, as writing, reflecting and re-writing as a process of repeated

engagement sought to unpick the processes of production, interpretation and reconstruction of data that are so significant in how children are listened to within research processes. Karen Barad, in her interview with Juelskjaer and Schwennesen (2012, p. 13), argues that the attention to the details of the text, the patterning within thinking that writing allows, is a reworking of *'spacetime-matterings'*, or a reflexive examination of particular encounters. The evidence presented here on which to base an understanding of children as writers is not essentially material in its form (it does not contain visual images for example), rather, my writing of the assemblages as the adult-researcher, provides the means for interrogating how this material evidence has come to be.

Conclusion – Constructing ideas that both connect and disrupt ways of thinking

'Does a pictorial work come into being in one stroke? No, it is constructed bit by bit like a house.' (Klee, 2013, iv)

Throughout the stages of analysis, I had concerns about how my analytic and theoretical house-building was progressing, particularly in response to the tensions that exist in developing rhizomatic thinking within the confines of a thesis structure and how this is eventually 'read' by others in relation to the signifying particularities of a PhD thesis. I was conscious of the critique that can form using techniques that are recognisably unstructured, 'messy' and problematic, and corresponding with Cumming's (2014) thoughts about her doctoral research, I would describe my engagement with rhizoanalysis as 'unsettling'. These feelings arose due to being engaged in a process that is accordingly open-ended and constantly changing, and one which asks the researcher to continually question their assumptions and ontological position.

However, the analytical approach that surfaced provided a creative and flexible route, one that enabled the participation of children and recognised not only spoken and written language but also the connections that exist between and within emotions, bodily expressions and relationships, all elements of language learning. Frustratingly, data as text and visual stills is not able to represent the multiple layers of sensation, gestures and action that are part of the children's writing encounters that I was part of, and so it must be recognised that the data is only a partial glimpse of the whole living event, one that has now passed. In this respect, exploring the relational processes between fragments of data is vitally important; otherwise, the analysis may become reductive, and the energy

within children's writing as productive activity (which some data collection methods may not capture) may shrink and become meaningless.

My intention in selecting this analytical approach, adopting and adapting the concept of the rhizome, is a way of heeding to Ingold's assertion that,

someone who knows well is able to tell ... to tell in short, is not to represent the world but to trace a path through it that others can follow. In a nutshell, it is through wayfaring, not transmission, that knowledge is carried on. (2011, p. 162)

The analysis and discussion presented next provide an insight into my own wayfaring, a process of wandering and wondering: an exploration of how we construct knowledge about young children as writers. It is within these analytical assemblages, presented in the next part of this thesis, that it is possible to recognise that, *'Despite powerful discourses that seek to contain childhood, children somehow manage to exceed sites of containment'* (Barron and Jones, 2014, p. 257).

In summary, this chapter demonstrates my intense experiences as a researcher moving through the data analysis process. It has linked conceptual theories discussed in previous chapters to strategies for how data created from within children's writing activity can be examined. I have created procedures that scrutinise, allowing the research questions posed at the beginning of this study to be examined rigorously. The following four chapters of analysis and discussion are written assemblages, created as an accumulation of thinking that developed within all stages of the analytical approach. Each of the following chapters should be viewed as a written map, where the vignettes of data used to re-represent aspects of children's writing activity illustrate the movements between people and materials as a series of relational encounters. It is within these movements where answers to the research questions begin to emerge.

CHAPTER FOUR: Assemblage one – Exploring ethical movements in research relationships with children

Introduction

This chapter shows the complexities of research with children as participants in the classroom context. It highlights the significant methodological issues that I found in working with children to construct data within this study. These findings and the discussion that has been assembled point to the need for a more nuanced and honest approach to working with children as research participants. It uncovers the spaces *between* children and adults that need to be established to explore multiple meanings within research activity. I have documented here the need to recognise research with children as a ‘doing’ activity, where qualities of immanence and movement can be found. Although this chapter does not directly discuss children’s writing activity, it has been important to demonstrate as a starting point the connection that exists between the research relationships that are formed in the field and the knowledge about children’s writing that is able to be constructed within these relationships. This chapter lays bare the intricate understandings I have formed of my own role and that of the research relationships: the ethical positioning and response I have had when researching with children in a particular social, cultural and material space. It considers how children’s writing activity in research encounters with adults is framed within the associations that are made with the adult-researcher.

The assemblage begins by unwrapping the sensations of discomfort I felt, evidenced in my notebook, as an ethnographic adult-researcher in the school classroom. This is discussed first as it demonstrates my adjusting interpretation of data from my initial field notes to a process of analysis. The ideas are elaborated on and illustrated by vignettes of data, which encompass transcriptions of research conversations and reflective field notes from a single day, where as a researcher, I encountered Gold as a research participant. Through formalised recorded conversations about her writing, and in other more revealing ways, my own positioning and construction of the child as a research participant were made strange and difficult. This data was then subsequently analysed and presented here as an assemblage, or arrangement of thoughts. This

assemblage raises key issues around participatory research with children: the researcher role, the methodological tools, and the child's co-creative actions during fieldwork.

Grappling with ethnographic positioning in the field of research

Being an adult-researcher in a classroom with young children

During the year I spent in the classroom, I found that researching children's writing activity within the busyness of the school classroom could be challenging, as this vignette from my reflective field notes reveals:

Capturing data is so frustrating because of the realisation that in the midst of doing it, you can't capture things that are often so fleeting due to the pace in which actions and events are happening. I have a need to pin down something which is constantly moving and changing. The context of a Reception class where children are engaged in child-initiated play means that children are often moving into and out of vision, moving off and coming back. Children are also needing care and attention for things that are important to them; this means that as part of being an adult in this context, I am in demand for other things, sorting disputes, worries, children not wanting to go to out to play etc. The research events are often disrupted, starting and stopping, and my attention is pulled into different directions. It's like being a 'researcher interrupted!'

(Field notes 13/02)

The vitality of the classroom was an element that, as a former teacher, I perhaps should have expected, but in the role of a researcher, I found it frustrating that my focus on the children's writing activity was disrupted by the essential moving nature of the activity itself. However, this sense of interruption, discontinuity and lack of focus led to some interesting findings about the nature of data and the researcher role, which I will elaborate on further.

In re-encountering this vignette of data after it occurred, I became sensitive to the essential changeability within the role that I was fulfilling as I reacted to the children's needs. This is also evident in another vignette, a list I created in response to how I thought the children were making sense of my role. Within this writing it is possible to appreciate the slight exasperation that I was feeling at the time:

The unusual adult

The adaptable adult

The responsive adult

The playful adult

The authoritative adult

The quiet adult

The chatty adult

The observer

The praiser

The questioner

The joker

The teacher

The helper

The food peeler

The dresser

The pair of hands

I am a changeable, unsettled adult. My adult role is not able to be determined. I am responsive, but also thinking beyond the more determined roles – both as lesser and more than.

(Field notes 28/1)

An interpretation of my field notes may indicate that the role I was taking on as an adult-researcher was 'ambiguous' for the children, as who I was appears uncertain and lacks clarity (Christensen, 2004). However, my analysis of this excerpt is that my role was not confusing for the children at all. I clearly occupied the role(s) assigned to an 'adult' for them, and as part of that role, I had experience and power that they could draw on. Additionally, due to my professional heritage and intuitive response to events, I was an adult who was adaptable to their needs.

It was not the children's ambiguity that I was alluding to when I wrote these notes, but my own. It was the children's actions that defined me as a 'useful adult' that led to my researcher confusion and frustration. Their construction of my role countered my own perception of who I was in the field. Even though the adult role being assigned to me by the children was multiple in nature, hence the exhaustive list, they were all 'adult' roles. I was being fixed to the contextual understanding of generational relationships that existed in the classroom (Alanen, 2001). At the same time, the adult role that I held of myself, one of researcher, became unsettled and unknown. For a year, I had planned to carry out research, construct important data in the field, and explore conceptual ideas. I had not considered my role to be one dominated by helping children to put their coats on or peel a banana. Neither had I expected to fail in attempting to record events due to the unpredictable needs of the children in the classroom. I felt particularly uncomfortable in how my desires as a researcher contrasted and to some extent were at odds with the reality of the children's natural environment.

Reflexive writing to understand researcher positioning

Within these reflexive field notes, I was attempting to work through these issues that were essential aspects of the ethicality and participatory approach within my research. By engaging with this disconnection between my ideas of myself and the reality of my experience as a researcher, I was putting my conceptual understanding not to one side but actually supporting its development. Etherington (2004, p. 36) argues that reflexivity requires a self-awareness that creates a dynamic process of interaction with and between ourselves, our participants, and the data that is being constructed. By articulating these concerns within my writing, I was confronting a way of viewing both myself and the field of study, and this supported further understanding and decision-making in two ways.

First, I recognised that the movement of data within events, i.e. the continual shifting of people, things and events (described in the first field note extract above), was highly significant in understanding how activity in the classroom was occurring. I began to understand the details of this as a *becoming* process, an interpretation that will be considered in relation to different encounters within the analytical arguments to follow. Rather than being frustrated by this alterity, I realised that its disruption to methodology was highly significant. I adjusted to this movement of the children and my research role(s), and embraced this fluidity rather than trying to pin it down for examination. I became

more receptive to the dynamism in the classroom as a way of understanding how writing was being formed in different spaces, but also as a way of recognising the transitional nature of research activity itself.

Second, I established that the tension that had come from being assigned adult roles by the children had emerged as a result of my attempt to become *part of* the field, in line with my ethnographic principles. This was evident not only in how the children assigned adult roles to me, but also in how I myself, as a former teacher, was attempting to 'fit in', keen not to disrupt the normal ways of working within the class. This is demonstrated further in this field note:

My role is as a 'reluctant teacher'. This is challenging as I am torn between emulating the teacher as this feels like the right thing to do, or to do nothing and observe. Doing nothing in interactions with children is not helpful for them or the teacher. I always feel uncomfortable ignoring things that are around me, their teaching and learning needs; I do not want to disrupt the normal events by pretending that I can't help. I feel that I have to be sensitive to how the teachers interact, to fit in, but also want to support learning if children are making it clear that they want me to do this. But then am I affecting what is able to be seen?

(Field notes 17/12)

This is the ethnographic dilemma. How is it possible to not affect the context of research as a participant within it, and to what extent, how and where should participation be offered? I was entangled within the data, in terms of the practicalities of its construction and its meaning. I needed to unpick these tangled knots. I also began to fully recognise the implications of the ethical approach towards the children as participants that I had adopted as part of my methodology, one which recognised the need to be 'caring' towards them (Noddings, 2012). It made sense that my actions as a researcher were predicated by the immediate needs of the children, and what was important to explore was how this was impacting on how the data was able to be formed.

Both my own research design and the classroom context were moulding the data construction. As a socially, culturally and materially constructed space, the classroom was woven through with particular values and expectations of children and adults. In line with Smagorinsky's (2011) explanation of social contexts, my role within the classroom was being defined within this structure, through the intersectional and relational practices. Within the classroom 'space', social and cultural structures defined the construction of a

competent adult/incompetent child binary. Therefore, the relationships that were being formed between myself as an adult-researcher and the children as participants leaned towards this dualism, where the children expected adult care. However, these relational practices, although the social and cultural norm and correspond to the construct of children in school as *future becomings*, once recognised were able to be challenged and disrupted.

These field notes point to a reflexivity within my writing, a process of self-awareness leading to transparency (Etherington, 2004, p. 37), which was seeking to understand how 'I' as a researcher was being challenged in this dynamic field of study. I found this deeply uncomfortable, as the aim of my research writing was to recognise reflexive processes with children and not to create a narrative autobiography to fix events to. 'Myself' as a researcher had come to the fore here, but I did not intend this to lead to the foregrounding of self. The changing and unpredictable field of study and my researcher role as part of it were intertwined. I recognised this in terms of a meshwork (Ingold, 2011), as it was in the linkages between the field of study, the classroom, and myself as the researcher where I was able to find meaning.

The reflexive process of writing and reflecting was important in recognising not only the expectations of socially structured roles, but also where there were possible spaces for blurring the boundaries between adults and children. I concur with Etherington (2004, p. 36) who argues in her work that reflexivity supports researchers to become more conscious of participants and their own cultural constructs. Although the children were assigning roles to me, there was a circulating energy between us about what these roles meant. So, the dynamic, the charge of research, was coming from *between* the children and myself.

The participatory 'dance' between adult-researcher and child participant

At times, the children I worked with jumped at the chance, often quite literally, when offered a moment in time with me, an adult, who was solely focused on what they were saying and doing, and who visibly demonstrated to them that their thoughts were valid by capturing them as data. But sometimes the children rejected and shrugged off my adult interest in what they were doing, and found ways to communicate disinterest by turning away and avoiding having to answer questions by shrugging or mumbling. However

sensitive the researcher might be, if the research activity disrupts children's all-consuming play and activity and does not offer anything more desirable, it is not surprising that it is rejected. There may be an assumption, which I myself made at times, that providing a space for children to express and explore their ideas with a researcher is in itself enough for children to want to participate in research activity. During my fieldwork, my experience demonstrated that there was a complex mix of desirability and power involved in how and when children chose to consent to research. I have likened this to dancing movements, in that there were spirited, expressive and reactive qualities within the children's involvement with me and the methods of research that I presented them. Just as a dance partner reflects and moves in response to the dance of another, I had to respond to the child's communicative actions.

These ideas are analysed further in this assemblage and demonstrate that what underpins the child's assent to participate is the changing positional relationship with the researcher. This is dependent on the social and cultural context, and the structures and frameworks in place within the field, as has been demonstrated in my research design and methodology. My interest in the classroom was in developing research relationships with the young children I was working with, not in terms of their rigidity but through co-constructed, ethical exchanges or encounters. The data in this assemblage demonstrates the complexities within this approach. It suggests that research opportunities with children develop within unique moments, often fleeting and transitional, where flows of power and responsiveness may not be planned for, but where attention to details and ethical questioning is much needed.

The 'doing' of participatory research

The movement in research relationships

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I focused on making sure that a transparent and honest relationship with the children as participants was formed. I told the children and parents regularly through letters home, and verbally as the fieldwork progressed, about my background, my research focus and aims, and what I was going to do with the data. Within these communications, I positioned myself as a professional researcher and provided information for informed consent. However, as the fieldwork progressed, I began to recognise that ethical considerations needed to be interrogated much further

than simply providing regular and clear information to participants and their families. What became clear was that the relational qualities between myself as the researcher and the children within the activities was a powerful force in the creation of data. As the research relationships between myself and the children were emerging through the first term of school, it was evident that these were informing how, why, when and in what way data was being constructed.

Although I was knowledgeable about avoiding participatory pitfalls, such as trying to play a 'least adult role' or assuming that by giving children methods of participation they were empowered to do so, I had not recognised the extent to which my own presence mattered. By problematising this, I moved from questioning *what* the child I was researching knew about me, to considering a deeper problem: *how* they knew me. These considerations allowed me to explore the further ontological question: *how was I forming knowledge of the child as a writer?* My questioning focused on the processes or the 'workings' in which knowledge was being constructed and shared. The 'how' questions enabled me to explore the nuances, complexities, ebbs and flows within this process. They allowed me to recognise that although the researcher/research participant may be positioned in terms of structural binaries (adult/child, responsible/immature, knowing/unknowing), these relationships were essentially fluid, constantly informed by shifting perspectives, physical repositioning and changing modes of communication.

There were significant challenges in applying a rigid framework for participatory enquiry that was effective in providing ethical and responsive care and attention towards participants. Research relationships changed suddenly, appearing like a tug of war, formed between and around people and material objects, such as physical seating and school spaces. When this occurred, research activity could be remarkably unsettling for both the researcher and the participant, and often resulted in counterintuitive encounters. Within these encounters, there were layers of meaning to be uncovered but which were difficult to extrapolate from the relational network in which it existed.

The encounter below began as a research conversation with Gold about her learning log. It is based on an analysis of the reflective notes that were made after the conversation and during the day. Other data is related to this and interlinked within the discussion: a transcript of the conversation about the learning log and writing, and the photographs that Gold had taken of what was important to her as a writer. Lines have been formed through map-making between these different aspects of data so that a rich picture emerges where relational forces can be shown between what Gold communicates

about writing and how this is created through her responses towards myself as the researcher and the material environment. Asking how Gold *knows me* in this situation, in other words, what ways she is making sense of our relationship through layers of action, provides a means of exploring how the data, based on what Gold has said, done, and photographed, was being formed within the field. In my discussion below, I have traced these lines that were crisscrossing each other and included another narrative, my own, which interlinks with Gold's actions and words. This analysis has enabled a detailed understanding of the intricate movements that were occurring within the research.

Children participating in research with technological tools

Gold initiated this encounter by approaching me and asking me if I would play with her. I took the opportunity to ask her if she wanted to talk to me about her learning log, which was the school book where her official teacher-planned learning, including some of her writing, was evidenced. Through her first movements towards me, her gesture, gaze and speech, she demonstrated her consent to participate in the activity. During the initial research conversation, Gold demonstrated control and joint decision-making in how she chose to proceed. I wrote the following in my field notes:

She was enthusiastic about going outside to talk, immediately moving in the direction of the door, telling her friends what she was doing and keeping her gaze on me; perhaps she saw it as a special thing to do. She chose where to sit on the sofa in the corridor and was keen to interact with me, responding and listening, and was particularly interested in 'playing' with the technology that I was using. Gold was very interested in the iPad, wanting to touch and be active in the process of capturing the data. She was really assertive today, and clearly wants to own what's going on...She was interested in not only being with me, but the process of research itself, playing with the technology and hearing the recording.

(Field notes 21/1 a)

Within the audio transcription comments, I noted that the conversation between us about writing,

became stilted at times, and that Gold was more interested in the 'doing' of the research, being with me and playing with my iPad in the research space, rather than in the subject being discussed.

(Field notes alongside research conversation transcript 21/1 b)

This embodied 'doing' was important as her interaction with technology shows. It appears that the research tools were a motivating factor for Gold within the research activity; the 'hands-on' physical process of holding, touching and controlling was important to her. Recent research by Flewitt et al. (2014) has shown that touch-responsive technologies are particularly conducive in stimulating concentration and engagement with young children, and that practitioners who observed children using iPads noted children's sense of wonder and motivation to use them. Whether the use of an iPad for data collection empowered Gold as an active participant is unclear, but the sensory experience of using the technology was a desirable activity for her. The process of doing something active with technology within the data capture process was a means for her not only to explore the potential of the tools, but through her interactions with me, to explore how she could take control of them. Gold's interest in technological tools extended to her use of the digital camera:

The camera gave her pleasure – she took photos and then laughed showing them to me. The photographs are all of her friends smiling – she enjoyed the fact that she had captured them in some way – a real pleasure clearly in the activity.

(Field notes 26/11)

On the audio recording of Gold talking about the pictures that she could see on the digital camera screen, she named all of her classmates and described what they were doing, quickly moving through the photographs before I could ask her any further questions. Her voice was animated and punctuated regularly by the rapid beeps of the camera. Although I had deliberately asked her to 'take some photos about writing in the class', there was little reference to writing as an activity in our conversation about the images she had collected. Instead, Gold pointed, talked and laughed at the photos, telling me where her friends were and what they were playing with. Gold wanted to see the other photographs that had been captured by the other children and talk about those too. The subject of writing was lost, but as a research participant, she was organising and checking the data, and directing attention to what she felt was important. The ability to do this, and explain her ideas, was essentially rooted within a physical, sensory relationship with the digital camera, and led me to consider whether it was the affordance that the technology presented to her, to control and manage the production of data, that was essentially encouraging her participation.

Renold and Mellor (2013, p. 27) point out that in their multisensory ethnographic exploration of nursery children, children themselves participated in their own material production as 'doing bodies' through material and affective practices of touch, embodied in body/place/object assemblages. The multimodal means of communication that Gold had used to see and to record was a multisensory experience, inextricably linked to her bodily desire to touch and connect with others. Gold can be viewed as a participant, not because she has been given the power to represent the world through the technology she was using, as this would assume that power is contained either within technology or can be distributed more fairly through being deposited in the hands of participants; rather, Gold had become a research participant because she was able to 'do' participation, able to be creative, explore sensorial and verbal possibilities, and most importantly this productive activity, although not planned, had been given the space and time within the research activity for it to occur.

Discursive material research spaces between children and adults

During the research conversation, Gold and I looked at her 'learning log' book. She turned the pages, briefly describing her drawings, for example telling me '*that's traction man*'. She read out a list of numbers that she had written, telling me she needed to practise them, and read out her own name repeating it again and again, until we were both saying it together, as a game. She also sounded out the letters she wrote when she was in her phonics group doing a '*Letters and Sounds*' session. Gold began to move around on the chairs outside of the classroom as our conversation continued:

Kate: It's more comfy like that isn't it? And that says what your next step is (pointing to the page)

Gold: And what does that say? (indicating the teacher's comments on her work)

Kate: Continue with sound mats, but now I am thinking what's a sound mat? How does it help you?

Gold: It helps you write letters and sounds

Kate: So does it tell you what to write or do you have to do something?

Gold: You do something

Kate: OK, do you think sound mats are helpful?

Gold: Is it still going? (she is referring to the audio recording and has leaned over to look)

Kate: Turn over, there's a blank page, there's a blank page. Do you think we have finished on this then?

Gold: No, I've got more and more...that's just stuck in... that just there

(Transcription of Research Conversation 21/1 c)

This extract of Gold's voice may not necessarily reveal much about her experiences of writing; in fact, her verbal responses in explaining her use of sound mats are partial, but she was clearly engaged in the activity of questioning both the adult responses to her writing and checking that the device recording her was still active. She necessitated the continuation of the conversation, although eventually she became distracted from talking about her writing and instead the conversation moved towards shopping, packed lunch boxes and the displays in the corridor.

The activity of the research, the instruments and the learning log, as material objects, appeared to be the most important aspects of Gold's participation; her use of language within the activity to explain her writing activity was limited in comparison. Gold's bodily movements were integral to her language responses and to focus purely on what her verbal utterances meant or represented was not enough to show how she was physically interacting within the research space. A sole focus on the language that Gold was using within this written transcript of data, rather than these other elements, might imply that she could not elaborate her ideas, but this was clearly not the case. Alternatively, I have considered the language that Gold is using as an *embodied way of thinking about the world*, not separate from her bodily movements with materials but integral to it. This analysis has alerted me to the fact that the knowledge that Gold is forming of school is not bounded within traditional language practices, but formed through relationships, tools and physical spaces. It also supports MaLure's (2013a) critique of the privileging of language within research methodology, which can limit what is seen and heard from research participants when it is their material and embodied existence that needs to be attended to as well.

It is also important to recognise the importance of 'discourse' here. Discourse offers us not a way of seeing language, but a way of seeing how language is *operational within the context of social relationships and materials*. It is not what is said but that

which enables or constrains what is said (Barad, 2007, p. 146). The research tools and materials offered Gold a possible way in which she could express her interest in the research; they enabled what could be said about her participation in the research. These material elements of the encounter created '*boundary making practices*' (Barad, 2007, p. 148) framing the discourse of research activity. These material elements should not be discounted in how we are able to listen to children, as they are essential to the creation of a research discourse. The communicative technologies within this encounter were important, not only in sustaining Gold's interest in recording data but also as they provided a means for her own material production of it. The materiality of the research encounter must therefore be recognised by researchers as a framework for what is able to be said and done by participants.

Research participation as *difference*

The child participant as *other*

Gold agreed for me to write down her words and record them so that I could read them again and others could listen to them later. However, her sustained interest in working with me as a researcher, which is evidenced by her desire to prolong our time together, as discussed below, was not aligned with my own research intentions. Gold's consenting to the task was wrapped up with her interaction and use of the research tools. She wanted to be involved, not so that her ideas could be noted and shared with other adults but so that she could enjoy using tools for communication as shown above. So, although we worked together and our desires connected through action, we did not share the *same* desires: our reasons for being involved were *different*.

Recognising this difference is ethically important. Being concerned with how and why children consent to research activity means an honest examination of the differences that exist as a fundamental aspect of researching children's participation. My relationship with Gold supported my understanding of participatory methods. This participation was not a process of merging our ideas into one; rather, it was an acceptance of difference and a respect of that difference, through proper acknowledgement of the actions and communications of children as separate. There was no totality and unity in the knowledge that was created within this encounter (Stagoll, 2010b), and no degrees of difference between us that could be reduced; rather, the difference that I was able to recognise was grounded within our actions and implicit within our relationships. This was '*difference-in-*

itself' (Deleuze, 2004a, p. 36). Although we were bound within the same time and material space, Gold and I had no symmetry between us. Our intentions in being engaged in research activity were converse. Gold's focus on the technological possibilities of the iPad and the digital camera was a distraction from my research aim, which was the potential exploration of her as a writer. The primacy of the research experience demonstrated that, even within such close proximity to each other, there was no resemblance in our intentions and actions; instead, our singularity remained.

The ethics of respecting this difference, a consideration that Gold's intentions were a product of her own unique desires and may contradict my own worldview, mean that I can confirm and create a space for alterity, or *otherness*. Rather than seeking to *know the other*, which would mean that I would make the *other* an object of myself (Levinas, 1991), I have instead regarded truths related to the other as *unknowable*, and alternatively considered my own responsibilities within face-to-face encounters. This is a '*respect for the other's heterogeneity, a shift from grasping the other to respecting the other*' (Dahlberg et al., 2003, p. 39). Essentially, the 'ethics of an encounter', how we avoid appropriation of the child by retaining and confirming difference, mean that we must trouble over the way in which we view the child within research as a person who should be cared for and respected. This means taking time to value what is happening in the moments of research, attending to detail, and allowing for sensitive, intuitive listening and response.

Ethics of care and affect

The research conversation between Gold and I opened up possible ways of being together, a way of sharing ideas, but when the conversation was finished and we moved back into the classroom, our relational positioning shifted onto more unsteady ground and brought to the fore my own concerns about protecting our research relationship and my ethical responses. I noted the following:

After the activity was finished and I was writing up my reflections, Gold wanted me to continue playing and was very persistent. I told her I wanted to do my writing now and she said 'no'. Every time I told her what I wanted to do, she said 'no, you can't'. She became very forceful, trying to grab me, and push me. She was smiling and it was fun for a while, but to stop the physical assault I was forced to be curt with her and assert myself, but she was persistent. I moved away from her to sit somewhere else and she followed me, ended

up lying across my lap to stop me moving.

(Field notes 21/1 d)

Although I had often seen Gold play with her classmates like this, a sort of rough-and-tumble interaction with an element of physical force exerted over another, I found her physical attention towards me uncomfortable. As an adult in a classroom, this would be seen by other adults to be inappropriate professional interaction with a child, and intuitively I felt that this physically controlling, whole-body movement by Gold in order to contain me, alongside clear verbal instructions to prevent me from doing what I needed to do, was wrong. I was not used to being handled in this way, and as I was bigger and more powerful, I was not able to physically respond to her as her friends would; we were not equal in this way.

There were other feelings, apart from professional concerns that were emerging about my research relationship with Gold. My reflection continued:

When she was trying to get my attention, I turned away from her – I feel like a bad friend, only wanting to play the role of collaborator when I want it, not when she wants it; this seems very unfair, but I have a very different role in all this – my motivation is different. I feel that I need to tell her to stop being silly and to not do this, but I know that I encouraged this semi-playful behaviour by laughing with her and encouraging her to choose where we sat, how long we talked etc. during the research conversation earlier on.

(Field notes 21/1 e)

Noting this down spurred deeper critical and reflective thoughts:

Am I somehow being manipulative? Am I playing an emotional game to win affection when it suits and reject her when not? This calls into question my responsibility, my ethics, and my position of power. Am I asking Gold for collaboration only when I say, about what I want? I feel very uncomfortable and tense because I think I am going to have to play the role of the teacher with her and create a necessary and professional distance between us again. Is this 'to-ing and fro-ing' in our relationship helpful for Gold? It certainly doesn't feel great for me...

(Field notes 21/1 f)

And later:

After play she ran in and jumped on me, hugging me. Her friend tried to copy. It looks like I

need to change my 'role' in relation to the children for a functioning relationship.

(Field notes 21/1 g)

The research relationship between Gold and I was a changeable element, and this affected the data that I was collecting. My behaviour towards Gold had been interpreted by her as a gesture of friendship. In the position of a powerful adult, my concern was whether I had inadvertently developed a pseudo-friendship with her, a pretence of equality in status and sameness of intentions. I was concerned that this was detrimental to a research relationship that was based on respect and care towards children. My adult responses were driven by guidance on the duty of care enshrined within the university research framework, and the school policies to protect children and keep them safe; however, this physical interaction was far more complex, and the issues arising from it could not be solved by following rules alone. I needed to look beyond these structures and consider the *ethics of value*. As Nutbrown (2011, p. 11) argues, in our gathering, analysing and reporting of data, we should be asking a fundamental question: '*Are we caring for our participants?*'. To do this, I needed to be aware of 'myself', my values, and be '*on duty*' as a self-reflexive researcher, confronting the problems surrounding my adult responsibilities towards Gold as a research participant.

This attention to Gold's actions towards me and my responses continued within my field notes:

*Later when I was talking to Blue in the corridor, Gold appeared and wanted me to come in and tidy up with her. She 'fell' on me deliberately and then pulled me. I said 'no *** (Gold), I am busy'. I held her hand and took her into the room; she pulled but I told her that she was not to come back out.*

(Field notes 21/1 h)

Here, I was purposefully positioning myself as an authoritative adult in response to Gold's actions, a role more akin to the other adults within the room but one I was familiar with as a parent and teacher. This was based on an intuitive reaction, or biographical and personal feelings and heightened sensations towards the situation, combined with a conscious recognition of my responsibilities towards her wellbeing and safety. This analysis concurs with arguments presented by Claxton (2006) about the importance of intuition in locating whether things feel 'right' or not. This alignment of intuitive sensitivity derived from heightened attentiveness and notions of caring demonstrates the importance of unpicking the personal 'location' of the researcher as

they make ethical decisions within the research process. Noddings (1984) uses the term '*engrossment*' to describe the thinking needed about someone else (in this case the research participant) to gain a deeper understanding of their situation and so determine what the appropriate action towards them should be. It is a course of action to ensure that the researcher is hearing or attending to what the participant needs. There is an assumption in Noddings' argument that the researcher as the 'carer' has responsibility to give to the participant as a 'taker'. I would argue that care within research relationships could in fact be reciprocal between the participants and the researcher, a movement between each other. This also allows the relative expertise of the carer or the researcher to be questioned within research relationships.

In this particular encounter involving Gold and myself, a further understanding of ethical research with children can be provided if we give critical attention to personal feelings and responses. It is important to consider the affective nature or the unconscious sensations which flow between adults and children within these research encounters. Intuition, defined as a sudden perception of the world which gives rise to our unique ability to make creative connections (Janesick, 2001) occurring in the moment of action, is useful in making sense of these sensorial elements that have influenced how research data is constructed. In her actions, Gold expressed herself not through language but through her physical responses, her intensity towards technological objects and to me, and my gestures were formed in relation to this. Shouse writes that affect provides the '*background intensity*' of our everyday lives, our interactions and relationships with each other: '*affect is what makes feelings feel. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality)*' (2005, online). The anxieties that I felt about my research relationship with Gold were checked against previous feeling and certainties around behavioural norms, situated within a pre-conscious moment of affect, an embodied reaction to events that provided a sense of urgency or necessity to respond. Affect here plays a role in establishing the relationship between our physical gestures, our environment (including the objects within it), and others. We can see from this encounter that the unstructured physical movements and transmission of ideas between myself as the researcher and Gold as the research participant are not contained within us, each as individuals, but created both unconsciously and consciously between us.

Participatory research – essentially nomadic?

My research encounter with Gold did not follow a predesigned pathway etched out on a 'road-tested' map, where the route followed my research intentions. Rather, it took the form of a movement or trek, where we travelled from one point to another, exploring feelings as a result of the transmission of affective qualities contained within the encounter and shifting towards a sense of meaning-making. As I altered my responses to Gold, she changed in her response to me, and through this process, new spaces opened up that were unpredictable but contained possible meaning-making opportunities. This movement can be described as *nomadic*, indicating a free distribution rather than structured organisation of events (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 419). Nomadic judgements are *immanent* in that they are contained within the actions, and as a response to these actions, they are also contained within the event or research space itself (Deleuze, 2004a, p. 37).

Nomadic research is a process where the production of research does not solely rely on external organisation and structures for decision-making. This is not to dismiss ethical frameworks and school policies, as these are existent structures within the *context* of research and are therefore embedded within the research activity, unable to be separated from but integral to how research practices operate. However, even by setting out to follow fixed procedures, the unwritten and as yet unformed research activities will come into existence within the moments in which they are created, and are continually operational as a creative and continual entanglement of materials, places and people (Ingold, 2011). Careful attention to the participants' and researcher's social, emotional and affective actions are needed as a way of working towards ethical responses and decision-making. Nomadic research recognises that the boundaries between adults and children within the research are porous and movable, contingent to events, and that power is distributed and changeable within unfolding relationships. This is what can be traced within the vignettes of data presented above.

If ethics is considered as a formulaic process, it will not be able to determine the movement within research relationships. These movements have import as they produce the research space that gives research encounters their particular quality. Considering research space as *nomadic space* rejects research spaces that are marked out with particular intentions or research as *striated space*. Colebrook (2010, p. 187) describes the difference between nomadic and striated space using the analogy of chess pieces on a board. Like a chessboard, striated research space is pre-arranged into systematic areas,

limited by the edges, and the pieces existent within the space that have prescribed moves assigned to them. The positions of the players and the lines between them are created through these approved movements. However, this approach may either intentionally or unintentionally close down and restrict the movement of participants. My interactions with Gold within this encounter existed with an awareness of accepted and expected working practices; however, the movements went beyond this. There was no prepared script for me to follow in response to the corporeal aspects of Gold's communication with me that would have been in tune ethically with her as a separate entity. The 'participatory dance' between us was messy, unchartered and unstable; sometimes unhappy, sometimes warm; always affecting of each other.

Conclusion – Recognising the writing child

Acknowledging the *nomadic movement* and *difference* that exists between myself as an adult-researcher and Gold as a child participant has been important in being able to answer complex research questions about young children's writing activity in school. As a researcher, I am concerned with the processes of knowledge construction and the validity of my methodology. To provide clarity in how I have made sense of children as writers, it has been important to trouble over actualities of the research encounter itself: the contextual, generational and material structures that constrain children's activities, and how these sociocultural and material elements may create new possibilities for data to emerge. Recognising that children's experience is different from adults, and different to each other, means that the writing activities that children are engaged in, as I have demonstrated in these research encounters, form a unique encounter of *difference*. Diverse meanings flourish within these encounters and should be explored through analysis and discussion. Considering the questions I posed as I brought this assemblage together – *how did the child know me, and how was I forming knowledge of the child?* – has helped me to understand how it is the *between spaces*, the connections and disconnections that exist in this '*inbetweenness*', that illuminate the constructive processes of data creation, analysis and conceptualisation. What I have assembled here indicates that it is these spaces, which both the researcher and children as 'research nomads' roam, that need attention if I am to develop new knowledge about children as writers.

Alongside this, recognising the complexities of affect, researcher intuition and *ethical difference* as emerging aspects of research relationships has allowed me to tune into Gold's ideas about writing and her actions as a writer more sensitively. The ethnographic process of writing reflective field notes has helped me to articulate certain features of this story and ask further questions in relation to my positionality, responsibilities and responses. By exploring these elements of the researcher role and the relationships that are *becoming* in research activity, rather than ignoring them as inconsequential or negligible elements within the construction of data, it has been possible to trace how I have been able *to hear* the *difference*, not the expected, of Gold as a research participant. Appreciating her differences to me, as a participant, has allowed me to recognise that all her actions, not just the ones that I think I require, are significant in understanding both children's participation in research and how they are able to construct ways of expressing themselves as a writer to others. For Gold, the spoken word was not as powerful as technological tools and physical contact in helping her to express her desires, and this indicates that there is more to be explored about the materiality of language for young children and how it is expressed through the body. It has led me to identify further questions about the use of technological tools and material objects as a writer in the classroom, things that Gold clearly finds desirous and engaging.

To summarise, the analysis in this chapter has been presented as an assemblage of vignettes, discussion and conceptualisations that recognises the need for research that unravels the changing connections existent between data, the researcher and the participant, expressed through dialogue, materials and in different spaces. This is a necessary examination if the aim is to provide further ethicality and validity for the uses of research data within participatory research.

CHAPTER FIVE: Assemblage two – The pink notebook and the importance of material stuff

Introduction

This assemblage focuses on Green and the research conversations we had about his classroom learning log and his personal notebook during one day. The assemblage has been constructed through an analysis of selected vignettes: audio recordings and their textual transcription, photographs, and reflective field notes. During the time I spent with Green, and through my subsequent reading, revisiting and reimagining of the visual, aural and textual data, '*moments of wonder*' (Massumi, 2002; MacLure, 2013b) emerged, the data appearing to have a significant and constitutive force upon me (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010). These significant novel moments, both effective and affecting, have been developed into an exploratory portrait of the relationship between the embodied and material aspects of Green's writing activity. The discussion that has emerged to create this assemblage – a bringing together of vignettes of data, my own exploratory writing and theory – has provided an insight into the materiality of writing activity. This assemblage points out the attention that is needed in determining the role that objects play in writing and drawing creation, and the strengths and limitations of theoretical perspectives in being able to explain this process.

The intra-activity of research data

By using an analysis that acknowledged my own position in association with the data, where data is recognised as having an effect on my thinking, I have been able to explore the concept of *intra-activity* where my potential responses to data as a material substance are recognised. The term '*intra-active*' has been used by Barad (2003, p. 822) to refer to the blurred boundaries between what can be described as human or living and non-human material. This idea has been discussed in my review of literature as an approach to the materiality of young children's writing. It is also a useful way of understanding how researchers engage materially with research data that is created by human activity and becomes an inextricable part of the researcher's interpretative analysis. The material data that I have analysed was constructed as Green and I worked

together, through speech, physical movement and touch; traces of this prior existence were still seen and felt in the objects of data that I subsequently handled and interacted with, through the different stages of analysis. My analytical thinking became entangled with the physical creation and later handling of these data objects, which were bound together with certain memories of their material production.

This assemblage therefore contains my own and Green's human-material intra-activity which started being analysed in the field and continued through the data handling in my home, and then has been explored further as I assembled this into writing. By fusing together both the material data and my continuous human responses to it, an assemblage, as a communicative expression, has been formed which details the writing and drawing encounters that Green and I had been engaged in. I have found that considering the data in this way, as a method of analysis through *intra-action* with the data, has encouraged a healthy, critical interrogation of the function in both the creation and the analysis of the data. This material engagement is often an overlooked process within research activity, but is integral to empirical research and data construction.

Green and what he was 'doing' at school

A pre-amble – creating questions about writing materials from other data

There is a contextual aspect to the encounters presented here that is connected to other classroom activities and prior encounters that I observed, where the social and emotional aspects of Green's writing activity in the classroom, and his relationships with people and objects, appeared significant to me. Reflecting on these observations raised questions that helped to form further critical enquiry into the nature of writing activity in relation to writing objects.

When the observation below occurred, there was a consensus between the adults in the room that Green was finding it difficult to settle in to school. Much of these problems centred on the physical space that surrounded him, including the social and material aspects of this. I observed him using his arms and legs to force other children out of his carpeted space (the carpet was divided into squares for the children to sit in, and most children over time had been assigned a space or had 'eked' one out for themselves). He also pushed against other children in the line for lunch and playtime if he wanted to

get ahead of them. He resisted sharing certain resources and objects that he was playing with, and argued for why it should remain his turn. He was often angry when the result meant he had to let go of something or give way to others. Green's behaviour was interpreted by the teachers as signifying his desire to control others and the environment. Although his behaviours were commonly observed in other children in the class, Green was becoming more, not less, resistant to the social rules of sharing with others, exhibiting growing anger and physical force in encounters with his peers. There was concern from the adults about his 'separateness' from the other children, and his domination of the communal resources and spaces around him. By the second term of school, the teacher had arranged a meeting with his parents to discuss his behaviour and find ways to support him to integrate into classroom life.

During this time, I also observed Green playing very successfully alongside the other children in role play scenarios, small world play and construction activities. In these imaginative games, he took on fantasy roles with serious endeavour, becoming totally engrossed and keen to carry on with the game against other disruptions, as this vignette of data indicates:

Green is dressed in a police outfit, butterfly wings and a pirate hat

Kate: Green, would you like to talk to me about your learning log?

Green: No, I am too busy shrinking things small

(He pulls a face like a grimace)

I ask again later and he states quite clearly and confidently that he doesn't want to talk to me about his learning log. I watch as he races across the classroom, exchanging hats and garments with others as the game progresses.

Later, Green asks me to help him with a costume change. I ask him how his play is going. Have you made a story yet (the teacher had asked them to do this and video it). No, I don't want to. I am Captain Hook. Green starts growling and striking his face. Watching him from a distance, I notice that he runs in one direction, around tables, and then back and forth, sometimes talking to himself and sometimes to other children. He directs me to help with his costume again and talks about which children are wearing what bits of outfit. He seems to be very serious about all aspects of the play and making sure that everyone is dressed properly.

(Field notes 23/1)

From my observation, I deduced that Green attached great importance to the management and use of material objects. He used these as a way of extending the narrative that he was part of, and expressed anxiety when the story was disrupted due to the problems he encountered in using the objects. For example, he was agitated when he was not able to get the spaceman helmet to close completely, or when the money and tickets had been removed from the theatre box office area, as this meant had to stop his game playing.

Towards the end of the first term, I observed Green and another child playing at being post office/delivery men in the maths area. Green had a clipboard with paper and pencil attached and he wrote down the deliveries, making marks to show that the things had been delivered. He negotiated the workload of the deliveries and collections with the other child, remaining in control of the clipboard throughout, and talking with me about what he was writing and drawing, marking the paper with squiggles and ticks, arranged in different places. When it was tidying up time, his play was interrupted by the speedy movements of other children, who squeezed past him while reaching over to put things back into trays and balance stuff on shelves. Green withstood the physical presence of the other children by tensing his body and using it to form a wall in front of the resources he was using. The teacher's voice indicated to the children a need to tidy up quickly and Green started to argue with his classmates, telling them not to touch anything. Eventually he relented but he took the clipboard and pushed it down the side of a nearby cupboard so that it became wedged between the cupboard and the wall and could not be seen by anyone else. In the following weeks, I observed Green going back to where the clipboard was, using it within his play either with others or alone, and then carefully sliding it back into its hiding space.

Emerging questions about writing objects

I began to identify connections with this and other data that indicated that Green afforded important meanings to material objects within particular play spaces, and that the relationships he had with other people in the class, both positive and negative, were often in response to the importance he assigned to particular things. Volosinov (1986) argued that the words to describe a 'social tool', or material objects, are significant to the particular context in which the tool is being used. For example, in a school classroom, a pencil carries historical, social and cultural meanings related to its usage within the

context of writing and drawing activity. If it had no social use or meanings attached to it, the pencil, just as a word, would have an empty existence. The pencil therefore mediates language, as it is used within a social situation to convey shared meanings with others, and through this usage, the 'theme' of the pencil appears. Socio-constructivists would argue that it is this *process of mediation* which is worthy of study. How does the pencil or other apparatus *become* the carrier of specific social and cultural meanings around school writing and drawing for children, and what does this mean for children's writing and drawing development? However, Green's encounters with tools and objects, which appeared to be uniquely created and often contrary to the shared social rules of using objects, provoked my questioning about the importance he gave to these objects in terms of their materiality, their preciousness, within their use in writing activities. These 'things' were viewed as ephemera in terms of classroom organisation, in that there were no 'sets' of them organised into trays of resources. For Green, they were found objects that were appropriated and transposed from one place to another to meet a particular desire, and they appeared to be unfixed to the expected social use.

These ephemeral objects could be understood, as Rogoff (1990) and Wertsch (1994) have argued, as being appropriated by the children to carry social and cultural meanings and used to transmit 'themes' to others. It appeared, however, that these adaptable objects of play and writing were doing something else that was particular to the individual circumstances within the space they were being used: they were transforming the children's actions, but not necessarily in a predictable manner. In concurrence with Pahl's (2002) research on children's literacy play in homes with ephemeral objects, Green's clipboard as a precious recording tool became meaningful through its different uses, transforming his thinking and actions. This corresponds with multimodal arguments that children's writing activity is dependent on the material resources. The tools that Green was using signified the potential they offered (Kress, 2010; Mavers, 2011). However, as Green was so keen to protect his clipboard from others, perhaps it had certain qualities that emerged not only from his usage of it but also in how it looked and felt and the fact that it was able to fit down the side of a cupboard. Considering sociocultural and multimodal theoretical perspectives led me to frame some important further questioning in my analysis. What was most interesting to me was that Green himself as the user of the clipboard had changed in his behaviour towards others and in his physical desire to protect it. So, how far were the objects that Green was engaged with (*mediational* tools in his writing activity) socially constructed through use and transformative of thinking and activity? Or alternatively, did these objects pertain to

something unique that existed outside of this social appropriation that enabled this transformative change?

My understanding of the extent to which writing objects that exist as part of the material world, external to the child's thinking, was being challenged. I began to problematise the 'separateness' of the child and the writing thing, and consider to what extent children were experiencing writing as a material activity. This moved my thinking beyond socio-constructivist theory, where the connection between children and their writing materials as social tools for learning are viewed as a purely cognitive interaction separating the internal mind from the external social world. I could understand how the children's activity with objects was a process of *intra-action* in which the material and human aspects of children's writing production merge. Here, the writing object is an extension of the human body. The child therefore thinks about the world as a writer externally together with writing objects, rather than internally as a purely cognitive process.

This assemblage continues as a critical exploration of these ideas by detailing a day in which Green and I encountered two very different writing objects: his pink notebook brought in from home and the school learning log. Within each object, writing, drawing and learning were recorded and afforded significance, but writing was created in each object through very different cultural, social, emotional, sensory and physical activity. The vignettes of data presented have been selected as they encapsulated '*moments of wonder*' in my analysis (MacLure, 2013b, p.228). They were a catalyst for me in thinking about how objects are shaped and are continually shaping children's writing experience. These vignettes of data channelled my focus on writing towards understanding it as an embodied activity which I will begin to argue is an integral aspect of children's material-communicative existence.

The pink notebook

At the beginning of the day, I was sitting at a table with a group of children and Green arrived at my side. We said '*hello*'. I was intrigued that he had sought to find me as he did not usually do this. He showed me a pink A4-sized notebook that opened out into a clipboard with illustrated lined paper and a pink pen. He said '*it's from my home*', and then asked me if I wanted to play noughts and crosses with him. He showed me the pages that recorded previous games of noughts and crosses, alongside some drawings and adult

writing. I asked him if we could look at it later as the teacher was shaking her tambourine, an indication that she wanted everyone to sit on the mat. Later I saw that Green was wandering about but not particularly engaged in any of the activities. I asked him if he would like to show me his notebook, and he ran to his tray to get it. We sat outside the classroom as it was a quieter space to talk and audio record the conversation. Green used the time that we were together to play with his notebook, drawing pictures and maps and talking quietly. He was engaged with this intra-activity through the entirety of our conversation, speaking very quietly, at times inaudibly. I made notes throughout this encounter which illustrate his immersion in the notebook activity:

Green was happy to be quiet and lost in his world of drawing. Overall, he didn't show any great interest in talking about his writing, but more about the imaginative ideas behind his map and the drawing related to the TV show. He wasn't that interested in talking about his writing, although questioned. He looked around a lot during discussions too. He took things out (the pens and paper) and put the things back, and talked about where they should go. He was very particular about ordering these items. Telling me how he has used them and how he needs to look after them. The objects are important to him, the organisation and care of them, they clearly have meaning for him.

(Field notes from research conversation 4/2 a)

An encounter with writing, drawing and mapping – language and meaning-making in situ

During our research conversation, it was evident that Green wanted to 'do' the drawing, mapping and writing, rather than to talk about it. Speech punctuated this writing and drawing activity, but was generally a supplement to the writing, a way of exploring the story that surrounded his 'doing' of it. The words he used described the actualities of his immediate writing engagement rather than providing a structured commentary of how he went about it, which I was prompting him for, as this vignette from the conversation transcript illustrates:

Kate: you're good at drawing. I like that (pointing)... Very good...what else do you use your books for apart from writing your name?

Green: (inaudible)...maps

Kate: have you made any maps?

Green: and I've made a destiny one to go on a forever quest

Kate: well, so what's this here?

Green: I done that today

Kate: this morning?

Green: (nodding)

Kate: your name as well?

Green (is quiet – continues drawing and writing)

(Audio transcription from research conversation 4/2 b)

Green's expressions within his writing became more intense through the events he was portraying, and I began to see parallels between his commitment to drawing and writing as a process of imaginative exploration and the intensity that I had observed in him within his fantasy play at earlier stages in my fieldwork. Rather than asking him about his strategy for writing, drawing and map-making, I began to tune into what I felt was the most important element leading this writing: his imaginative storytelling.

Kate: is this about mount destiny?

Green: yes, this is a...this is a... I'm drawing a Jake map to mount destiny, so Jake can be the guardian of Neverland and save Neverland from fading away

Kate: mmm, is that like a story you know already?

Green: no, it's on tele

Kate: oh I see. What's it called?

Green: Jake saves Neverland

(later)

Green: there's the other map

Kate: aah that's a map. What's going on in this map?

Green: it's to go to mount destiny too, and... (inaudible)

Kate: it's to go to mount destiny? And that's the map to get there? And who will use the map to get there?

Green: the people. I'm pretending that they go up to mount destiny

Kate: and what's going on there

Green: that's a picture of a lamb, up... up, that goes up to the reservoirs (inaudible)... that's my Grandad... and that's the lamb that goes on top of the Land Rover

Kate: oh wow – has he got a Land Rover?

Green: yes

Kate: so was he driving it there?

Green: yeah

Quiet – pause

(Audio transcription from research conversation 4/2 c,d)

Importantly interwoven with these storied conversations, I have noted that,

Green is engrossed in his drawing about Jake, so we sit quietly and I decide to take my lead from him and not disturb the process. Occasionally people walk past and he watches them, but rather than being distracted by them, he is gazing at them as if looking off into the distance – a moment of space perhaps in his working. There are long periods of silence as we sit together. Halfway through, Green wants to move and sit on the beanbags.

(Field notes from research conversation 4/2 e)

The talk that I have transcribed was not constant, often disappearing altogether and then reappearing, but the drawing, mapping and writing in Green's notebook was continuous. Green's conversation with me took the form of communicative gestures which articulated his story telling on the page into speech, but were also interwoven with the production of the story through his drawing and mapping, and there was a distinct rhythm of movement between these aspects of our communication. Our conversation was integral to the map-making and drawing; the talk we were engaged in created a way of exploring a shared understanding of its meaning. The forms of language existent within these different modes of production can be identified as separate literate activities or modes of communication, but only came into existence in relation to each other, the purpose being to create a shared narrative within the emerging story. It was multilayered and multimodal; the relationships between drawing, writing and map-making were important to its production and composition. Mavers describes these multimodal texts in

terms of an *'ensemble'* (2011, p. 6), and I would suggest this musical reference is a fitting way to describe the encounter.

The writing encounter was also particular to the social situation we were occupying. Sitting outside the classroom on a beanbag with objects from home was not 'normal' school activity for Green. It was not bounded by other children or adult expectations, and apart from myself, it was not modified by the actions of others. The possibility within multimodal composition was open for Green to explore, which he appeared happy to do. This meant that very different situated meanings from those of the classroom could emerge. Gee's (2004, p. 32) argument, that *'language is tied to people's experiences of situated action in the material and social world'*, was apparent in how this differently situated event created different experiences and meanings for both of us.

Towards the end of the conversation, Green asked me to help him in making the map, which we did jointly, and then I too became engrossed in the quiet and studious business of moving his emergent story forward. The language and tools we shared, both within our conversation and drawing, supported the construction of shared thought (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1998). This ability to work together, in response to an idea (Green's story), demonstrates that language expression is embedded in a combined and interlinking 'whole' (Goodman, 2005). Green was not creating language alongside me in separated parts; its meaning was not compartmentalised but developed through the connections between all the modes of communication that he was utilising.

The quietly relaxing, sensory aspects of the experience, or the material effect of making the drawing together, was an essential part of this. The material 'doing' of the story using writing tools had primacy within the shared social practice; a space in which Green's 'knowing' about drawing and the extent of his use of it as a communicative practice was being explored and *becoming* something new. This activity created an emotionally enhanced experience, involving a particular state of immersive concentration; although communal in nature, it has parallels with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of intrinsic flow and emotional engagement (1995) and helps identify the emotional qualities that Vygotsky (1999) noted in his thoughts about *perezhivanie* (emotional learning), which he argued was an essential feature within the processes of children's learning within activity.

Throughout this writing encounter, a relational network had formed between both myself and Green, involving speech, space, place, the physical use of pens, and how they felt on the paper. They were all connected together to create a meshwork (Ingold,

2011) together with Green's imagination, which in turn was fuelled by characters and stories from other media. Each element of communication, as separate modes (i.e. the talking, drawing, and gesturing), came into being through the responsive associations created between them. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) suggest that by echoing or using the voice of other multimodal texts within their own writing, children are able to explore interesting combinations of word and sound images. Green's exploration of the narratives from 'Neverland' was not a representation of previously encountered text or a fixed replication; rather, his text making resonated with these previous encounters.

Talking as text making – thinking and designing

Kate: what's this bit here?

Green: (mumbling)

Kate: so have you used it when...

Green: I think I might have to use another pen (mumbling – the background noise increasing)

Kate: I like all the pictures at the bottom

Green: that's (names all the characters) from Doc McStuffins

Kate: so do you use this at home?

Green: sometimes...I think I might have to write here (quiet, then mumbling)

(Audio transcription from research conversation 4/2 f)

Green used the word '*think*' here to articulate the planning processes within his writing activity with me. There appeared to be a desire or intention from him to make me aware of what he was doing as a way of carrying me along within the activity. He was articulating that his writing, drawing and map-making actions were not a random thoughtless process but something he was taking care to do and which had social importance. Cremin and Myhill (2012, p. 38) contend that talk is a tool that allows for ideas to be generated and shaped during written composition; talk, therefore, is a way of formulating thinking which is closely linked to the design of text. Importantly, talk as the testing of ideas is socially constructed and shared, and Green chose to talk to me as a

means to express his processes of thinking and make explicit the design of the writing and drawing ensemble.

Kate: so what's this bit here?

Green: that's the destiny sword. I'm just about to draw a guardian, once I've drawn... and I've got to draw Jake, he's in my bag. I think he can help me do it because I can't remember what he looks like (this is a toy that Green has brought into school)

Kate: so, drawing's good, is it?

Green: yeah, just drawing the garden...that's the garden, it's all green and dark, but I don't have a green pen

Kate: oh OK

Green: so I have to colour in a lot of different colours

Kate: mmm

Green: that's how the garden is

(Silence between us as Green draws)

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 g)

Green provides a meta-narrative within his speech of his drawing, not only describing the work but also commenting on his choices and intentions in doing it. The talk that he uses is not merely representative of the 'doing-ness' of his text making, but a way of exploring this 'doing'. The content of conversation would not have been possible if he was not engaged in the activity itself. The combination of speech and imaginative mark making was not only signalling his thinking, as social speech (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and supporting the design within the planning process of writing (Kress, 2000b, 2010; Cremin and Myhill, 2012), but was also shaping the activity itself.

Writing activity as *more than* language and talk

Speech as a representative tool of language, a sign of the thinking involved in the text making, offers an understanding of this activity as a process of text generation based on the structures of language. However, I suggest that although I have demonstrated above

that this notion of writing activity as socially constructed is helpful in analysing talk and shared thought, close analysis of Green's activity shows that what he was engaged in went beyond this structural understanding which focuses on cognitive thought. He remained silent at times, and these silences were just as important to his compositional process as the words he used in the transcripts discussed. He was also affected by the colours he was using, and linked his sensory response to colour with the materiality of the pen from which the colour could be drawn. I had witnessed this in other children's use of pens, crayons, paint, etc., where colour and other sensory experiences, such as smell, were linked to the objects from which they emanated. Green demonstrated that his composition was formed in relation to the restrictions and possibilities of the materials that he was encountering, for example the colour that the pen could offer him. The thinking he was undertaking as part of the process of text making was knitted together with the effect that the material objects had on him. It was these material elements in his writing that sociocultural theories of language, which limit an understanding of objects as purely mediational and afforded meaning through their usage, were not able to explore.

The 'specialness' of writing objects

Green indicated throughout the encounter that the pink notebook, as an object for writing and drawing, was important to him and had a special status. He concentrated on it throughout our time together and was very careful in handling it, directing me to take particular photos, telling me, for example, '*I want you to take a picture of the back*'.

Green: if you take some photos of this, can you take that white bit there off

Kate: oh yeah, shall we get some scissors and do that

Green: yes, but can you be careful not to cut that bit off

Kate: oh, I won't do that. Shall we do it in the classroom?

Green: yeah

Kate: we'll definitely do that then

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 h)

At this point, which was towards the end of our encounter, I wondered why the pink notebook was so important to him that he wanted it to be documented so carefully.

Was this importance something that he had attributed to it so that the notebook had become significant through the meanings that he had transferred onto it? Was it a passive receptor of something else that was important to him, for example his parental relationships? This might be evident in the following vignette which occurred at the start of our conversation:

Green: shall we talk about every picture drawing I have done?

Kate: you could do. You can tell me all about it. Where did it come from, this notebook?

Green: my daddy bought it for me. It has stickers.

Kate: what, what have you used it for then, this notebook?

Green: er writing, all the writing bits that I have done, and I've used it for homework

(later)

Green: that's the pen for the notepad. This is my mummy's pen

Kate: so that's your mummy's pen, so she let you borrow it?

Green: cos she doesn't need this pen

Kate: oh that's good then

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 i,j)

Or perhaps the notebook contains within its material make-up traces or elements of 'specialness' related to Green's personal history and relationships that were not separate but integral to his writing activity. In other words, the important meanings of the notebook came about through his *intra-activity* with it, rather than it having been afforded certain meanings that it was then able to transport into different contexts. The possible uses that the pink notebook and the pens that Green was using lie in the 'existence' that these objects have had, and will have in the future. Green's writing came about through the movement or usage that was able to exist because of the materials he was using. So, it is this entanglement (Barad, 2003, p. 33) between objects and people, viewed as a 'whole' process rather than separated into distinct elements, that could support further understanding of children's writing.

I needed to look more closely at how the objects he was using were not only spoken about but materially engaged with, functioning not only in symbolising meaning but also in creating meaning themselves. Green indicated the 'specialness' of the objects

he was using throughout the encounter: the pen, the stickers, even the pinkness of the notebook. This 'specialness' was spoken about in relation to and as part of the special relationships he had with his family. The pink notebook and the pens belonged to these emotional ties, rather than being afforded them. As the objects held particular special abilities, they allowed him to explore his familial relationships further and bring the connections with his parents together within other text making in school. By doing this, drawing together relationships and objects, he was transforming his own thinking about the possibilities that writing and drawing could hold. These objects from home held resonances or traces of important literate events for Green, namely experience he had with his family of writing, drawing and playing games.

To summarise these arguments, the pink notebook had particular functions in extending and elaborating Green's imaginative world that corresponded with the role play and small world play that I had observed him engaged with over the previous months. It also offered him the opportunity through social interaction with others, for example with me at school and his family at home, to join together very different modes of communication for very different purposes. The map-making and story telling that I encountered with Green was a very different text-making practice to that of writing his name and playing noughts and crosses with his parents. The notebook, as an object that had been afforded particular changeable uses, enabled him to explore the possibilities of textual communication with different people in very different contexts. Therefore, as a material object, it gave Green an opportunity to explore a range of modes which afforded specific functions for him. However, these were dependent on the communicative opportunities of unregulated time and space on offer to him by others. He was able to use the pink notebook at home and at school in this research encounter within a '*smooth space*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.536), one without an assigned layout but where it was possible to roam. In this smooth space, the discourse of text making formed around the pink notebook was open and adaptive, and Green was able to take advantage of this; however, this was a very different experience from his normal writing experience in school, which will be demonstrated in the next part of this assemblage.

The 'learning log' – an object of fixed school literacy

Later the same day, Green wanted to go outside of the classroom again and talk about the teddy he had brought from home. I encouraged him to remain in the classroom as I was

concerned that he would be missing out on the learning activities with other adults and children. He told me that he wanted to talk to me about his learning log, which I had asked him about the day before. The teacher agreed to him leaving the classroom but asked him to make sure he completed his maths activity when he returned. I wrote the following in my field notes:

'He rushed to the door carrying his teddy, keen for us to go and lie in the beanbags'

(Field notes 4/2 k)

Green suggested that we look at his learning log first. All the children in the class had a learning log, an A4-sized exercise book where evidence of learning was recorded by the children and annotated by the adults. The activities that were noted in the learning log represented all areas of the curriculum, but the work was mostly text based and generally contained writing and drawing as evidence of numeracy and literacy activity. Other means of recording and assessing the children's learning, for example photographs and observations, were kept separately as part of the children's assessment, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

The learning log was a document used by the adults in the class to identify features of children's learning and verify the extent to which the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) had been met by the individual children. I had already had conversations with the other participant children about the writing activities that were evidenced in their learning log books; I had also taken photographs of the text within each book and this had enabled an exploration of the cultural significance that each book was afforded as a material object that conveyed particular features of school literacy, which will be discussed in the next chapter (Assemblage three). However, the conversation I had with Green opened up other insights into how his thinking about writing was created as a process of *intra-activity* with material objects, where the object was valued in relation to the aims of the school curriculum.

Spending time with Green and his learning log was a strikingly different encounter to the one we had with the pink notebook, as my field notes indicate:

He was not interested in talking about what he had done nor even looking at it quietly, which was in complete contrast to his engagement with his notebook. At one point, he turned his back on me and would not answer my questions.

(Field notes 4/2 l)

Listening to the audio recording and reading the transcripts of these notes indicates to me that Green was passive in directing our conversation and actions. This lack of engagement is mirrored in the photographs taken, which were composed by me alone without any direction from him:

Kate: ok, you tell me about what you have been doing here

Green: (silence)

Kate: tell you what, you hold it and you can tell me what you've been doing

Green: (shuffles, looks at the book but does not respond)

Kate: mmm, what's that page there, what's this?

*Green: I wrote all my name, all along them pages, Ms *** wrote that and said to copy it*

Kate: mmm and how was it writing your name, was it OK? yeah? Is it getting easier?

Green: yeah and harder

Kate: harder, why's it harder?

Green: it's like letter here and then there.

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 m)

Green appeared to distance himself from the learning log, detaching himself from the activity that he had been doing within it. The explanation he gives of '*letter here and letter there*' shows that he is identifying the procedural nature of name writing within the learning log, one that he is grappling with in this context. His technical focus on name writing was not apparent in the conversation we had about his pink notebook from home, although his name was a feature of that object as well.

Relationships or discord?

The log book contained links to home and family, just as his pink notebook did, and this was an area of conversation that Green talked about confidently:

Kate: so what's going on in this page, hang on who's this, you've written his name there.

Green: his name's traction man

Kate: yeah, and what does he do?

(silence)

Kate (slowly reading Green's writing and pointing to the words), 'he is wearing a shiny space suit'. Do you remember writing that?

Green: no

Kate: oh

Kate: this is interesting

Green: that's my daddy pretending to be Mr Freeze and that's me

Kate: mmm pretending to be Mr Freeze. What does he do when he is Mr Freeze?

Green: he freezes me like an ice-cold block

Kate: can you move when you are frozen?

Green: no

Kate: oh, so how do you become unfrozen?

Green: by whacking stuff, that's what I do

Kate: mmm, you did some more writing down here

Green: that's my daddy, that's me and that says Mr Freeze

(Later)

Kate: what's this a picture of, this lovely blue, do you remember?

Green: that's what I done, just colouring, I'm swimming, that's swimming with mummy

Kate: oh, did you go swimming then?

Green: yeah, we done it on Sunday

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 n,o)

Again, Green's ability to express the meaning of his writing is in relation to the significant familial relationships that he has, either within real events or through the imaginative play that he explores with his father. In contrast, he struggles to express in words the meaning of the text that he has written about the class superhero, 'traction

man'. Green would have written these words within a group, but not collaboratively, and the words as written and contained within the learning log had a singular significance to the teachers in the class in evidencing his 'independent' writing ability. It appears that this significance is not something that Green is able to articulate or even has any understanding of. As the words he had written occurred as part of the situated learning in the classroom, they signified a particular discourse about writing which the adult teachers were leading. This is evidenced by the photographs that I took of each page of the children's learning log, which contained adult comments related to assessment coding systems, written in different coloured pen. This corresponds with Cole's (1996) argument that cultural objects are 'carriers' of cultural meaning. As an object, the learning log was able to extend the meanings that were given to writing activity in the classroom. It appears that the teachers were using the log to extend assessment and curriculum meanings, and Green was using the log to form particular understandings of school writing activity which he was either confused about or not interested in communicating with me.

The '*rightness*' of writing in a learning log

Kate: so what else could you do in your learning log do you think?

Green: sometimes I do, but I don't do much in my learning log

Kate: why not?

Green: cos

Kate: do you like doing it?

(no response)

Kate: what's your favourite thing to do at school?

Green: err nothing

Kate: nothing, nothing at all... what's your favourite thing at home?

Green: pretending I'm going to mount destiny

Kate: that's your favourite thing, and do you play that sometimes at school too?

(no response)

Kate: and what about writing?

Green: Kate, I don't like doing writing very much

Kate: why not?

(no response)

Kate: is it hard, do you think? I find writing hard sometimes

Green: why?

Kate: sometimes I sit for hours trying to do writing and it's really, really hard

Green: why?

Kate: cos the thing is with writing, you've got to think about what you want to write, and you have to try and get it right and make it exactly what you are thinking

Green: why do you have to get it right?

(Audio transcription of research conversation 4/2 p,q)

Reading this extract back made me question my researcher positioning as I had clearly led the conversation in a particular direction. This was due to the frustration that I felt in the stagnant research encounter that we were having, and the lack of response that I was getting in all modes of communication from Green. I wanted him to have gained some sense of meaning-making from the conversation that we were having, and therefore I was leading the direction of the conversation, perhaps taking on a more knowledgeable adult role. Interestingly though, at the end of this exchange, Green raised the question about the 'rightness' of writing, indicating his questioning of writing as an activity that should represent correctness. This comment was mirrored by other children's concerns when engaged in official writing activities set by teachers, and will be discussed in the next assemblage. His questioning challenged my own thinking about whether the processes of writing were about accurate representation of thinking or something else, perhaps more exploratory, sensory and open-ended. Green appeared to be bemused by the idea that writing was about trying to be 'right' in its composition, and questioned the assumptions in my description. He gave me an indication here that for him, doing writing 'properly' is very far from his own experience of relational text making, which appeared to correspond with Deleuzian notions of writing as unfixed experimentation (Braidotti, 2010).

Green appears to be recognising that the distance of travel that he would need to go to make his writing 'right' was just too far from this.

The text making offered by the school's learning log, as an official documentation of activity, existed within a structure of 'rightness' related to the fixed external curriculum. Although Green was able to move beyond this boundary by creating connections to his own family life, the opportunities that Green and I had to extend these shared meanings were limited by the structural definitions ascribed to the log book's classroom usage. As a writing object, the learning log appeared to create distinct boundaries where Green existed in separation from its production. He appeared passively unresponsive to it, lacking agency and engagement. As Cole (1996) has argued, the learning log as a cultural object held an ideal and material reality that is extended in how it is used in the classroom. The teacher's ideal, or rightness of writing, related to the future expectations of the child, and existed in their use of the log to record and comment on the children's writing in response to curriculum expectations. The material reality of the learning log, as an artefact where the writing experience of the children was retrospectively 'captured', related to this ideal and the hoped-for 'correctness' of writing. This is how some children understood the learning log and writing activity within it, and will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, Green appeared either not to comprehend the link between the two or was just not interested, as evidenced in his limited ability to communicate about it. He appeared to remain separated from the cultural values within the learning log, which reflected other activities he was engaged in that positioned him in opposition to others. Further questions need to be raised about the significance of books and logs that children write in at school, both their role as cultural artefacts and in holding communicative potential as a text-making object. The question needs to be asked about whether these objects create possibilities for children's writing and communication, or limit them through the cultural meanings that are assigned to them.

The materiality of writing – The writing object as the stuff of writing

What is clear from these two encounters is that writing tools can be described as mediational. As children appropriate them for uses in different contexts and for different purposes, they provide opportunities to extend and compound children's thinking. They are also culturally defined and are given meaning in terms of the cultural value that is

assigned to them. However, close analysis of Green's activities with writing tools questions the extent to which the external tool and the internal mind are separate identities within the thinking processes necessary in text composition. The material objects themselves appear to carry extensive vitality (Bennett, 2010), which words and cultural usage are not able to describe. Theories that maintain the dualism between the mind and the body – where the embodied experience, although relational, is distinct from the construction of cognition – may limit our opportunity to understand how children's writing experiences are encounters with the material world, where *matter matters to them*.

Malafouris (2013, pp. 60–61) argues that understanding and reasoning emerge from the human body's sensorimotor experience; embodiment is therefore the condition for meaningfulness. Human engagement with material things, as an embodied experience, shapes human thought. The objects that Green encountered within this vignette carried personal history and relationships that were created in different and changing contexts. They were teeming with the traces of others, i.e. other events and other interactions over space and time (Barad, 2003; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Ingold, 2011), some of which created potential for further productive opportunities, others not. The text-making activities that Green had with these objects were to differing extents sensory, emotional, relational and social, and it was the unique combination of these that transformed his ideas about writing and drawing. Through this activity, his understanding of text making was shaped. Ingold describes this as 'form giving' where the writing is becoming new with the writing objects, and the writer is then becoming new as a writer. The writing object is therefore brought to life by its usage as a '*gathering together of the threads of life*' (Ingold, 2010, p. 10).

Although both the pink notebook and the learning log were similar objects in shape, size and functionality, the pink notebook held potentially creative text-making opportunities for Green; it was an object with fluid and responsive uses. The learning log had a purpose in relation to adult intentions, representative of the structures of literacy learning in school where there was an expected 'right' way of writing; it had limited meaning-making potential. Green's experience of writing and drawing, his thinking as an embodied writer, was integrated *with* these objects and the creative potential, or not, that they held for him.

Research with children as *more than* language and representation

I wrote the following in my field notes at the end of the same day:

Silence – the importance of silence and gaps in the conversation, like in a painting, the empty space says a lot. It appears empty, but isn't. Green created spaces as locations for 'doing' his writing in his notebook earlier, and empty spaces appeared as pages in his learning log – he has chosen the spaces; they have meaning for him.

(Field notes 4/2 r)

Corresponding with the analysis from the previous assemblage, the writing encounters within this chapter demonstrate the importance of looking beyond language within research. In this assemblage, there were empty spaces within vignettes of data that were as meaningful as speech and other physical gestures. Interpreting what is experienced by the child in a writing encounter in purely representational terms, signifying something else, assumes that meaningful writing and drawing activity is a process of internal thinking structured by language. This then relies heavily on talk as a tool in which it can be explored. However, as has already been explored, text creation is an embodied material activity, so it is not surprising that talk as a language tool may 'stutter' (MacLure, 2010, p. 11) in its attempt to articulate writing and the fullness of its meanings. This is evident in Green's silences, turns away from me, and avoidance of talk, both in his encounters with the pink notebook and the learning log. These were different types of writing encounter for him, but speech and language was not the only way he was expressing his ideas. The material production of the text appeared to be able to express more than language through the activity of creating and 'doing' using material objects. It was this intra-activity and entanglement with objects that revealed more about Green as a writer than his speech could offer.

By exploring Green's experience of writing through objects as intra-action, it is possible to argue that writing is a material expression of entangled relational forces, or in Deleuze's vision, it can be seen as an '*assemblage of desire*' (Livesey, 2010, p.18) that is productive and creates new functions. Traces of other people, previous literacy encounters, and the affective and sensory nature of these are tied together within the writing object encountered and expressed through its usage. Green's desire to explore material possibilities and create meaning through material objects was interpreted by his

teachers as signifying his problems with other children and the social rules of 'give and take' in a classroom environment. It is important to caution against a reliance on signification of children's action where meanings of children's actions are reduced to the external structures around them. If meanings were understood in terms of materiality, then something much more complex and interesting could be revealed.

Conclusion

This chapter indicates that meaning-making in writing activity is socially constructed with others, but also with materials, and it is this substantial element of writing activity that is often overlooked in school literacy. I have exposed the importance of cultural objects in opening up or shutting down possibilities for children's writing in school. For Green, the pink notebook, with its relational significance to people, events and other materials, was an enabling object. The fact that it was an object from home meant that it was open to possibilities even within a school setting, and perhaps this was why Green was so keen to write, draw and map make with it, as it afforded him agency and exploration. This was in contrast to the school log book, which was contained within a specific school discourse that Green appeared to remain outside of.

The vignettes that illustrate these writing encounters indicate that a reliance on language theory to fully explain children's experience may limit exploration in researching children's literate activity. A focus on material intra-activity may provide a fuller understanding of children's writing activity instead. Focusing on the materiality of writing objects has shown that writing tools, resources and equipment are able to transform children's thinking and show researchers how different discourse is created. To understand how this occurs, we need to take note of the materiality, the actual make-up and organisation of the object, as this matters in how children encounter them. This argument extends the multimodal idea that children afford objects potential by shifting the perspective so that language is not privileged in understanding the meanings of objects, but is recognised within a complex meshwork where children's bodies, school structures, emotional relationships, and materials are combined into a whole experience, and where multiple meanings, rather than limited meanings, can emerge.

CHAPTER SIX: Assemblage three – Daily writing activities of representation and *difference*

Introduction

Young children encounter writing through regularly occurring literacy activity in school. Activities that are commonplace in a Reception classroom provide organised time and spaces in which understandings of writing for children can emerge. This chapter, split into two sections, seeks to unpick two of these routine writing encounters that were a dominant feature of classroom activity within my data construction. Within the discussion, I will explore how writing activity, as part of language learning within school, is often an act of representation. I also provide evidence that children seek to make it a relational activity, where differing elements combine to form multiple meanings for children. I will demonstrate how different types of writing activity offer children different potential as writers.

Regular writing, remarkable differences

This assemblage, using an amalgam of small and large vignettes of data from writing encounters, is an analysis and discussion of children's text-making activity within two regularly occurring school writing events: name writing and writing within synthetic phonic group instruction. These different activities had common features: the children experienced both these activities daily as part of the structured timetable of literacy events, and the focus in both was on practising the signifying components of writing as a graphic code, i.e. correct letter shape formation and sound symbol recognition. These encounters were clearly separated from other literacy activities, although the teachers often reminded the children verbally to make links between these practices and other writing activities within the class. The broader purpose in planning and teaching these activities was that the children could transfer these segmented and discrete elements into their broader literacy learning. So, although compartmentalised aspects of literacy teaching were planned, a 'whole view' of language underpinned it.

These two literacy activities, *name writing* and what I will loosely term *phonic writing*, being habitual writing experiences for the children, formed much of their writing

production. However, what was noteworthy and why I re-formed them into an assemblage through my analysis was that although the intention of both of these activities was similar (i.e. to increase the knowledge and skills that the children had of producing graphically correct representations of English language), they afforded vastly different experiences for the children about the meanings of writing within the classroom. Name writing and phonic writing were organised so that they could be practised within structured times and places, and segmented into discrete elements. Yet, these two similar approaches to literate activity illuminate very different ways in which the children in the classroom experienced writing. The analysis and discussion of these two regular events demonstrate that for children to be armed effectively with the material tools of symbolic representation, their writing production needs to involve the creation of links and connect with other aspects of their literate lives. Regular and seemingly mundane writing activity does have the potential to enable new literate possibilities if children are able to make writing in this way, i.e. as a relational ensemble.

Section one: Phonic writing

These observations took place during an activity that was known to the children as 'Letters and Sounds', a twenty-minute, ability grouped, teacher-led session in which Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) was taught at a fast pace.

Doing 'phonic writing' within striated language spaces

Below is an observation of Yellow that illustrates the activity of the children during a 'Letters and Sounds' session:

Yellow sits cross-legged and sways from side to side. She stretches her legs and holds onto her toes. She rocks back and forth. She quietly blows raspberries with her mouth. She begins to jump, and then sits in response to the teacher and stretches out her legs. She leans against the chair on the edge of the mat. The children are asked to say the phonic sounds a,a,a,a, as they do the action for angry ants walking up their arms. They are asked to speed up and the actions become quicker and quicker. The teacher asks them 'Can you spot something beginning with a?' Yellow puts her hand up. They are asked to 'robot talk', 'Stand up and robot talk with your arms. A-n-t'. She copies the teacher's movements and

sounds out all the sounds. Yellow continues to put her hand up again, and again to name the 'a' pictures, kneeling up to look at the board, and sits back down in response to teacher. The teacher says 'Who's the smartest on the carpet?' Yellow sits up with her back very straight, arms crossed, still looking at the teacher.

(Narrative observation 19/11)

During the phonic teaching sessions, the children were engaged in fast-paced physical strategies or mnemonic techniques to activate memory (Ehri and Roberts, 2006). These activities included 'magic finger' writing where the children traced the letter shape in the air, and 'robot talking' where words were segmented into individual sounds as the children used their arms and legs to move robotically. This often occurred within a confined carpeted space, where the children were physically regulated; their bodies were contained within the fixed space and bound within the framework of allocated time. The children were rewarded with stickers and praise for correctly reproducing phonic sounds orally, and accurately controlling their fine motor use of pens on whiteboards to produce the associated letter shapes. This activity was prompted by the teacher's regular instructions to '*sit beautifully*', or to do '*good learning*' or '*smart learning*'. In this way, the children were waiting to respond physically to prompts, moving and reacting to physical expectations and looking to adults to manage and modify their own corporeal existence.

Within my observation, Yellow's natural movements are clearly exhibited at the beginning of the session, and as time progressed, she responded to the teacher as instructed. She was able to sense the physical restraints expected, and replied to the teacher's input by moving/sitting in the correct fashion. She was reacting *to*, rather than reacting *with*, the teacher, and *reflective of*, rather than *instrumental in*, the movements that she was experiencing. Yellow was representing action and understood the rules for doing this. She had integrated the physical dimensions of phonics learning by bringing together both the representative sounds and symbols and the associated embodied movement. Yellow can be seen to be a successful respondent, and therefore a successful learner. She was able to react appropriately within the physical boundaries that had been formed by the teacher during this encounter.

However, not all children were able to move between these different physical states so easily within these teaching sessions:

Green looks at the teacher pointing to the prompt cards that say 's,a,t,p,i' but is not making the sounds. He looks at his whiteboard. He looks out of the window at the group

going outside. He holds his pen and says 'nnn', and makes an aeroplane sign by raising his arms. He has two whiteboards now. He leans back on one, so that it bends, then he sits on it and slides back and forth. He leans forward and watching the teacher, rolls his pen back and forth over the whiteboard in front of him. The teacher is asking the children to read 'tap, pan, pin, tin' after writing them on the classroom whiteboard. Green rubs his eyes and squints down at the board in his hands. He pokes his friend gently in the back with his pen, rubs his eyes again, uses the board rubber so that it presses his pen down onto the board. He then makes a triangle with his hands. The children are doing robot arms to segment the letter sounds. He holds his board up and presses his forehead against it.

(Narrative observation 26/11 a)

My field notes continue:

After the phonics session, he lies on the floor and slowly flicks through his learning log, looking carefully at the pages.

Kate: what have you got to do?

Green: I've got to draw the pictures up there (pointing to the board).

Kate: what are you drawing?

(He points to the board again)

Green: the water thing

Kate: which word is it?

Green: the top one (which is tap)

(He continues to draw while lying down on his tummy)

(Transcript of conversation written as field notes 26/11 b)

Green does not respond correctly to the teacher and the social and behavioural regulations she emits, but instead he engages in a process of intra-activity with the material resources and spaces available to him, similarly described in the previous chapter. The embodied encounter he had is disconnected to the learning activities presented. So, why was he not joining in with the teacher-led task and responding in the same way that Yellow had been? He appeared to be particularly responsive to the learning objects he had been given, and demonstrated creative use of these at times, but he was 'off task' in relation to the learning intentions, and was not able to identify the pictures that he was

asked to draw when he was left alone to work independently. He was disengaged with the teacher's voice and actions, and was not able to reproduce or mirror these.

He was, however, searching for some other desirable activity, one that was forming different kinds of attachments, connections and responses that appeared to be more fulfilling, despite the teacher's explicit instructions to go in a different direction. Throughout this activity, Green was looking to connect to his environment, through intra-activity (Barad, 2007) with the objects and spaces he could manipulate. He was active in a different way, not by reflecting or representing the teacher's knowledge, as Yellow had been, but through the material attachments he was creating and responding to, an exploration of the material nature of the tools.

Performing the literacy curriculum

Sellers (2013) argues that how children compose learning, as a desirous assemblage, is essential for teachers to explore, as this is how they themselves are performing or *making* the curriculum. She cites Dewey's ideas about the importance of the living and acting spirit within children's learning, through the notion of free movement and operation, where ideas can be connected to form whole bodies of knowledge (Sellers, 2013, p. 33). With this in mind, how are the free movements of Yellow and Green being responded to in forming the curriculum? By looking at this in more detail, it is possible to see very different types of learning composition here.

Green was performing the curriculum, or the physical space, the time and the resources available to him, in a particular way, but this 'acting spirit' was not following the lines of the teacher. He was not building the phonic knowledge expected by tracing the pathway placed before him; instead, he was performing the curriculum on offer differently. The phonemes and graphemes and their associated meanings as language tools were not part of the assemblage that he was engaged in composing, one that emerged from a physical and material desire to experiment within the confines in which he is placed. Green was constructing some understanding of what these phonic sessions mean through this assemblage of connections, but the links he made did not represent the universal structured curriculum that the teacher was concerned with. Green was making the curriculum *rhizomatically* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 23) by constructing knowledge which is not representative of ideas being given by others but instead allows for variations and expanding connections with the material objects at hand. This

rhizomatic experience was not part of the intended outcome of the session, which had fixed, linear objectives and where the phonics being taught signified not only the sound symbol relationship but also the way in which language is understood as segmented into distinct parts.

Yellow, on the other hand, was making these connections in her writing within the phonic session by signifying the facts about literacy being presented, as was identifiable through her gestures, actions and speech. Green had formed no such connection but was actively making sense of the time, space and resources differently. Using Deleuze and Guattari's (2004, p. 421) ideas here, Yellow was working within *striated spaces*, enclosed physically and tracing predetermined pathways, whereas Green was working within a *smooth space*, which had no determinates, or borders, but offered a multitude of material entanglements in which he was able to meander. The teacher's expectations, which were framing the outcomes of this session, could only be successful if the children were able to perform the curriculum within striated space; a child creating the curriculum outside of this would be failing the task.

Disconnected communication

For Green, this encounter with writing ended with him drawing something that he could not name: a tap. This uncoupling of thought and language and lack of relationship between meaning and action was deeply unsettling, almost a perversity of language learning. It is particularly problematic as drawing activity is essentially a communicative gesture that needs to say something about how we understand the world (Kress, 1997). It was difficult for Green to express the necessary meaning and understanding that are essential elements of drawing's communicative purpose (Ring, 2006). The limited reference given to the meaning of the word 'tap', the function and purpose of it, during the teaching input had not helped Green to construct the connections needed to develop the contextual narrative for its meaning to come to fruition (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Unfortunately, ignoring an explanation of the meanings of words, for example by making sense of words within the context of relatable sentence, is common within this type of phonic teaching (Juel et al., 2003). The SSP teaching strategies I observed demonstrated that the exclusive focus on letter sounds meant that there was limited reference to whole word meanings. The relationships between phonemes, graphemes, whole words and sentences were disconnected, and sound/symbol connections remained unexplored;

instead, the children were provided with abstracted elements of language to make sense of.

Green's inability to make the expected connections is in line with the Vygotskian argument that words, as a semantic part of language, are created in response to the machinery of thought, as meanings of words come into being in relation to wider language uses and functions (Gee, 2004; Halliday, 2007). As the wider contextual thinking surrounding the word 'tap' had not been explored during the session, Green was struggling to find what meanings he could make in association with it. His drawing of the tap, as a sign, was conveying a different social meaning, one where the drawing signified a 'water thing' that he was drawing, because he *had to*, rather than signifying the phoneme/word association hoped for. As Volosinov (1986) has written, the word is a signifier of meaning, and this meaning can change depending on the social expectations.

The fact that Yellow was able to follow these abstract lines of thought and make the physical and cognitive connections intended is also significant. She was 'successful' in showing a segment of knowledge about writing, related to the 'a' sound, but the question remains about whether that will support her to write in the future. MacLure (2013a, p. 663) argues that although there is a need to research the materiality of language, as something issued from the body and affecting other bodies, language is always something that leaves the body, becoming immaterial and representational of symbolic cultural ideas. Yellow was able to access these ideas about how letters and sounds were related and represent these through actions and speech, something that Green struggled to do. However, armed with the ability to recall the phoneme 'a', within this session, will she be able to construct further connections to it which will support her future writing? Is she able to escape beyond the structured and stratified grid of representation (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) to explore a more expansive form of language within a range of literate activity?

What Green was doing within his physical-material intra-activity can offer an explanation of how he was constructing knowledge, which was very different from the process of signification that Yellow was successfully doing. The observed phonics activity had allowed him little ability to construct or form new knowledge about writing using phonemes. However, he was forming *other knowledge* about what writing activity meant in school, through his body and environment: a rhizomatic formation of knowledge, or knowledge formed differently. He was learning '*to draw the pictures up there*', in other words, to follow instructions and complete a task, even if this had little meaning for him.

This was not what the teacher had intended, and may have lasting consequences on how Green views himself as a learner in school.

These discrete phonic sessions are intended to form building blocks for literacy, where knowledge is constructed through cumulative developmental stages. There is an assumption within this strategy that the phonic knowledge that the children are able to represent (just as Yellow had done) will be transferable to other literate encounters within classroom writing activities. So, it is hoped that these discrete elements – the phonemes, with the additional skills needed to recreate them in writing – will be applied within other writing contexts. Questions about the children’s experience of writing therefore need to consider how, or indeed if, the knowledge of phonemes that they are constructing within the letters and sounds activities is applied to other writing contexts. Children should be constructing threads between these daily phonic activities and other writing events. The next encounter explores what connections were emerging from SSP instruction into other writing arenas.

Revisiting ‘phonics writing’ – A closed arena

Data drawn from many conversations I had with the children indicated that they struggled to make verbal sense of the writing that they had done in the phonic sessions. There appeared to be a disconnection between what they had written and what they were able to say about it; the transfer of knowledge gained in phonics activities into new arenas through speech was limited. For example, the vignette presented below of extracts from video elicitation with Yellow and my reflective comments demonstrate that Yellow was unable to tell me accurately about what she was doing in her phonic writing or expand the conversation about this writing activity.

Yellow and I are watching a video of when she was writing outside as part of a phonics writing session.

Kate: what are you doing?

Yellow: (shrugs)

Kate: what learning were you doing?

Yellow: I was learning ‘ss’

Kate: you are working really hard

*Yellow (points to B*** – her friend – on the video)*

*Yellow: there's B*** (she smiles)*

(Yellow then points to the Teaching Assistant and says her name)

(By the third short clip, she is looking away)

(Video elicitation with Yellow 16/1 a)

Yellow did not feel the need to talk to me about her writing activity, but was pleased to see the other people with her on the video. The writing she was doing was led by the teaching assistant, and Yellow shows persistence by transferring from writing in the air to using chalks on the ground as instructed; however, the 'ss' she talked about was not apparent in the writing that she did. She said earlier that she was writing 'ss' but this was not the case. It was 'll', as in hill.

(Reflective Field notes 16/1 b)

Conversation and discussion were not part of the phonics sessions the children experienced, as these sessions were dominated by teacher instruction. Often the children were asked to say words and sentences where the phonic sound appeared, and limited discussion in the group sometimes took place around what the words or sentences could be. Most speech was limited to the phonemes that were being taught, and the children did not talk to each other or the teacher in ways in which they had to reflect on their learning or relate it to other aspects of their lives. Juel (2006, p. 418) argues that there is a connection between the more words children learn to speak and their phonological 'attunement'. So, speech and vocabulary building are important elements of language that help support the connections necessary for children's understanding of phonemes in their writing. These elements were missing in the children's experience within phonic writing activities.

The components of language being experienced by the children were fixed to the phonic sessions in which they occurred, rather than extending into other communicative contexts. Speech, therefore, as a way to expand children's thinking (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) was sparse within phonic writing activity, and so it was unsurprising that it was limited within the elicitation sought after the event. Cremin and Myhill (2012, p. 38) have argued

that talking is an essential part of the writing process; furthermore, it enables children to extend their compositions. They also note that the restrictions of time in school mean that children are often asked to begin writing before they have had a chance to develop their ideas. In concurrence with their argument, the aspects of thinking that Yellow and others were engaged in within these encounters were restricted by the focus of the strategy on reading and saying the phoneme. The writing element often appeared to be an addition to this, not as a thinking process but as a representation of the letter shapes without the thinking that would necessitate writing.

Fragmented sites of learning

Further evidence of this containment of thinking about phonemes and writing as a result of the 'Letters and Sounds' activities can be seen in my research conversation with Gold about her learning log. By visually mapping the audio recording and photographs of this conversation, directional lines were created that revealed the attachments she was constructing between different writing encounters and other events in her life. During the encounter, our conversation allowed us to form new lines of exploration about her family learning and relationships, and to reflect on her own learning and enjoyment of writing in the class. However, when we talked about her phonics writing, she stalled and the lines of exploration between us careered back into themselves, never moving beyond the representation of what was on the page.

We talk about where Gold went to nursery, and where she lives and where I live. She tells me that it is 'really far away' where her mum lives. We have a little chat about this for a while and then return to looking at her learning log.

Kate: what's this writing about then?

Gold: I done w, e, s, i, z, it, i, i, its, ss, its, i, e, o (reading the phonemes)

Kate: your sounding those out very nicely, aren't you?

Gold: excellent, I tried to write like that but.... s, h, p...pad

Kate: ok. what were you writing about when you were writing this, were you writing about anything?

Gold: no, letters and sounds

Kate: so when you do letters and sounds, what have you got to do?

Gold: (no answer)

(I ask again)

Gold: I am meant to be writing the words, and I wrote t, e, i, tick

Kate: and there is more writing here. What's that about then?

Gold: now it is s, o, h, t, s, pacs

Kate: mmm, I'm not sure I know what that word means – do you?

Gold: no

Kate: oh, so were you just writing the sounds then?

Gold: yeah

Kate: but not a word

Gold: no (smiling)

Kate: I know what this word says...can you...?

Gold: m, e, c

Kate: tr-ai-n (I stretch out the sounds)

Gold: train

Kate: do you remember writing it? ... do you remember... why were you writing train?

Gold: Sardines class (Sardines is the name of the year one)

Kate: oh, you were in sardines class. I forgot you go in there sometimes

Gold: for letters and sounds I go in there

Kate: what do you do in sardines class?

Gold: I kee... I don't know

(Audio transcript of research conversation 8/3)

The letters and sounds writing – the grapheme representation and associated words that Gold has encountered during these sessions – remained fixed within the contextual space in which she had experienced them and stayed there. There was nowhere for these abstract, floating pieces of knowledge, which incidentally Gold had remembered extremely well, to go; they had no further meaning for her. Even as tools, she was unable to show how they can be used or to know why she was learning about them in the session. This phonic writing she had experienced was detached from, rather than connected to, the other writing events that she had been engaged in and which she freely talked about.

What was significant is that the children identified letters and sounds activity *as* writing, as the important writing that they did at school, and therefore their perceptions of school writing were dominated by this regular activity and the associated language of phonemes; it was a growing presence in their learning logs as their first year at school progressed.

Kate: when you are doing your writing, what do you need to think about then?

Blue: the word that helps me to do the sounds, some of them are digraphs

Kate: right, what about you, Red, what do you think you need to know about writing?

Red (no response)

Blue: and trigraphs

Kate: and trigraphs

Blue: you need to know all of them

Kate: you need to know all of them, do you need to know anything else, anything else do you think?

Red: ah, ah, ah, I dunno

(later)

Kate: so what was the last thing you wrote?

Red: can't remember

Kate: really, you can't remember?

Blue: letters and sounds, and I drew something

Kate: what have you learnt in Minnows class about writing since you started, do you think?

Red: letters and sounds

Kate: apart from letters and sounds. What have you learnt about writing in Minnows class?

Blue: letters and sounds

(Audio transcription from research conversation 3/7)

'Phonic writing' within these letters and sounds activities offered limited opportunities for the children to construct further meaning and expand their understanding of writing beyond the abstract and representative. If meaning-making within writing activities means being involved in processes of dialogue around it, of critical reflection drawing on concrete human experience (Dahlberg et al., 2003, p. 107), then these meaning-making elements were missing from these daily writing experiences for children in the class. However, the children's desires to explore and make meanings in the classroom as multimodal expressions were able to be realised in other opportunities within the classroom. Writing activity that could be described as copying offered both closed and open possibilities for experimenting and knowing about writing, as will be discussed in the next section.

Section Two: Writing as copying

Duplication as an act of representation

Within the encounter below, Gold, Red and Blue are in the Year One classroom within a group of ten children for a twenty-minute session of 'Letters and Sounds'.

They sit cross-legged on the carpet leaning the back of their heads on the edge of a table top. They are asked to write 'oo', 'ai', 'x', 'w', and 'sh'. Some of the children write in their learning logs, while others write on A4-sized whiteboards. The teacher asks the children to be 'good writers' by writing down the sounds that they have learnt correctly. Then the group is asked to read some 'tricky words' (not phonetically spelt) and asked to write them

into a sentence. Blue suggests 'They went to the arcade'. The teacher is keen to look at their letter formation. She asks them why they should use a capital letter and a full stop. She points out what a comma is on the board. Some children are lying on their tummies. Some have been asked to sit at the table. I realise that Red hasn't got anything to write on or with. There are a few children in the same position and I am surprised that this appears to be overlooked. The boy next to Red shares his whiteboard and pen, and asks her to write. She says 'no' and looks down at her feet. Red eventually takes the whiteboard and copies the letters from underneath what the other boy has written.

(Narrative observation 23/1)

Later I ask Red why she didn't have her learning log to write in: 'were you supposed to have it?' I say. She looks down and smiles.

*'I don't need to have it and **** (names the child) wrote some sentences and I copied them so it was OK.'*

(Field notes 23/1)

Red understood the 'game' called writing here and was able to articulate it quite clearly (Grainger, 2003). She had met the task expected of her by sitting and copying. Red had shown a very particular understanding of the function and expectations of the activity, and that was to represent, or 're-say', what was being said. She had done that by copying, and so she had successfully completed the activity. But what was Red learning about writing? She may be able to write the letter shapes associated with the letter sounds, or the whole 'tricky word' from memory, but she would probably need a lot more repetitive practice for this to occur. If she transfers what she has learnt, what is she transferring? In other areas of her writing, Red was cautious to take risks and looked to adult approval or help to get her writing 'right', even when she was presented with other resources to support her learning. One such example is outlined within this research conversation:

Red: I don't like doing letters

Kate: I thought you did

Red: sometimes I don't know how to do letters and the teachers don't tell me, because they want me to know, and my friends don't know

Kate: you've told me that before, actually, I remember you saying that when we talked

about your learning log. So, what do you do when you are stuck like that?

*Red: um, tell another teacher, like if I tell Ms ***** (teacher) and she doesn't tell me, if I tell Mrs *****(teaching assistant) she sometimes does tell me what to write*

Kate: do you not have to think it in your own head?

Red: um

Kate: and remember what you did before, do you do that do you think?

Red: I try to know what it is, but I can't

(Audio transcription of research conversation with Red and Blue 11/3)

Copying the writing of others was a common approach that Red demonstrated within her writing as a response to difficulty, and as a safe, if constraining, strategy. For example, when she was writing a Christmas story, she repeatedly asked me to support her by asking the following questions:

'What comes next?...

'What do I do now?'...

'What shall I do, can you help me?'...

'I know it's a digraph but how can I write it?'

(Field notes 17/12 a)

What Red was indicating in her questioning was that I knew the answer that she needed to then 'copy'. Drawing on my own pedagogical ideas as a former teacher, I encouraged her to utilise writing resources to aid her thinking; however, it was clear that this was not what she wanted me to say or do. Her last comment above demonstrates her desire to show me that she does 'know' about writing, i.e. the terminology (digraph) to describe it. These descriptive words had importance for her as an uncertain writer as they enabled her to show certain (if somewhat limited) knowledge about writing.

'I notice from her body language that she is still unsure of what to write; perhaps it doesn't make sense or she is frustrated.'

'Red is writing over the letters she has already written and looks at the other children's work. She lies the top half of her body on the table over the paper.'

(Field notes 17/12 b)

This copying over already written letters or whole words was a common behaviour in many of the children. It occurred when they were caught or 'wedged' between what they had written already and what to write next. Like a record in the same groove, they often went over the same marks again and again. For Red, there appeared to be a fear of jumping forward into the unknown, into untested and uncertain territory. Unfortunately, the outcome of this encounter was that sometimes the intense scratching of the paper with a pencil, in tracing over and over the letter, meant that previous meaningful marks were distorted, sometimes leaving holes in the paper as an intentional destruction of their writing.

Looking for certainty

Later within the writing activity, Red asked me if she could finish her writing in the afternoon, and I responded as follows:

Kate: yes of course, if you want to. You can choose. Why don't you want to do it now?

(Red looks down and speaks very fast; I can't hear. I joke in a funny voice 'are you mumbling'. I mimic her voice playfully, carefully watching her expression and she smiles.)

Kate: what is it?

Red: I don't like writing.

(She looks uncomfortable, looking away and down)

Kate: why not?

Red: I can't do it. I don't like it

(She walks away.)

I hear the teacher behind me saying words, sounding them out and asking the children to find the sounds on the sound mat. I write down what the teacher is saying:

'the baby is born in the stable...then write the...find the letter... there...which one? What happens next? Don't stop...Do it again...watch...try it...this one...write that here...Yes, like this...'

I notice later, when taking a photo of Red's writing, that she has drawn lines all over her blank page.

(Field notes 17/12 c)

This encounter felt very uncomfortable as my own approach as a former teacher and researcher in responding to Red's request for help was very different to the teacher's input, and it was clear she was looking for these adult instructions and parameters from me. Not liking writing was not a constant feeling for Red, as she often expressed joy and engagement in the writing that she did, but her frustration here was evident. She was looking for the solution to the complexities of thinking that writing entailed for her from me; she was trying to locate the known structured framework in which her thoughts could be organised. The writing that the children were asked to do by the teacher was often a combination of dissatisfaction and enjoyment, shifting as it did in response to social and contextual elements: friends' comments, the intended audience, and the attention that their writing was given.

Red's insistence on being directed to the 'correct' elements to copy in making her writing 'right' can be linked to her experience as a writer within the letters and sounds activity. She had learnt to use this approach, a reliance on copying as a way of doing it properly, accurately and with regard to the adult expectations; it was a winning strategy for her. Writing tools, which would involve Red mediating her thinking through their usage (Wertsch, 1994), helping her to deepen her understanding of writing composition, were disregarded by Red in favour of a quest for 'correctness' that the teachers and more knowledgeable peers offered. It was this 'ideal' form of writing – writing as correct – that Red was seeking. She understood that her writing as an artefact was going to be measured against a cultural ideal (Cole, 1996). However, these cultural expectations appeared to limit her risk-taking as a writer. These understandings of writing were commonly shared by the older children in the group: Red, Blue and Gold, who were all born in the first term.

Writing as a future ideal – Writing as ‘good learning’

Individual writing activity is a complex process of knowledge transformation (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). It is a hard and difficult process. The children were searching for the best support in relation to classroom expectations so that they were able to action their thinking into marks on the page and overcome their difficulties as writers. What to write, and how to do it, was shaped by social and cultural values, and so this complex transformational thinking was being mediated by ideas about how writing should look and what was acceptable, informed by cultures of school literacy and the curriculum framework. Copying another text that was imbued with cultural correctness helped the children to find a way to fit the ‘image’ of the child writer that was being encouraged in the classroom.

‘*Good learning*’, a phrase often used in the classroom, could be identified as writing that was ‘to task’ and with the hoped-for outcome, which was able to be individually assessed in line with curriculum documentation. The teacher modelled ‘*good learning*’ by displaying examples of children’s ‘good writing’ on the wall. It was also clear in the teacher’s writing in the children’s learning log, as has been described in the previous assemblage. Photographs show quite how visible this ‘*good learning*’ is, through the choice of red and green pens. As well as comments made by the teacher as a dialogue with the children individually, which shows interest in their ideas, the teacher’s writing also included a meta-commentary for other adults in relation to assessment criteria. Examples of this included whether the writing was independently written, or whether it could evidence Early Learning Goals having been met.

The children, particularly Blue, were able to articulate what ‘good learning’ was very clearly. For example:

Blue: You have to do writing to make the teacher happy. To get a tick. I got two ticks

(Field notes 15/11)

During a more structured conversation with Blue about writing, in which we discussed what he needed to do to be a writer and what he had learnt within the class, he was keen to identify how this ‘*good learning*’ within writing is measured by others:

Kate: ok that's good, so do you have to think about what you want to write about first.

Blue: yes, cos right now I'm thinking about a story, and ... really hard

*Kate: say that again, ***, you need to write a story?*

Blue: I was thinking of writing a story so that I could be at a really high level

Kate: I see

Blue: on yellow you see, I want to be more than yellow, not yellow, I want to be more than yellow, over (blue is referring to the reading levels which are measured by colours)

Kate: Over the yellow? Is that the reading you are on now, yellow?

Blue: (nods)

(later)

Kate: but how do you do it? have you got better at writing do you think?

Blue: yes

Kate: how do you know?

Blue: Every time I write, I remember what I did at four and say, this is well better

Kate: What else?

Blue: when I get older I can do that, when my kid, after finished their reading, I can do the scribbles and mark it off

Kate: oh like the teacher can?

Blue: yeah, like 'that's scribbling' (imitates the teacher's voice)

Kate: ok

Blue: and that will be fun, scribble, scribble, scribble, scribble (turns into sing-song voice)

(Audio transcription of research conversation 18/6)

Blue was relating his writing to the progress he had made and hoped to be making in the future. Writing for him had an important meaning related to improvement and advancement. Unlike the other children in the group, he was very aware of the structures that surrounded him (for example, the reading scheme and the teacher's

comments) and how they framed his sense of his own individual stages of development. He was looking back, and looking forward, in understanding his improvements in writing, but also framing these within the given measurements of success, for example the colour that indicated the stage he had reached in the reading scheme or the teacher's authoritative marks on his work.

As a learner, he recognised himself as both *being* and *becoming*, tallying with Uprichard's (2008) research that demonstrated children's awareness of their own temporality as future becoming adults. The conversation with Blue also indicated his connection to the concept of the 'ideal', as something to be obtained in the future, and this links again to Cole's (1996) premise that the activity of producing writing as a cultural artefact is always in relation to the cultural ideal that is constructed within the social group. Blue understood the importance of his future '*becoming*' within the structures that dictated his success, and this was very important to him as a writer. Other children (Green, Yellow and Silver), although experiencing the same teacher input within the same school structure, remained separated from this conceptualisation of themselves as future writers, and did not make the same connections. Interestingly, these were also the youngest children in the group.

The limitations and potential of copying

The definition of copying is problematic as it can be used to describe a wide variety of text-making activities at the same time as being loaded with disapproval as an educational term. Some copying allows for creative reinvention; other copying activities limit the potential for new transformations in thinking. The copying that Red did in her phonic writing discussed earlier was controlled by the intentions of the teacher, the goal for that session, and the material resources available to her in representing those intentions. The possibilities for Red's own representation, as a process of redesign and modification involving elements of difference, were thwarted. Reproducing the teacher's representations of writing did not enhance Red's text making; rather, it was impoverishing it, and Red struggled with the mixed message that this type of copying was acceptable for some writing encounters, such as phonic writing, but not valued in others.

Different types of copying within the classroom were seen to afford more pleasurable engagement than copying for correctness or copying to seek the ideal. This

entailed children using a variety of tools and objects, and included copying from books, from each other and from the environment. Mavers (2011, pp. 12–14) contends that copying as a writing activity is always purposeful. It is a way for children to redesign and re-contextualise text, a process of re-presenting new ideas, which through the process of production involves some type of intentional change. However, it is commonly perceived as an educationally deficient activity in schools, offering little academic challenge and so is often discouraged.

My data did not indicate ideological opposition to copying in the classroom from the teachers, but much of the children’s writing that could be described as copying was not commented on by the teachers and occurred outside of adult-directed activities. The adults directed their gaze instead towards children’s writing that was in their log books, as an official space where discourse around the children’s writing was created through formative feedback and written comments. So, as a completed and assessable artefact, writing activity as a result of adult-directed activity and recorded within the log book was given more value by the adults than other writing activity. Conversely, copying, which was often created spontaneously or left unfinished on scraps of paper, occurring outside of curriculum planning but an aspect of many regular writing encounters for the children, was overlooked. Even being aware of its ‘valueless-ness’, the children invested in this type of writing activity, and afforded social and emotional value to it.

Red and Gold would regularly copy over the lower- and upper-case letters on the sound mats (a wipe-down resource to aid sound symbol recognition) with precision and accuracy, enjoying keeping the pen mark on top of the line of the letter shape, rubbing them all out when completed, and beginning again. Perhaps there was something safe and secure within the boundaries of this activity that they were searching for within other writing activities. Phonic writing activity offered them similar copying practice, but the copying they did on the boards offered them more opportunity to practise precise hand–eye coordination in forming graphemes and, significantly, to explore different tools in which to change the design of text. These elements of writing activity that involved choice and concentration over time were not on offer in phonic writing activity.

Name writing – copying and re-inventing

Blue, Red (sitting next to me), and Gold discuss how they felt when they started school.

Red: I was scared because I couldn't write but now I can, well some words, not all words

Kate: so could you write your name?

Red: yes easily I could do my name

(Field notes 12/11)

Children often come to school as writers armed with the ability to write their name, and all the children that I worked with wrote their name when entering school confidently, with differing degrees of accuracy. Most described or referred to writing their name as 'easy', often falling back on doing this when they got stuck writing other things. The children found numerous places in which to write their names; for example, they wrote their names by the side and on top of other texts, perhaps as a gesture of ownership and possibly as a sign of experimentation with space and design, an exploration of how familiar text could sit on the page. They also enjoyed photographing their names. These actions correspond with Pahl's (1999) research which noted young children's expression of enjoyment and absorption in copying their names. Kress (1997) also noted that children are endlessly fascinated by writing their name if they are given boundless opportunities to practise, experiment and importantly to shape it in new ways, as this observation of Green shows:

He finds his learning log and turns the pages slowly, looking at the things he has done previously. He finds a space, though not on a clean page, one with some teacher's writing on, and a picture he has previously drawn with red pencil. He writes his name as a list down the page, repeating. He uses capital letters and moves across the blank and lined parts without considering them, the organisation of his name as a list formation is more intentional than practising the letters correctly.

(Field notes 17/12)

Green must have been aware of the design already imprinted on the page, including the lines below and blank space on top; however, he decided to redesign the space with his name. His name writing gave him the opportunity to be the designer, something that Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) have argued is an essential aspect of writing.

In addition to regularly writing their name for authorship purposes and general enjoyment, name writing was something the children were asked to do every morning

when they entered the classroom. Made into a regulated activity, name writing involved the copying or tracing over of the children's names that were written on a wipe-clean piece of card that the children kept in their individual trays. The children were responsible for finding their name each morning and choosing a space to write in, either sitting at a table or on the floor, either tracing over their name or producing a copy of it in their learning logs, and sometimes on a scrap of paper. It was an exercise in handwriting, but this writing activity, structured and controlled as it was, offered freedom for the children to socially interact with each other and to move between different spaces within the classroom. This writing activity was sanctioned copying, but with less order and control than other representational activities, such as 'Letters and Sounds'. The teachers encouraged and talked to the children on an individual basis about their individual letter formation and the phonemes in their name, as did the children to each other in their social groups. The children understood that it was an exercise in rehearsal and practice, and so they sometimes used the time to trace over or copy other letters as well as their names, using wipe-clean 'sound mats' that had printed letters on them.

8.45 Gold is sitting at a table with five other children 'writing their names'. They are using whiteboards to draw and write. Some have name cards to copy and trace over with their fingers.

Kate: where is your name?

Gold: I lost it in my tray

Kate: you can't find it?

Gold: no

She has a writing board with capital letters and traces over them with dry-wipe pen. When the alphabet is complete, she turns it over and traces over the lower-case letters beginning them all on the line. She traces the letter shapes accurately, all in correct formation, concentrating. The rest of the children on the table begin to sing a song from a children's TV programme. Gold looks up but doesn't join in. Red sits down and watches what the group is doing. She leans over and tells Gold that her writing is 'really good'.

(Field notes 19/11)

There is a sense of camaraderie within the children's experience of writing activity here, an opportunity for them to share something together, which then erupts

into song; however, within this space, Gold was still able to find a place to fully concentrate on writing the letter shapes correctly. Red's admiration was not surprising as she herself chose to spend lots of time in the classroom tracing over the sound mats. The children also wanted to take photographs of their names and steered me towards recognising the value of this as writing production. They often engaged me in conversation about their names, and name writing activities, seeking me out to demonstrate their activities. For example:

Silver came up to me before registration and showed me his name writing. He sounded out all the individual phonemes, pointing to them individually. He was very confident in his knowledge, and clearly felt this was something to be proud of and to share with me.

(Field notes 26/11)

As there were no set intentions that could guide the interactions to support the writing practice, the teachers and children responded differently to the names being written. There was also no classroom culture of universal 'correctness' in the writing of their names, apart from being encouraged to form letters accurately, as each child's name was unique, joined together differently, and followed different patterns of letter order; practising them was a different experience for each child, and it was not possible to create unity of sameness.

The children were also afforded choices in this writing activity, able to use a range of pencils, crayons and pens when they wrote their names in different sizes, within different spaces on different pages. They were using different modes to express different ways of writing their name, and this multimodal engagement, which involved choice and selection, if not encouraged directly, was expected. So, this diversity of practice made it much more difficult for either the adults or children in the classroom to make a judgement about 'correctness'. As a reflection of this, the teacher talk with the children within these times was more individually responsive, less linked to outcomes, and more dialogical.

Name writing – creating connections through participation

The practice of writing names is often researched in relation to emergent literacy and phonic awareness (Drouin and Harmon, 2009; Puranik et al., 2011; Puranik and Lonigan,

2012). In these studies, name writing has been shown to support knowledge of some letter sounds, but not the broader knowledge of letter sounds needed to spell other words. The argument presented is that individual letter writing is a better indicator of children's emergent literacy (their developing spelling ability) than name writing. This presides within a theoretical perspective that conceives the formation of writing as linear and individual, with preconceived, universal measurable outcomes. Here, learning individual sounds is a measurable process where identifiers can be named. However, this approach ignores the importance of name writing as a way in which children are able to make connections socially, culturally and materially with their friends, family and the wider community.

Name writing happened in the classroom as a social activity, and helped to develop the children's social worlds. Writing names was a socially functional activity. Children wrote their names within social groupings, corresponding with Dyson's (1989, 2013) argument that writing is a means to develop peer culture. The dialogue that children formed around this type of writing, the encouragement and commentary from each other, validated their work and made it into something that had a social purpose. This was due to the unstructured space, or 'smooth space', in which it occurred, which opened up possibilities to make social connections to others, and from this, to explore the social possibilities that writing can present:

Yellow: I like doing my writing

Kate: OK, what sort of writing is it that you like best of all?

Yellow: writing my name

Kate: writing your name, yeah?

Gold: my best is writing cards

Kate: you like doing that? Do you do that at home as well?

*Gold: **** (Gold's friend) is not allowed to see that card that I made for her because it's her birthday card, cos it's her birthday tomorrow*

(Audio transcript of group mapping task outside of the classroom 3/7)

For Gold, writing names was a way of creating connections with her friends and participating in cultural activity. Name writing for her was also a way in which she could

transform other objects so that they became personalised, as can be seen from this observation:

*Gold and I are counting the sides of the shape. We count sides and corners. She says that she needs to write her name. **** writes her name on a paper shape, and Gold tells her that she isn't supposed to do that. She herself then takes a pink circle and writes 'love Gold', saying it out loud as she writes. I ask her why she has written love next to her name and she said it was because it is from her. She puts it back in the pile of cut-out shapes.*

(Field notes 11/3)

Name writing has certain transformational powers, especially in association with other powerful emotional words, such as 'love'. This writing encounter suggests that Gold and her friend are transforming the meanings of the paper shapes by redesigning them with important words added. Now these shapes, having been modified, contain additional elements related to the children's identities (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). This vignette shows that when young children write their names, they do this to explore the multiple possibilities that the textual mode offers children in redesigning their world. This redesign may re-state, or change, the meanings that objects and text have within the social group. Importantly, their social agency can be recognised here in their transformative actions as writers (Kress, 2000b).

Conclusion – writing as representation or writing as *difference*

If writing is a fractured activity, disconnected from the 'whole', then it is much harder for children to make relational sense of what writing is and means. Writing activities that are given cultural value in school are framed and bounded by the idea that knowledge is about correct representation, and because of this, other writing activity, where rich potential exists, is not attended to. There are multiple possibilities of meaning-making in children's mundane regular writing activities that need to be examined more closely.

Writing as fixed replication – ‘hanging in the air’

The ‘phonics writing’ activities that I observed and that the children talked about were encounters where children were writing to accurately represent what had come before, a process of writing as repetition, where the parts of language were systematically and intentionally separated and detached from each other. These segmented parts, although connected in their structural dimensions, remained unconnected to other essential features of writing, either as a social instrument or as a fundamentally physical and material experience. The associations being constructed by the children remained within the boundaries of the activities themselves, and their ability to transfer this knowledge appeared stilted and limited.

This type of writing was concerned with accuracy and correctness, repeating the known, and signifying and symbolising knowledge about letters and sounds, with an underlying assumption that these segments of language could be transferred to other writing activities. However, as a language tool, it was restricted by the structures of the activity in which the children experienced it. It was a physically bounded experience framed within the carpet space and was limited to the common resources available; movement and exploration were constrained. As a writing activity, it was purely representational about showing or performing correct mark making. For some of the children (Green, Red, Blue, Yellow and Gold), the phonic writing activities that they had taken part in ‘hung in the air’, waiting for a further meaningful connection, which is why they found it so difficult to connect it to other forms of language, to make sense of it, and explain it to others.

Writing names – ‘gestures in the air’

In writing their name, children were also practising correctness and accuracy, but the space in which it occurred and the attachments that surrounded it were constructed from their own lived experience, connected to meaningful relationships, identities and potential usage. The children’s name writing activities were generally unmonitored by the adults in the class and were not formally assessed. Name writing occurred frequently, took place in many different contexts, and had elements of free choice of resources,

spaces and design. Children often talked about their name and wrote their name unprompted, making links between home and school.

Their name writing practice was *re*-representative of personal connections and networks, not merely a correct representation of something external to them. Their names were both signs that carried changing meanings and also tools for experimentation and exploration. Name writing was essentially desirable due to its function as a networked and relational practice, where links to other writing experiences could be created, and where the potential for transformation could be clearly traced, within its multiple functions and connections to other events, people, places and materials. For these children, writing their name was a movement of thought, expressed within an open or *smooth space*, or as Vygotsky would describe it, they were able to create '*gestures in the air*' (1978, p.107).

The image of the writing child

What underpins both of these writing activities within the phonic teaching sessions and opportunities for name writing is an image of the writing child (Hermansson, 2011, p. 51). This image pertains to the planning, resourcing and assessment of writing in line with the curriculum. The image of the writing child held within phonic writing activity is one where children represent knowledge through performance: learning as 'correctness' in relation to 'ideals'. The image of the writing child held by adults in name writing activities is one where the child is an emergent writer, an individual constructor of knowledge progressing independently. However, children 'imagine' these activities very differently. Phonic writing for them is detached, discrete and disconnected; name writing, on the other hand, is relational and networked, and so much more desirous.

Children's 'copying' as stratified or different

Children's copying as a regular writing activity, both in phonic and name writing, can be shown to be either confined within stratified events, where the material/dialogical features of writing are controlled, or it can expand concrete and practised meaning-making processes. Analysing these vignettes of writing encounters to create this

assemblage has revealed distinctive qualities of *difference* (Deleuze, 2004a), a divergence and variation that can be shown to exist within these activities. These differences indicate that repetitive writing or copying for young children, activities that are carried out with an intention to embed fixed knowledge of language structures, can be unbound through the actual practices of doing them and doing them differently. Writing phonemes and graphemes should be something that is '*connected to*', rather than '*transferable to*', other necessary modes of language and communication. The children within these 'copying' writing encounters indicated that it is this process, one where personal and social relational links can be made, that is most productive in playing with and therefore learning about the graphical and phonetic features of writing, rather than one that is limited to imitation. What may also be missing in SSP programmes of activity for children is an acknowledgement that '*Phonemic awareness may, especially initially, not mean the ability to hear or perceive phonemes, as much as to feel them*' (Juel, 2006, p. 419).

Writing a sound is often contained within gestures, within the mouth or the body; it is important to recognise that phonic knowledge is embodied and sensorial. Otherwise, as Ingold has argued (2007, p. 136), if we rely on the drilling of manual writing 'correctness', children are only ever going to be taught to recognise the letter forms and not the gestures (the meanings) that should lie behind them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Assemblage four – Writing as fleeting playful action: Social, sensorial and multimodal movements

Introduction

In this chapter, four playful writing encounters have been gathered together as an assemblage to form a discussion about the different aspects of writing as playing, or playing as writing. These encounters, expressed as vignettes of text and photographs, have been selected because they illustrate important tracings of *movements* within young children's writing. This chapter will demonstrate that writing, drawing and text making in playful activity, as a process of movement, enables multiple features of writing and text making to be produced.

Young children's modes of literacy often came together as part of playful activity during this study. The data produced by recording these encounters demonstrated how the writing and drawing events within play were sensorial and pleasurable for the children. These elements developed as they intra-acted with materials and each other. This playful type of writing encounter is often unnoticed by adults, due to the momentary, passing and ephemeral nature of both the activity and the artefacts that are created. However, as will be shown, these encounters are richly literate events.

This chapter illustrates the importance of understanding the generative 'playfulness' within children's writing activity: play as *playing*, in the present. It suggests that there is value in writing in play within the moment it occurs, rather than in how it can demonstrate children's 'growth' in relation to predetermined stages of cognitive, emotional or social development. I will show how playful writing involves propagative processes and complex movement, and is highly significant for understanding the changing and fleeting nature of young children's writing experience.

Observing children's playful writing – researcher's writing as *becoming*

Below is a narrative observation of a playful encounter and a sample of field notes, presented as a 're-constitution' rather than an exact reproduction of the writing that I did in the field. Although nearly all of the text below has been taken from my writing, which at the time included not only text but also significant spaces and directional lines, I have re-written parts to articulate more clearly for the reader (for example by correcting the grammar) what was happening within the encounter. This data as a vignette, alongside others in this chapter, is presented as an illustration, a writing up, of the transitory, associative aspects of playful writing encounters, within a given time, gathered as a '*bundle of relations*' (Sellers, 2013, p. 110). By pondering over the presentation of this encounter, I came to 'tune into' how the children were learning about writing in their play, and how my own interpretations and analysis of this were being constructed from the data. For both the children in the encounter and myself, this re-constitution of data texts '*required the mind to go beyond the given*' (Deleuze, 2004b, p. 45). The children as players were able to expand their ideas and expressions about text making and drawing beyond the structural frameworks of learning expected. Through analytical mapping of the children's activity, I was also able to identify forceful elements of writing as part of play, which I had not yet considered prior to creating this assemblage.

*Yellow, Blue and Silver are standing in a line by the cupboard housing the individual trays for their work, all holding dry-wipe whiteboards for drawing. I notice them because of their engagement and laughter, and their talk; they are chattering away. They move to sit down where I had been previously with Gold on the comfy chair. I follow them and try to sit out of their eye sight. Blue leans over to me: 'we are drawing monsters', he says. Silver turns to me and repeats Blue's words and says 'look' as he shows me his drawing. They are laughing and laughing, sometimes hysterically, almost falling off the chair. Yellow and Blue are sharing a board, although they both have their own pen. Blue is drawing and says, 'this is my sword', then Yellow rubs it out: 'you're rubbish at it' she says. Blue laughs and says '**** (Yellow) get your own, do it yourself'. Silver sitting next to them draws some stars and lines. 'This is my name' he says as he waves his board in front of their faces. They all laugh. Yellow is scribbling fast. She shouts 'get working' to Blue and nudges him. Silver hides his board. He doesn't seem to be quite 'in the game' as the others are. He shows his board to Blue again, trying to get his attention, and then starts to rub out his own work*

telling them it's tidy up time. Blue responds by saying 'look at mine'. Both he and Yellow wiggle on the chair, rising slightly up and down with excitement; they lean forward and back laughing. Yellow is making letter shapes quickly; she is moving her head up and down and side to side as she writes, her head gesturing the words, catching Blue's eye at the same time, occasionally elbowing him to keep up with her and grabbing his arm.

*When the boys are gone, I ask Yellow if I can take a photo of her board and ask her what the marks are. She says 'I can't read'. I say 'What's it about'. She says 'it's about the monsters, the monster was a dragon'. 'So is **that** the dragon?' I ask, and she looks confused.*

(Narrative observation and field notes 6/2 a)

Very soon after this observation, I wrote the following:

The children's marks on the dry-wipe whiteboards appeared as an extension of the game of monsters and dragons that they were playing before. Yellow made it clear that the idea of the dragon wasn't being represented through their mark making – this wasn't what her marks were doing, but the actions of pen on board were in some way transforming and telling the story. The marks appeared not only to be symbolic of the children's shared ideas, thoughts, and emotions, but the use of the pens and boards themselves was important to how this was expressed. It was action led and frantic at times, involving movements in their social relationships, between the real or material world and their imagination. They were writing quickly as if to get their ideas down and concentrating hard on the task as if the game depended on the marks they were making. They needed to make the marks for the game to continue. Although it wasn't my intention, I was included here, as a point of sharing or justification for their play. I wonder whether that was why they found it so funny – they were pretending to write, and they knew it wasn't correct. I was part of the whole writing performance.

(Field notes 6/2 b)

In re-presenting this data, I recognise the extent to which my reflective field notes were written with an analytical tone, providing a deeper description of what I thought were the significant aspects of the event. My reflective writing was merging previously known conceptual knowledge and newly observed data together to form different conceptual understandings, seeking connections and exploring this through my

own writing activity. By writing about this observed encounter, I was creating an analysis: a textual retelling of the story of the children playing and writing. I was developing a more coherent story by troubling over small details and larger textures to produce a depth and understanding from within the messiness and incoherence of the data (Etherington, 2004, p. 81). My knowledge of the data was moving and transforming; by plugging in my written observations to the conceptual ideas I was employing (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013, p. 123), I was bringing forth new ways of *becoming-with* the data. From these initial tentative footsteps of analysis in my field note reflections, I was able to develop trails and establish clearer pathways between the encounter, as data, and my conceptual understanding.

Friendships and relational movements

Masny and Cole (2009) have written that children's social relationships as writers provide continuous movements that intersect in complex non-linear ways. The play dynamic that was formed within this encounter centred on the relationships between three friends, and changed unpredictably as a response to movements between them, be they physical, affective or discursive. The children demonstrated a desire to share experience and keep pace with each other. This is illustrated by Yellow and Blue bouncing on the chair together and sharing a dry-wipe board on which they were making marks, as 'action writing', almost in unison. Their actions as a way of consolidating their relationships provided a forceful energy as the game progressed. However, the movement between these three friends was changeable, and could also be less energetic and more reticent at times, for example when Silver hid his board, stopped and stood apart from the action.

These relational dimensions between the children helped to shape the marks that they were producing. Their text making within the encounter was generated not as a result of official writing practices, but as a direct result of their peer-to-peer relationships, demonstrating their ability to create writing experiences that, although unofficial, have cultural significance to them within their friendship group (Dyson, 1989, 2008). The relational connections formed between the children were significant in understanding how the formation of writing took place, and the social and cultural possibilities that mark making offers friends who are writing together.

However, although the social and cultural aspects of this writing *together* can be understood through its process of production, it is important to note how this occurs within a multiple and moving assemblage that is not limited to social and cultural

elements but is a combination of multiple connective factors. To understand how the generation of their shared cultural writing experience came into existence, as part of a social friendship group, we need to recognise how these forces work as one component, within other relational connections, both material and human. The children's friendship towards each other provided an energy within the play, but it was in joining this energy with other elements, which are discussed below, where mark making emerged. It is possible therefore to argue that children's socially shaped writing activity resulted from something akin to a '*meshwork*' (Ingold, 2007, p. 81), consisting of interwoven trails made of threads and traces along which lives are lived, and where ideas and objects 'knot' together:

...nothing can escape the tentacles of the meshwork of habitation as its ever-extending lines probes every crack or crevice that might potentially afford growth and movement. Life will not be contained, but rather threads its way through the world along the myriad lines of its relations. (Ingold, 2007, p. 103)

The children's playful writing viewed in this way – as an *entanglement* of their bodies and tools, other texts they had encountered, and shared sensations – created in them a desire to write, draw and mark make. The social and cultural aspects of writing that they were engaged with as friends was formed as an aspect of all of these different and movable factors, rather than being detached from them.

'Material togetherness' within playful writing

The materials that the children encountered within their play were influential elements within the social and cultural production of their mark making. For example, the way they spoke, moved and wrote together was in response to the forces exerted by some of these materials. The chair in which Blue and Yellow sat closely, with Silver perched on the end, and on which they wiggled excitedly, provided a small space in which their bodies could move together. They elbowed each other and expressed their joy by bouncing on the chair, and this movement was replicated in how they moved the marker pens on the board. The chair had been selected by the children because of this physical potential; as a material object, it allowed the children to do these things. Bennett (2010, p.2) would argue that the chair had '*thing-power*', or a vibrancy that affected the children's physical bodies. The resonance, or quality, of the chair was integral to how the children's writing was produced; how they gestured, touched, drew and wrote together.

To illuminate the connection between writing objects and friendships further, I have re-presented below a writing encounter between Blue and Silver later on in the year. The boys sat at a table together drawing, using dry-wipe boards and black pens.

Silver is watching Blue drawing a fish on the dry-wipe board and is creating similar shapes on his board. He rubs it out. He is getting upset. We talk about why.

*Silver: *** (Blue) has taken my board. This one isn't smooth. I don't like the feel'*

(I turn it over for him)

Kate: it is smooth now

*Blue sees that his friend is upset and exchanges the board. Silver begins to draw again. He does it carefully and smiles when I ask him what he has done but does not say anything. He also does not respond to **** (another friend) who asks him what he is drawing. As he draws, he makes fishy sounds – swish, swash etc. – and does the mouthing of a fish. Eventually he shows me the drawing and tells me it is a fish. He shows others and writes 'fish' on the board, asking me what comes first, the 's' sound or the 'h'. He is really pleased and smiling, and shows it to his teacher.*

(Field notes 17/6 a)

The dry-wipe object is really important to Silver; clearly the feel, the touch makes a difference to how he can 'get on' with writing. It holds much more meaning to him than how it can be used. The whiteboard has material significance, and this is linked to his friendship with Blue, and related to his desire to experience what Blue is feeling, and therefore what he is able to do with the board. The object contains elements of friendships, relationships, former memories and sensory experiences.

(Field notes 17/6 b)

The materiality of the wipe-dry board appeared to have an effect on Silver because of the sensorial qualities it possessed. Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action is useful here to understand how Silver intra-acted with this object, as a merging together or mutual constitution of the human and the material. The dry-wipe board was an object which became significant to him as it fused with his feelings towards Blue. Silver desired what Blue had, both the object and what he was able to do with it. In this encounter, the

object became centrally important to how Silver was able to draw. His actions were in response to the materials; if the board had been replaced by paper or a touchscreen, then a different sensory, emotional and relational encounter would have occurred. In agreement with Barad, the materiality of the object is integral to human's existence, and how Silver generates writing in this example demonstrates this. Although the materiality of Silver's encounter is significant, the drawing was produced not solely as a result of the object's elemental make-up, but in how these materials were connected to social relationships. Silver desired to have the materials which allowed him to draw and write successfully, just as his friend was doing. He was not encountering the potential of writing materials alone, but formed a complex relational pathway between the material object, its sensorial qualities and his best friend. Silver was enabled to write and draw when he could map these things successfully together.

To understand playful writing activity as socially constructed and situated, we should incorporate the significance of material elements and recognise how they offer different socially desirable and culturally affective possibilities for children. This concurs with Rautio and Winston's argument that practices of play are '*complex entanglements of congregational, socio-material activity, rather than only individual and interactional*' (2015, p. 22).

Playful writing – spontaneity, humour, performance and power

As playful writing encounters, these were unplanned events and illustrate Lieberman's argument that an essential aspect of all types of play is spontaneity (1977). The spontaneous nature within Lieberman's definition of playfulness can be recognised within the unprompted movement of the children through one space into another, as well as the unstructured nature of the changes in what the children were doing, saying and writing. This spontaneity was grasped by the children in their performances with each other and myself. Although unrehearsed, the first encounter with Silver, Blue and Yellow was performance led, and this performativity appeared to give the children pleasure. For example, when Yellow tells Blue to 'get working' and 'you're rubbish at it', his response is not to be upset but to enjoy these forceful exertions as a new dimension in the game, allowing the game to be drawn forward in a new direction. The children did not take on clearly defined roles within their play, and therefore the possibilities for what happened were not delineated. Rather, they were experimenting with the potential that a

performance might offer. Blue found it fun to be challenged by Yellow in this socially unconstrained way; it enabled further excitement and dared him to respond, challenging him to be resourceful in keeping the performativity within the game alive. This can be understood as a performance movement, both moving towards and away from each other, a way of ensuring the flow of the game (Sellers, 2013, p. 114).

Silver also adds to the performance by showing his drawing of stars and telling the others that this is his name, which they find funny. However, Silver then sits outside of this performance, trying to bring in external social structures in which to control the movement within the play by telling the children it is tidy up time. The performance movement he offered, a subversion of his representational drawing, was reined back in. Silver was expanding the play, but then suddenly withdrew. As Sellers argues, in play, borders are crossed over and then crossed out (Sellers, 2013, p. 109).

The spontaneity within the performance extended to include me, as an outsider of the play looking in, producing a perverse internal–external storyline. Unprompted, Blue told me that they were drawing dragons and by doing this, my presence had become part of the game. The performance level was heightened from then on, as my actions as an observer of their writing provided the possibility of merging pretence and reality. This reaching out beyond the boundaries of the play purposefully destabilised our established roles. I was known to the children as an adult interested in their writing; therefore, with glee, they performed as ‘writers’, busily producing lines that they knew would not be considered ‘real’ writing. This succeeded in challenging and confusing my role as an observer. The children had invented ‘substitute writing’, which could be described as ornamental (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 444), as a feature of their performance and playfulness, not symbolising anything or inscribing something else, but generated as a way in which to tease apart the binary roles that had been assigned. This provided humour and risky excitement for the children but unnerved me. My role as an external researcher separated from the children’s play performance had become dubious.

Considering the implications of this performance writing in play helps us to understand how children are actualising the connections needed for writing, or responding to them, traversing across recognisable ways of being and bringing about new thinking. This is described by Deleuze and Guattari (2004 p.556) as creating ‘*lines of flight*’, in other words, producing ‘*thought movements*’. The children were creating thought movement as writers by constructing relational forces with me, and importantly these movements were mutating and non-static. By being unconstrained by organising

principles, this play activity allowed for power flows to be disrupted, enabling the crossing of internal–external play boundaries. The children were not constrained by their play; rather, it was the opposite. Their actions were unexpected and to a certain extent subversive of authority. Observing writing as part of play allowed me to consider how young children’s unregulated actions were occurring, something that Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) have argued is needed in researching children’s experience to counter the imposition of further regulatory ‘participation’ onto children. Play may not be a tool in which the children were empowered to take part in my research, but as a feature of learning within the Reception class, it created avenues in which they could demonstrate their desires, one of which was to resist adult presumptions.

This desire, or power to express, was also realised through the joy that could be observed in their laughter, and anticipation of each other as a combined, interconnected process between them. The children were activating the power they had within their performance as relational to the powers of each other (Colebrook, 2010, p. 216). This power as action maximised further potential of the game, enhancing the pleasure it provided. The performativity of the children within their writing play affected, and was an effect of, shifting positions of power, and the children’s enjoyment was constructed from this.

Sensorial qualities of playful writing

Deleuze and Guattari have proposed that we ‘*paint, sculpt, compose, and write with sensations*’ (2004, p. 166). It is important to note, however, that for Deleuze, the notion of sensation is inextricably linked to biology and occurs *prior* to discovering the true meaning of something through reasoned cognition (Conley, 2010). If young children’s writing activity is defined purely in terms of representational action, as a process of reasoned cognition, it means that sensation for the writer can only have meaning through the use of signified language, rather than as a physical act. A Deleuzian argument would propose that this is sensation as *an after-thought*, rather than sensation itself, and suggests that an understanding of writing needs to be more closely aligned with the initial embodied sensations within writing production. In the encounters I observed, I would suggest that young children’s writing activity as part of their play does have considerable sensorial qualities and, importantly, it is possible to recognise these occurring both before *and as part of* rationalised thinking, as a continuum.

Throughout the first encounter, the children were experiencing sensations as an *effect*. These effects took place in their physical movements, touch, speech and verbal sounds, facial expressions and gesticulations. This was both the *effect of sensation and sensation itself* as a continuing process. The children were sensing and at the same time being affected by these sensations, and then displaying them to others; it was how they played together. They were clearly writing with sensations and this sensory experience was *combined with* the representational act of making marks, rather than being a precursor to it. It was difficult to see how the sensation of writing as an embodied action could be divorced from the gestural element of representational mark making.

Particularly noteworthy was *the sensation* of the motioning rhythms of marks on the page produced by Blue and Yellow as part of their dramatic performance. The sensation was fundamentally linked to the physical movement of the pen, *producing an effect* which the children wanted to continue. The fast scribbling of Yellow, her eye contact with Blue, their laughter and physical approximation to each other were all intertwined as affective forces within this sensorial activity. The children's continual movements within their mark making were produced as a result of the sensations they were encountering and then responding to. So, Yellow's and Blue's production of abstract squiggles was related to bodily sensation; it is this sensing that links the body to language. This concurs with Deleuze's (2005b) argument that the children's writing encounters were primarily a series of bodily sensations: an embodied experience. This analysis suggests that young children's mark making as writing involves more than representation and rationalisation from sensory experiences, but has sensation as an integral part of its effect on how things are produced by children, with their bodies, in different spaces and places. This is what Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 166) are referring to when they state that '*we paint, sculpt, compose, and write with sensations*'. Although sensation is felt in response to events just before rational thought, it is also a continual presence in how it affects the children and therefore how the events themselves are created.

It is the essential element of spontaneity or changeability within playful writing that encourages sensation to be brought into existence within it. It is primary force within the play and is extended to the writing that occurs as an aspect of it. Young children's writing that comes into fruition within a playful context has the opportunity to engage with and explore these vital sensorial elements of writing which encourage and inform new ways of writing.

Embodied writing that *becomes* representational language

Studying writing encounters as lines of sensation can help us to trace how children's writing has been created as an entanglement between language and the body (MacLure, 2011). Olsson has written that '*sense is on the border of language*' (2009, p. 53), indicating that it is possible to consider sensation as another dimension of representational language that is vital to its process of production. As I have shown above, young children's writing viewed as productive activity is sensory, so perhaps there is a need to consider further how children's physical sense of writing not only borders language, but is a force within it. The sensorial elements of Yellow's writing can be understood as issuing from the body (MacLure, 2013a). So, rather than working on the margins of language, the physical sensation of it is fundamental to how it is produced. This is demonstrated in how Silver and Blue encountered writing with the wipe-dry boards in the second encounter.

Within the first play encounter between Silver, Yellow and Blue, the children were engaged in writing play that was not concerned with representing and signifying the symbols of written language; this is clear from Yellow's confused response to my question about whether the writing was representative of a dragon. They did not appear to be practising and imitating adult writing behaviour as part of an emergent process or developmental stage of pre-writing, which is often how children's early mark making in play is interpreted (Clay, 1975; Teale and Sulzby, 1994). Their writing in this encounter involved more complex and overlapping forces that brought together the sensations of imaginative game creation with the marks on the board. The writing had importance within their play because it was specifically abstract rather than symbolic, and therefore transcended meaning-making as purely representational of something else. The *nonsense* writing that was being created by the children was not the opposite of writing *for sense*. The writing within this encounter was *producing sense*: the sense that the children have to each other, to their imagination, to their bodies, and to their material world. The children are producing sense of things using the 'new machinery' within the play that they are encountering (Deleuze, 2004b).

Playful writing as a multimodal ensemble – An adventure into ‘smooth space’

Taking a multimodal perspective, the children within this playful writing encounter can be observed as users of a range of modes in their play – e.g. mark making, gesturing, sound and touch – to shape the use of their shared materials. This could be interpreted as a response to the affordance that materials offer for meaning-making, or signifying thought. However, as shown above, the ‘shaping’ of meaning within the social context, understood in terms of how the materials the children were using were socially and culturally regulated between them, also needs to recognise this as a materially embodied experience which fused together the children’s sensory, material and physical movements between different modes. As Scollon and Scollon write, ‘*no mode of communication operates in a monomodal fashion, even if it is useful to abstract a mode from the context for the purposes of close analysis*’ (2011, p. 180).

Although my focus is on children’s text making and writing, analysing how the multimodal experience of the children comes together as an ensemble, where relationships between the modes are combined, furthers my understanding about how the writing mode of communication has come into existence. By looking at how this ensemble has been formed within these encounters, I have been surprised at how the ‘writing’ has been formed in terms of modal resistance. The normal uses of these modes have been destabilised. The children’s laughter, their ‘pretend writing’ and their gaze to include me all challenge the modal relationship between the user and the social context. So, rather than modes showing organised and regulated usage, we see modes being socially and culturally transgressive. This would indicate that the children were aware of the social signs associated with the modes that they are playing with, but their actions as players, their ability within these moments to generate new thinking and relationships with each other and the materials they are using, permitted the creation of a new space in which the modes, as communication, could be extended. The children understood how the mode is used to represent the social world (how writing, in the form of recognisable letter shapes, communicates to others), but by playing with writing, by following the material and physical potentialities of writing, the mode was reconfigured. The children’s play writing, if we interpret it as sign making, signified both *sameness* (the expected) and *difference* (the unexpected).

Multimodal writing in play, which works as an ensemble, offers a ‘*smooth space*’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) in which children can respond to each other and the

materials at hand in surging movements rather than through predetermined narratives. This allows for *'a kind of thought that is determined not by universals but by singularities'* (Hodgson and Standish, 2007, p. 10), unfolding through *'an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction'* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 494). Although the children were aware of the modes on offer in the writing structures surrounding them, and drew them into their play, their writing activity during this play encounter had yet to be formulated. The children were therefore encountering modes of writing as fluid rather than rigid.

The type of writing encounters presented above as playful are not predefined or existent within *'striated spaces'* where modes of communication are fixed; instead, they are open-ended and resistant to categorisation. They allow children to understand writing to be *continuously developing in form*. The generative encounter itself should therefore be prized, not ignored, as it can help us to understand the possibilities that children's multimodal playful writing offers children *to become writers*. To do this though, we need to value the many varieties of writing that are able to be created by young children, and construct an image of children as makers of multiple literacies (Masny, 2006).

The writing line *'goes out for a walk'*

As a vignette, the observation below of Silver making maps has been selected to illustrate how movement was an integral aspect of young children's writing activity. Silver's map making: the marks he made on the paper, his physical movements in and out of geographical spaces, and the gestures towards others, had a fundamental moving quality about them. Tracing these movements demonstrated how his writing line *'goes out for a walk'* (Klee, 1961, p.105). It showed the necessity for children to extend and curtail movement between people, spaces and materials to be able to produce writing artefacts in playful encounters,

Silver chooses a blue crayon and draws circular patterns on light brown 'sugar' paper. He rolls the paper up.

*Kate: **** (Silver) why have you rolled it up?*

Silver: because it's a map

(Unrolling the paper, he points to the bottom)

Silver: these are the fireworks and this is the pavement

Kate: where does it go?

Silver points to the top and the beginning of the line he has drawn. He circles in the air with his finger quickly to replicate the drawing movement and motion of his line on the paper.

Silver: it goes round and round and round to here

(He begins to move away)

*Silver: I'm going to show it to *** (his friend)*

(A few minutes later he returns)

*Silver: ***'s is black, is big with big lines*

(He looks at his map)

Silver: I want to do another one

(Silver gives me his first picture and then uses a red pen to make circular swirls in a repeated pattern and rolls the picture up.)

Silver: this one is for the café (pause), no stage

(He runs to his friends playing in the role play area which is set up like a stage. Then he runs back and gives the map to me and runs off again. Later Silver returns to find his maps.)

Silver: these are for my mummy

(Later the maps are found on the floor.)

(Audio transcription of research conversation and field notes 12/11)

As has been discussed within the previous assemblages of data, young children's writing activity often takes place within rigidly segmented spaces. Lines are placed to firmly mark out the boundaries of these writing activities, plotted from the coordinates of structured frameworks for literacy and assessment. Ingold suggests that these lines are produced as a network of immovable connected points (2007, p. 82). These are rigid lines, producing routes for children to follow as writers; they are a way to travel from point *a* to point *b*. Children's writing activity framed within these lines is a process of assembling the

pattern already mapped, a joining of the dots. Writing activity, once completed within these lines, has nowhere else to go, no travels beyond, apart from onto another set of predefined connecting lines (Ingold, 2007, p. 74).

However, writing activity in play is something different, as it has no such plotting emanating from predetermined structures, and the spatial boundaries are flexible and responsive. When Silver made his map, he began with seemingly no prompting, although his desire was probably related to the continuation of a game he had with his friend, who had also made a map. Silver's map as an artefact was very simple and quickly produced. It contained no specific references to places or objects, and therefore did not appear to signify to others particular elements of reality. Nor did it represent multiple ideas or layered meanings, as Mavers was able to explore through her interpretations of older children's map drawing (2011, p. 89). So, if Silver's map was not intended to represent ideas to others, what was it for? To understand this, I want to highlight the importance of how the map is made, and within that production, the importance of movement.

Silver's map is made of a continuing line which circles around and about, a line that is not limited to the media of the crayon, or pen and paper. For example, he shows it is possible for his map to be extended into the air with his finger, as '*writing in the air*' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.107), and demonstrates Silver's thinking as a language user. So, Silver's map-making moves. It begins with the material (crayon and paper), changes shape (as it is rolled up), becomes a signal for something else (the gesture), and then goes back again to the material (as the map then becomes an object to share with his friend). Map-making is able to traverse both material and language encounters, incorporating embodied motion *and* be representative of thought. This was also touched on by Wohlwend (2008, p. 133), who noted that children engage in movement through time and space as they play, arguing that this is another dimension in which children are able to transform modes and transcend the expectations within school literacy discourse.

The lines Silver has produced here are very different to other lines within the classroom; they are able to grow and move, and as shown in this encounter, they are also able to do what Klee aspires to do in drawing: to continually extend, grow and have no definite point of origin or destination (Klee, 1961). Silver's map drawing is a movement which goes beyond the marks he is making, and takes him into different geographical and thinking spaces. It is a movement which links together other movements – i.e. the travelling of his crayon across paper, the motioning of his finger in the air, the running of

his body across the classroom – all combined within the map-making encounter as a changing, repositioning activity.

But how does the movement intrinsic to the drawing of maps relate to the writing of text? Ingold (2007, p. 132), by using Chinese calligraphy as a reference, argues that drawing and writing are both essentially about rhythmic movements and delicate gestures which are brought forth by the writer's observations of movements in the world around them. In writing, as a second order thinking process, these gestures or movements have been fixed (Vygotsky, 1978), but writing is still gestural and so still related to physical and material acts which involve motion. As a writer, Silver is able to motion or shift into new areas – materially, socially, physically and affectively – as he gestures both to symbolise something to others and to sense his way within the world.

Marks as trails of movement towards others

The movement in Silver's map-making was evidenced in numerous ways: the constant change of the materials he was using, his physical transfer into different geographical spaces, and the fluid associations continually created between his map and the people who mattered to him. This was a relational movement which diverged throughout the encounter. Movement in terms of his relationships to others can be seen in how the map as an artefact takes shape. Having shown his map to his friend, a reciprocal interaction where he took careful note of how his friend's map had been drawn, he became motivated to respond and drew a second map. His attention shifted to a new map-making opportunity, and then I, another association, became the keeper of the first map. The maps were in motion throughout, transitioning in relation to others.

Silver's new map was made for '*the stage*', as he wanted the children playing in that area to make use of it in their play. However, the second map, like the first, returned to me, perhaps as I was seen by Silver as a safe and attentive pair of hands within the encounter. Silver drew his maps as a vehicle to generate social action and sustain fruitful relationships; this involved a continuing back and forth movement between himself and other people. This action, his production of the map, was a *motioning between* materials, signs and his social relationships. At times, these movements deviated from what was initially intended, as shown when the maps at the end of the encounter were found abandoned, even though Silver had previously expressed his desire to give them to his mum. When these trails of relational movements were charted, it became clear that

Silver's imperative was not fixed: his intentions digress and wander. This relational movement is something intrinsic to children's mark making, an essential part of how the lines are able to be produced.

Taking note of the dynamics of writing, text making and drawing that young children do in terms of movement towards and away from people, materials, spaces, etc. enables us to see the actualities of its production, traced here through close observation. As the producer of marks or lines, Silver, just like a snail, has left a trail behind him. As a trail maker, Silver's actions show pathways in his learning. It is important that we follow his trail so that we can understand how his mark making was generated and how the desires he had as part of a process of construction have led to its production. There is a need to value how children 'make the trail' as writers, as series of movements both as having the potential to represent thought and as a shifting embodied material intra-activity.

Redesign as movement

The encounter below is a re-representation of my field notes from when I observed the children redesigning my visitor sticker that I wore every time I visited their classroom. It illustrates that the notion of movement in children's mark making, as original line generation, can also demonstrate how children playfully modify the fixed signs and symbols of writing within their environment.

*Gold has brought in some glittery colourful letter stickers from home, which she and her friend **** have played with on and off throughout the day. From a distance, I can see that their play with the stickers involves them drawing pictures and then putting the stickers on each other's drawings, which they do carefully, discussing what stickers should go where. There are other children leaning over to take a look. As I get closer, I can hear that the other children are pleading for the girls to share the stickers, and Gold and Emily are deciding together who should be given a sticker and which one. Silver arrives to show me the sticker Gold has given him. It is a K and he wants me to have it as I am 'K for Kate'. Gold and Emily are watching our exchange. They come over to where I am sitting and suddenly the stickers take on a new force. Gold and Emily quickly put stickers on my clothes. I decide not to encourage this, and ask them to find the letters of my name. Once*

they have found the letters, they want to change my visitor label and write my name on it, which they do. Gold tells Emily that she has stuck more stickers on me than her, I think to assert her power in the game. The play becomes excitable as more children arrive to put stickers on me; some of the boys and Yellow jump up behind me to place colourful sticker on my hands and cheeks. The teaching assistant leans over and says 'it's not very nice to cover our friend with stickers'.

(Field notes 13/4)

This encounter was rife with flows of power in relation to the potential of the stickers as desirable objects and how they were utilised by the children to assert physical control of each other and me. However, I was particularly intrigued by what this playful encounter with the stickers was able to tell me about how they approached the creation of texts. The children were using the letter stickers in different ways, as a way of remaking texts, shown in how they remade their drawings and my visitor's label. They were merging different modes to create something unique. The children were shifting the object as text from one arena to another, from the sticker sheet, to the paper, to their fingers, to the bodies of others, to other stickers. Although the text that they were playing with was already created and fixed in design, they viewed it as a changeable resource and used it to recreate new designs. Multimodal theorists would argue that it was the mode of play that afforded the children the ability to use the resources and tools of literacy to transform meanings (Kress, 2000b, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Explaining this in operation, Mavers writes that the *remakers* (the children) are working out the complex structure of form and meaning in their designs:

Decisions are made about what can be achieved, and what cannot. Some features are selected, others omitted and others added. Some meanings may be abandoned because they are not essential [...] Shaped by the task to be done, the interest of the remaker, and the resources available, resolutions are reached about what will feature, what will be approximated and what will be put aside. (2011, p. 123)

This description of remaking appears to be the case in how the children rejected the closed authoritative mode of the visitor sticker and remodelled it with other texts to signify something personal, communicating through this combination of modes how they knew me. Using this analytical approach means that it is possible to recognise that small actions are complex fusions of multimodal activity, and that play activity, which may be regarded as inconsequential, has important literate functions. As Wohlwend argues, *'The multimodal quality of play offers children multiple ways to expand the meanings of the messages they produce. When a message is conveyed in several modes, the combination*

of modes amplifies and/or complicates the separate strands of monomodal meanings' (2008, p. 128).

However, caution needs to be taken in how we read intentionality into the children's actions as designers, regarding them as purposefully creating significant meanings within this encounter. If we employ a more open approach to this encounter with text and include children's movements in relation to how texts are produced, we can see that although there may sometimes be social aims and clear objectives in their actions, not all aspects of their textual encounters are intentionally symbolic. For example, the children jumping behind me to put stickers on my hands and cheeks, far from intentionally signifying meaning to others as representative of something, were being reactive and spontaneous, and their actions occurred because they were physically thrilling; it was a resistance to the 'expected' use of the letter stickers. It may not be possible to translate these movements as meaningful of something else or as a way of purposefully redesigning, but this vignette demonstrates that there were important bodily entanglements with people and texts within this encounter which may not be representative or necessarily about intentionality, but were desirous in the actualities of their production.

This encounter was about an *embodied redesigning of text*, less predictably patterned but reactive to the unique flows of movement in the encounter, that emanated from a particular combination of elements: relationships, signs, power, materials, etc. It was not just about transforming one signifying text into another. The stickers were a resource that allowed the children to extend their understanding of what text could do in relation not just to other representative texts, but also to their physical bodies which were creating connection to these material texts. As the children re-designed or constantly adapted and changed the texts they were playing with, as a process of physical-material production, they were able to explore their subjectivity in relation to others. Fundamentally, this multimodal embodied remaking of texts involved movement: movement of design, materials and bodies. This movement existed in the repositioning of the researcher and research participants, the sharing of the material stickers, the shifting relationship between the friends, and the new directions taken in the meanings assigned to the mode of the label and the sticky letters.

Conclusion

Although I understand this assemblage as a never-ending circulation of ideas, I will end here by accentuating the potentiality that unrehearsed play offers us in researching young children as writers. To do this, I want to finish/start with an interrogation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming* in relation to playful writing to provide a way of understanding the action of its production, as potential movement, thereby viewing what children do as dynamic *writ-ing*.

The children, as *becoming* writers in these playful writing encounters, were *becoming differently*. They were not re-representing a known world of writing and text, although they referenced it, but instead moving between different events, people, spaces, materials, texts etc. to explore the multiple possibilities that text and drawings have for them. It was through these relational entanglements with materials and objects, therefore, that their mark making emerged. Without these embodied material–discursive encounters, which essentially involve movement and transformation, writing would not have come into existence; this corresponds with Taguchi, who argues that it is the connectivity in life that creates life (2011).

The movement of connective elements in young children's writing can be understood by adopting the Deleuzian conceptualisation of *becoming* as the 'very dynamism of change' (Stagoll, 2010a, p. 26). It is useful to understand the process of text production in terms of *becoming* if we value this movement. This assemblage has demonstrated that as successful and creative writers in these play encounters, the children were *becoming*. Considering children's writing or text making within informal, dynamic and playful activity in terms of unique arrangements of elements and intertwined forces, as an *assemblage of becoming(s)*, recognises the complex, expansive and multimodal ways in which children create text as expressions and sensations. It enables us to realise that playful writing goes beyond the representational, as children as desirous writers want to engage with practices that are physical, sensory, relational and material. Also, these aspects of writing as *becoming* are in a constant state of flux; the connections that the children construct are forming and re-forming. When children actualise these connections or respond to them in their writing, they are creating '*lines of flight*', or '*thought-movements*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.556). The children in their play created connections or lines that traversed across recognisable ways of being so that

they could bring about new ways of thinking and doing as writers. As pure movement, their *becoming* can be understood not in the events themselves, but in the changes evident between the events (Stagoll, 2010a, p. 26). This is where the exceptional moments of production can be explored, and where the lines of flight can be traced.

This 'playful writing', or 'writing as play', can be understood as a '*smooth space*'; although the space exists in relation to regulated language structures, and how these structures are used to create shared meanings, ultimately the space operates beyond the assertions of what Hodgson and Standish claim to be '*regimes of language*' (2007, p. 115). Playfulness is continuous and not fixed to end results or expected outcomes; it is self-generating through the processes of production itself. As they played, the children were able to think and do writing in ways that they had not thought of or done before, resulting in new and different ways of writing as *becoming*. To really understand how this occurs, writing as part of play, as a smooth, unstructured space, should be explored through the fluid contours which it emits as the continuing development of form that is its production (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 478). This involves 'leg-work', or effort, to re-see or listen openly to children's actions, suspending our assumptions and letting our encounters with children move us to somewhere new. By doing this, our understanding of writing can be examined without the restrictions of the operational systems that hover above it (the structures of language) or the partitions and stages in which play may be interpreted by adults in the classroom (the curriculum framework). This opens up the possibilities of interpretation that prioritise elements of difference, rather than continuity, and offer a way of 'tuning in' to the intra-active complexities of play rather than prioritising the paradigmatic future-oriented meaning that play holds for adults.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter is a gathering together of the ideas that have emerged and been expanded through each stage of my research. It aims to demonstrate conclusive arguments in relation to other thinkers and researchers in the field of study and beyond. The empirical findings presented here are organised as a response to the research questions posed in the first part of this study. These will provide evidence for the conceptual conclusions that have been developed as a result of the research process. The limitations of the study will also be acknowledged. Finally, I will be looking forward by providing future directions in research and implications for policy and practice in this politically contested field of study. This chapter will provide a clear contribution to knowledge about young children's writing activity in their first year of school.

A recap of the study

In an attempt to disrupt structural conceptualisations of young children in school and their writing activity, as future-oriented 'becomings', my research focused on six children's participatory activities as text makers within a Reception classroom during one school year. I framed this exploratory study by drawing on sociocultural theories of language, multimodal theories of meaning-making, and multiple literacies of embodied material connectivity. The aim was to travel around some of the unseen spaces of research with children by adopting different ways of conceptualising children as *becoming* writers in school.

Researching young children's experiences as writers in the classroom through close analysis of their activities had two important purposes for me. First, it gave me an opportunity to know more about how young children's understanding of writing was being formed through regular writing practices, and from this gain a sense of how children were being enabled or not as writers in Reception classrooms. In doing this, my intention was then to negotiate these findings with others in early childhood education, supporting professional understanding and potentially impacting positively on policy as well as practice.

Second, it allowed me the opportunity to closely examine, analyse and develop a more measured understanding of how the child, as a participant, is imagined in research and education. My reasoning in doing this was to take forward more critical and ethical methodologies of participatory research and educational practices with children, ones which recognise the complex layers within adult–child constructions.

My own movements as a *becoming* researcher

Although my research is presented here as a linear piece of work, the process of its development has been one of continual raking back and forward through literature, methodology and analysis. In doing this, my theoretical gaze has shifted and moved direction as this study progressed. I began with assumptions about mark making and writing as a socially communicative act, an expression of thinking informed by sociocultural theory. I positioned myself from the beginning of this research within a theoretical framework where children, as active and competent participants, constructed knowledge of writing through their social and cultural practices with others, and that this could take multiple forms of expression.

My knowledge of young children and their writing has not shifted in a radically different theoretical direction. My understanding of multimodal activity has gained clarity, and my sociocultural perspective has become sharper and more able to consider the complexities of how thought may be structured by ‘ideals’ within language practices; moreover, I have also gained an insight into how children’s writing production may demonstrate other ways of *becoming-with* language. By ‘plugging in’ Deleuzian thinking (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013) and adopting a re-conceptualisation of children in the classroom as *becoming different*, and by taking a rhizomatic approach to data analysis to unpick sociocultural participatory understandings of language and writing, I have been able to see, and hear, young children’s writing in the classroom in a new way.

The arguments that have emerged from this research stemmed from the empirical data itself and my *intra-action* with it. By immersing myself in the richness of ethnographic data to find out where that could take me, I wrestled with questions about where to look and puzzled over inconsistencies within it. I had not anticipated the difficulties of working with such a large and diverse quantity of ethnographic ‘stuff’, and how this material could disrupt my professional and theoretical assumptions. Throughout this process, I was concerned with how I was *hearing* the children within their

participation in the research as ‘text’ makers. Analysing the data and problematising these issues was deeply informative for me in learning about how research, as a meshwork of interwoven lines (Ingold, 2007, 2010) or an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) of desirous activity, is laced together as a *becoming* movement.

Empirical findings

In the previous four chapters, I selected vignettes of empirical data to provide fleeting illustrations of children’s encounters with writing that were then formed into assemblages or written maps of analysis and discussion. Each assemblage exposed significant findings in response to the original research question:

How are children becoming writers within their writing encounters in a Reception class?

This initial question, where stress fell on the word *becoming* to help form a critical enquiry into the construction or image of the children and their writing within a school classroom, was then further broken into sub-questions. These sub-questions were developed in response to the review of literature so that elements within children’s writing activity that could be described as facets of their ‘becoming’ in a Reception class could be explored. These were identified as the children’s social, cultural and material associations and movement within writing activity, and the questions focused on how the children assembled writing as making, crafting, composing and producing:

- **How are young children constructing knowledge about ‘school writing’ with others (including researchers) through classroom writing encounters?**
- **How do young children engage with mediational tools, and signs and symbols, within writing encounters to re-represent and transform their ideas?**
- **What connections are young children creating through writing activity at school?**

The findings have been organised below into responses related to these subsequent questions. Also presented here are findings that, although not specific to the research questions, have emerged due to the methodology employed, and relate specifically to the use of participatory research with children.

Sub-question 1. How are young children constructing knowledge about 'school writing' with others (including researchers) through classroom writing encounters?

Writing activities planned by adults with curriculum outcomes at the fore, were often segmented into units of language occurring in specific spaces and time periods. An example of this type of 'marked out' or striated writing activity occurred during the SSP sessions. Within these encounters, the knowledge that the children were forming of writing became an act of representing fixed meaning; this was demonstrated within the children's talk which 'stalled' during conversation about their '*Letters and Sounds*' writing, and was also observed in how they had learnt to copy as an act of universal representation. The range of children's writing tools and their potential modification within these activities were limited due to the restricted 'spaces' in which they occurred. Here, there was a certainty of outcome implied in the discourses that surrounded the writing activity the children were asked to engage in. In turn, the possible exploration of language was narrowed in terms of material resources, and opportunities for multiple and transformative expression were restricted.

This organisation of literacy activity as fragmented 'parts' meant that the children's actions as writers became abstract, or floating; they were unable to move beyond a fixed and operational space, concurring with Deleuze and Guattari's description of '*striated space*' (2004, p. 524). The children struggled to transpose knowledge of writing from these sessions into different language forms, such as speech. This concurs with 'whole language' arguments that state that segmenting children's language learning leads to an insecure knowledge of how language operates and therefore functions as a whole meaning-making process.

Writing as a representational act inferred a certain 'correctness' or 'rightness' of writing, and this affected the children in different ways. As discussed in chapter six, Red appeared to be reluctant to take any risks with writing. Another child Green, appeared to be disconnected to synthetic phonic activities, and struggled to find associated meanings during these encounters. In contrast, he was able to make meanings and create connections in his writing in more open ended encounters where curriculum outcomes were not the priority, as demonstrated in his use of his personal notebook discussed in chapter five.

Some children recognised their school log book as a cultural artefact with 'ideal' expectations. This is in line with Cole's (1996) argument that school education is

ideologically 'future-orientated' and that cultural artefacts carry values in relation to what is a future ideal. The learning log was framed by a future-oriented discourse of children's writing, where 'real' writing was given value by both teachers and other children in response to this curriculum 'ideal'. Some children, but not all, were adept at understanding the curriculum expectations of writing activities; they were able to articulate a conceptualisation of their own 'becoming' in terms of the externally structured framework. This supports Uprichard's (2008) argument that children have temporal understanding of themselves as both 'being' in the moment and 'becoming' in the future.

The words that children used about writing sometimes parroted the literacy language that surrounded them; for example, they adopted technical terms such as digraph to 'tell' about writing. Their spoken 'voice' as writers was in response to the voices of more powerful people, namely adults, who were articulating the associated cultural rules of being and behaving in relation to the curriculum. This corresponds with Bakhtin's argument (2011) that speech is used to re-describe the social context, always occurring in response to what has come before as well as anticipating what will come next. However, the language that children adopted about writing in more fluid, multimodal and materially rich encounters such as play, where the external outcomes were less prescriptive, were different. Here, the adult discourse that surrounded 'school writing' appeared less influential, and the children expressed themselves as writers differently, utilising the material-discursive possibilities within these 'spaces' to build other literacy connections and to 'voice' their writing knowledge in multiple ways.

Sub-question 2. How do young children engage with mediational tools, and signs and symbols, within writing encounters to re-represent and transform their ideas?

Activity with tools and objects

The writing objects that the children interacted with mediated their thinking through the modal affordances that the children gave to them. The children were observed many times adapting writing materials for particular social uses, for example the wipe-clean boards, notebooks, and stickers. Sociocultural perspectives on the appropriation of tool use (Wertsch, 1994, 1998; Claxton 2002), and multimodal theories of affordance (Kress, 2000a, 2010, 2011; Jewitt, 2011; Mavers, 2011) have helped to explain throughout the

previous chapters the children's usage of objects and their re-design. Additionally, the children were exploring the material make-up of these objects to extend their ideas, which suggests that their engagement with writing was materially significant. The 'things' the children were using to write, draw, and mark make with were shaping their ideas of what writing could be used for. This is concurrent with Malafouris's (2013, p.180) argument that writing can be shown to be an '*evolving enactive cognitive system of material engagement*'.

Significantly, the materials the children used radiated particular meanings to them that went beyond the social and cultural signification assigned, to what could be described as a 'specialness', or '*life force*' (Bennett, 2010, p.2). The writing objects the children engaged with appeared to resonate with the children's relationships, cultural experiences, and other literacy encounters. These personal histories were ingrained into the object's molecular make-up. For example in Green's encounters with his pink notebook, the opportunities for writing and drawing came directly from the relational qualities that were existent in the writing object, how it could be moved around, and how the pens inside it could be ordered. The interaction between the tool for writing and the child, which pre-supposes a separation between them as Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Wertsch (1991, 1994) have proposed, was not always clear, and at times the boundaries between each entity appeared blurred. The implications of this will be explored further in the theoretical conclusions.

Ensembles of signs and symbols

When the children had the opportunity to explore materials in unstructured social contexts for learning, for example within some of the more playful activity and in routine name writing, they engaged in overlapping multimodal activity as part of their writing production. They organised text, drawing, map-making, colour, shape and space, together with gestures, talk, laughter etc., into an 'ensemble' of modes in the same way that Mavers (2011) has described in her work. The children changed their modes of writing activity as a way of pursuing and strengthening relationships: social, cultural and material, connecting modes of writing from home with school writing, and with other literacy encounters which had cultural significance. This concurs with Dyson's (1989, 1999) and Pahl's (1999) research findings.

Although different modes of expression were differentiated in the organisation of the classroom, for example in how and when talk was allowed, and in how the drawings and writing were organised into different spaces within the learning logs, at different times, the children's desire was to redesign elements of writing as combined expression, as Lankshear and Knobel (2011) and Kress (2000b, 2003) have described. The children merged modes of communication to create different modal ensembles that overruled this external demarcation, reconfiguring writing materials in response to new opportunities. This is evidenced in how Gold modified her stickers for different social uses and how Red and Gold explored letter tracing on the wipe-clean boards. These changes of modes allowed for new ideas to emerge and transformation of meaning to occur, as Kress (2000b), Pahl (2001) and Mavers (2011) have all demonstrated in their own research.

Sub-question 3. What connections are young children creating through writing activity at school?

Making sensorial associations

When the children wrote symbols, names, squiggles etc., they indicated that the smell, texture and touch of the materials and tools they were using were important. They appeared to be keen to write due to the sensorial qualities that writing could offer them, just as the children that Masny (2013) and Sellers (2013) worked with demonstrated. Sensation appeared to be a precursor to thinking within writing, as Deleuze writes (2004b), but it was also an essential part of its continuing production, which Deleuze does not appear to recognise. This suggests that sensation for children existed as an important element of writing. It did not only 'border language' as it was emitted from the body, as MacLure (2013a) has argued, but was necessarily entangled within its production. Sensorial action was an important feature in how writing was able to be formed by these children.

'Smooth spaces' as room for writing to come together

In playful writing encounters, as opposed to writing as a representational encounter, children were able to explore the intersections between bodies, social relationships, tools and sensation most effectively and become immersed in writing as a flow of production, as Csikszentmihalyi (1995) describes.

Children found many opportunities outside of adult-led activity to incorporate writing, drawing, and map-making activities within open and flexible 'spaces' within the classroom. This corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's description of '*smooth spaces*' (2004, p. 424): locations not bounded by fixed structural frameworks, where different ideas are able to emerge. The children's writing in '*smooth spaces*' was shown to intersect with structural dimensions, but was not determined by them, and offered children more variety of activity and multiplied opportunities for constructing meanings, as Masny (2006, 2013) has found in her studies of children's writing and drawing. For example, in spontaneous play, the children were able to physically move around, rearrange resources and explore what writing could do so that the activity could be more exciting and imaginative.

Writing encounters in '*smooth spaces*' offered children the potential to make useful literate connections and assemble sensations, materials, friends, and representational language together into spontaneous playful activity. Through play, the children could be seen to be creating a (writing) curriculum themselves, as Sellers (2013) concludes, or alternatively involve themselves in '*a literacy of possibilities*' as Wohlwend (2008, p.127) has described.

Methodological findings: Children's research participation as 'difference'

Christensen's (2004) argument that adult-researchers should play an 'ambiguous' role in carrying out research with children was evident in my reflexive writing. However, this ambiguity was not only related to how the children viewed me but also to how I viewed myself as an adapting and changing presence in the classroom.

Children were autonomous and capable within the research, in line with the UNCRC's (1989) conceptualisation of them as active meaning-makers, decision-takers, and influencers; they were able to involve me in their spontaneous, co-constructed, dialogical research activities, as Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) have argued. However, the physical and material aspects of their participation, which affected the formation of the research relationship, was surprising in their physical contact and material desires and moved beyond a purely dialogical encounter. Children's speech was at times limited and other bodily expressions were communicated instead; this supports critical arguments by

MacLure (2013a) that an over-reliance on representational speech limits methodological approaches.

The participation that the children engaged in departed from my own desire as a researcher. For example, Gold wanted to participate because of the affordances that the technological research tools offered her rather than sharing my need to answer the research questions. There was an essential 'lack of sameness' that existed between myself as adult-researcher and the children as participants. This '*difference*', as Deleuze (2004a) would describe it, corresponds with the notion of the child as '*other*' that Levinas (1991) proposes. Our differences were acknowledged not only by me but also by the children. For example, in chapter seven the performance level of the children was heightened in peculiar ways by them knowing that they were being observed. They then destabilised my authoritative adult role by playing with my expectations. At times, the children did not participate at all: they were silent or turned away, a demonstration of their 'participation/non-participation'. This aspect of research highlighted the need for value-led decision making and ethical responses to the children within the moment of the research encounter and concurs with arguments made by Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Clark et al. (2005) about ethical listening practices.

Theoretical implications/Conceptual conclusions

Theoretical implications have been drawn from these empirical findings to help form further conceptual understandings of young children as writers in their first year of school. These conclusive ideas, which contribute to a theoretical knowledge of young children's writing, are organised below into two significant areas, one focused on how it might be possible to extend our knowledge of writing as 'activity with language', and the other on extending the methodological discourses that surround research with young children.

Activity as language: Young children's writing extending beyond representational language structures

As shown in the findings related to sub-question 1, the external curriculum structures existent in school classroom contexts framed these children's internal understandings and their 'voices' as writers. As writing became an act of representation of the curriculum requirements, so the children's ability to explore and transpose language became limited.

However, other findings from the study, particularly resulting from sub-questions 2 and 3, demonstrate that for the children, writing activity could be an expressive, multimodal, desirous thing to do, involving not only representational elements but also exploration of sensation and material intra-action. When writing was confined to actions of representational thinking within discrete literacy sessions, these 'unbounded' aspects of writing activity were quashed. Alternatively, they were seen to flourish within open-ended activity, where the children were able to construct connections between different elements within its production. The findings imply that writing as language is clearly an act of social and cultural representation, but as it is also a physical and material act of creation it may not be able to be described fully in terms of its signification alone. For example, the sensorial aspects of writing, and the intra-activity between the writer and the writing materials, are more than representative thought processes. The findings demonstrate that young children are able to extend and explore the possibilities that writing as language offers them if these associated elements (materials, sensations and representations) are able to be brought together and connections made between them. This is something that the children within this study appeared to be desirous to do.

Considering these points further in respect of the theoretical approaches adopted, I have been able to develop conceptual ideas about young children's engagement with writing activity within Reception classrooms. These conclusions offer support and evidence for known theoretical ideas, but also extend the way in which children's writing activity is conceived, and how it is possible to further conceptualise children as producers of *writing*. Below I have outlined the aspects of theory relevant to the findings offered here and expanded these ideas further to provide a way of outlining the elements that appear to be important to children's writing.

The embodied nature of young children's writing

In sociocultural approaches, the embodied nature of young children's encounters with writing is understood to be a process of distributed cognition. Here, physical objects, sensation and language (essential elements of writing activity) are seen to extend the child's thought; the mind is understood to be linked to but remain separate from the body. However, this body/mind dualism privileges the mind over the bodily experience; it is thinking as expressed through the body as a tool. The conceptualisation of writing developed within this research is different, as children in their actions as writers within

the data appeared to *embody* writing. For these children, the physical elements of producing writing were essentially sensorial, moving, and could even be described as animal. How these children produced writing as a physical and sensorial activity cannot be completely explained as a representational process of thought, as these sensations were not always clearly linked to thinking processes. The sensorial elements of their writing appeared to be necessary aspects of its production, one which was a fundamentally physical activity with materials. This argument also counters Deleuze's (2004b) position that sensation is a precursor to writing, and that the act of writing 'flattens' human sensation to fit into a representative system. These young children were not separating bodily sensations and representational expressions as they wrote, drew and made marks, instead they were bringing them together in changing and dynamic formations.

Young children's writing as desirous material existence

The data showed that material objects were afforded certain meanings by children in relation to their social and cultural uses, and their potentiality in transforming meanings. But at times, these materials, their elemental make-up, had a distinct energy which was not possible to describe as having been ascribed to them through their employment. This vitality emanated from the material make-up of the stuff itself. Children were physically and sensorially entangled with these materials, as *intra-action* (Barad, 2003, 2007). The writing that children were doing therefore appeared to be a merging together of objects and bodies into unique encounters. The materials were not only carriers of the children's expressions of language but they were seen as things that the children tied themselves to, things that they could *become with*.

Young children's writing as a relational assemblage

Children, in their writing activities, are attempting to find connections between people, places, objects and prior events. As writers in school, they desire to link different components of writing that are meaningful to them. When they write, they are creating an assemblage of interconnecting elements (friendships, cultural signs and symbols, feelings, sensation, memories etc.). It is through this process of assembling different elements that children are able to know what writing is, or has the potential to be.

Writing can therefore be seen to be essentially a relational activity, done to connect to other people and things. Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) theoretical argument around what it is to be a wolf can help to explain this. The wolf, they argue, is able to be a wolf because it is 'wolfing' within a connected pack. Without the connective activity of the pack, the wolf will cease to be a wolf. Children are able to be writers and engage successfully in writing if it is a connective activity with other elements related to what it is to 'write'. Therefore, the associations of writing activity that children are making – to their family, friends, geographies, materials, etc. – as they are producing it are essential for its existence and needed for writing as an action to occur. It is possible therefore to perceive young children's writing as a relational assemblage that they construct by bringing together all of these different elements into an associative network of meanings.

Young children's writing as movement: 'becoming-with' and 'becoming-new'

Writing as relational making (explained in the previous section) offers an understanding of young children's writing not in terms of fixed outcomes, but as a movement between things, people and places. As young children write, elements are drawn together and children traverse between these different constituents. Ingold (2010, 2011) has explored people who have made marks on the world throughout history and culture in terms of their wayfaring. Within this conceptualisation, it may not be the destination of the writing that is important in understanding the writing process but instead the movement that the child is taking between these constituent elements, and the growth and transformation existent within these relational networks.

As they travel, child writers are weaving modes of expressions together to construct a social, cultural and material resource. Children as embodied, material writers who are constructing meanings between social and cultural signs are therefore *becoming-with* others, cultures and materials; constantly shifting and repositioning rather than engaging in purely representational processes with fixed end points. This was shown in chapter seven in the complex relations that were being formed and reformed in the children's fantasy play, and within Silver's movements during his map making. Although signification can be seen in how children carry out activity with others, as an aspect of its production, the knowledge that young children are constructing through writing activity is not fixed to language structures alone. Given their infinite possible connections and constant movement, even when previous activities are woven within them, each writing

encounter is always *becoming-new* and limitless; it is never a repeat of what has come before; it is always different.

Extending our languages of research with young children

Nomadic research with children

Young children and adult-researchers continually adapt and alter within their research relationships. Recognising this means that a rigid approach to spaces, roles and methods would not provide an adequate methodology. In this study, it was important to recognise the shifting judgements necessary within the research activity with children. These processes could be described as a series of immanent movements within the moment of research or a 'nomadic venture'. Rather than delineating space, it is vital to embrace nomadism through roles and relationships. The possibilities for the children's participation, the data constructed and the ethicality of the encounter were contained within the events of each research activity itself and a shifting or nomadic response was needed. Considering oneself as a nomadic researcher means moving along the path of research rather than focusing on the different points that are externally demarcated and can be crossed off. It is the researcher's nomadic movement that enables them to 'tune into' the child's *otherness* and *difference* within research activity, and it is the attention given to the researcher's route that can support this to be achieved.

Hearing children differently through material encounters

Dialogue with children provides insight into how sociocultural knowledge is being formed; however, the context of research, where adult voices are powerful, means that dialogue with children may reflect previously formed researcher assumptions. Children express themselves not only through speech, but in multiple ways using their bodies and the objects that they encounter. Hearing children as participants within research needs to recognise the complexities existent in how these expressions are made. In this research the material nature of writing objects became significant, and what became known about the children as writers emerged *through* these human and material intra-actions. Looking

closely at the children's intra-action with writing materials in the field whilst recognising the researcher's own intra-action with data as the research progressed, made it possible to identify layers of meaning within the writing encounters. It is by exploring both the child's and the adult's *intra-active becoming-with* materials, as expressions of what can be known about children's activity, that ensures that *difference-in-itself*, rather than unity of what is already known, is able to be acknowledged. Other methods that trace the embodied and sensory aspects of research with children may also provide valuable ways of knowing and recognising alternative truths that do not necessarily correspond with adult discourses.

Participatory research with children as becoming-with in smooth spaces

Research methodology that embraces *smooth space*, as a continued variation of action, unlocks opportunities to hear children. Unfortunately, methodology that creates *striated space*, as sedentary and with fixed possibilities, closes these possibilities down (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Within the classroom, the children's writing was often limited to representational acts within *striated spaces* of activity. However, children's writing as a relational activity of *becoming-with* materials and people was able to be observed in *smooth spaces* of activity. Smooth spaces are important to seek out in research contexts but also in framing methodological boundaries as they can provide opportunities to know children through the continual shifting relationships, their intra-action and their multiple meaning-making. Smooth space as a research encounter means that each participant and researcher is *nomadic* within the space, and children's lives are understood as they are *becoming-with*, and *becoming-in*, their world.

Have the research aims been fulfilled?

This research was completed in the planned timescale, created positive research relationships with others, and provided extremely rich data to work with. My general aim of exploring how young children's writing activity was *becoming* in their first year of school resulted in some interesting conclusions that I hope are useful to other researchers. However, my research questions are not satisfactorily completed, and although rewards

have been gained through the emergence of new understanding, incomplete knowledge still exists in my thinking.

Initially, I imagined that I would be observing a 'process' in children of their *becoming* a writer. In retrospect, how I envisioned this 'process' seems rather vague. I am still unsure about what 'process' may mean, although I now view it as a rather mechanistic description of writing. Initially, like a lot of literacy researchers, I was focused on cognition and the processes of the mind. As my work progressed and I recognised children's writing as production, distributed through multiple elements, I instead adopted terms such as construction, association and connection to describe children as writers, encompassing a more extensive understanding of what children are doing. A fuller explanation of these terms, i.e. how they come to fruition to form assemblages of writing action, is needed to really appreciate the complexities within children's writing production.

One of my central concerns was why some children are 'put off' writing in school, thinking that by understanding the 'processes' more clearly, this would be made apparent. Although some of my conclusions may offer a partial explanation, for example what was desirous for children in writing was not necessarily valued in terms of the school curriculum, a more focused longitudinal study of children's preferences as writers within school is needed to know this.

The original research question was open enough that within the field of research, I was able to follow certain trails and explore opportunities that were presented. I did, however, trouble over the creation of a definition of 'writing' for some time so that I could 'look' for it in the classroom. This was helpful as I had to consider how other thinkers and researchers conceptualised writing, both in theory and practice. I made the decision during the first few weeks in the classroom not to define it; instead, I let the children define it for me through their actions, and the results of this are drawn together in my factual and theoretical conclusions. Some would argue that my analysis is not about writing *per se* but other modes of communication. However, what children were doing in their encounters with text was not restricted to recognisable codes, symbols and systems, but expanded the use of these elements alongside drawing, mapping and other written expressions as ensembles of 'writing'.

This research has raised rather than solved the question of whether writing should be understood as an act of representation, as sociocultural, multimodal and multiliteracy theorists have argued, or as something that is sensory, embodied and

material, as Deleuzian and new materialist theorists have claimed. For the children in this study, there is evidence to show that it is both. It appeared that their everyday writing was not necessarily an *act* of representation, although these acts were apparent in the data, but could instead be understood to be a series of *connective movements* in the world with important *stuff*.

In the same way, I am not entirely convinced of the extent to which young children, in their use of tools, are either mediating cognition with the resources they are engaged with and affording them meaning through their social use, or doing something which may challenge the privilege given to humans over materials. It appeared in my data that children were intra-acting and 'melding together' with the materials they were encountering on a very sensory, physical level, and this raises some demanding questions about our human/material existence. My research showed that children could be seen to be both affording objects meaning *and* intra-acting with the material elements of their particular molecular make-up. So, further questions remain here which I am looking forward to exploring in future research.

It could be argued that if the theoretical framework, methodology and research tools are valid in providing answers to the research questions, then research with children will provide the evidence needed to improve the practices that surround them, but unless researchers tackle the underpinning conceptualisations of children that are being adopted, then their research will obscure essential questions and limit potential answers. This research is successful in revealing the responsibilities that adult-researchers have to make transparent the conceptualisations they hold about the children they are working with, and how this then might affect the construction of knowledge about children's lives that is being formed. Questioning the universal assumptions around what children do, as I did, by troubling over how children are imagined in school as *becoming* learners, opened up different ways of considering them as writers.

Implications for policy and practice

Policies and practices that limit the potential for young children's multimodal opportunities by articulating a discourse which values certain aspects of writing more than others are problematic. Informed arguments based on research evidence need to be made by teachers and researchers to counter these politically influenced educational

practices. Drawing, map-making and copying are all text-making literacies which support children's understandings of writing text as having expressive function. Privileging letters and words in young children's experience of writing in school over other modes ignores children's authorship as an overlapping ensemble: a way of expression which utilises many different modes. Planning and assessment of young children's writing activity in their first year of school needs to recognise and foster the diverse ways that young children explore communicative possibilities as writers.

Teaching young children phonemes and graphemes to support their writing is an essential part of learning about how codes and symbols are used within the writing system. However, this needs to be connected more visibly to children's other literacy and language activities and their modes of expression, and not be placed within discrete sessions where these connections fail. Children's writing activity within segmented SSP activity, where they are limited in their material intra-action and social interactions, lacks literate functionality. Because of this, the knowledge that children experience does not move with them beyond the carpet space in which it is transmitted. Young children need to construct knowledge about sound/symbol relationships and how to write letters in a variety of spaces and places, where they can be experienced through meaningful expression. Phonic knowledge is used by writers to create the words and sentences that as writers they want to say, and this is what young children need to know about writing: that phonemes are linked to writing in that they *enable them to say something*.

The material 'stuff' of writing in classrooms matters. How young children feel about writing, the connections they are able to make, and to what extent they are able to express their ideas through different modes is dependent on the resources on offer. The materials adults choose for children to write with in school classrooms (i.e. their sensory qualities, cultural references, and the 'histories' associated with other writing encounters that they contain) need to be considered carefully. Writing materials, pens, paper, chalks, keyboards etc. should be selected because of the associations that young children have either made with them previously or will be able to make by building new associations through their usage.

The relational aspects of young children's text making and drawing mean that connections need not only to be recognised but promoted between writing in school and other writing activity, e.g. at home or in play. Rather than seeing this writing as an 'add on' that may support the child's movement through the formalised curriculum, classroom writing activity should attempt to build on these richly invested writing encounters as

they are essential in how children are forming an understanding of writing in all areas of their lives.

Teachers need to attend more perceptively to young children's text making and drawing in play. It is important to recognise that this activity, which is often unpredictable and fleeting, is significant in children's learning about writing. Assessment of children's writing should not be limited to what is evidenced in an official learning log, as other exciting learning in which children are able to demonstrate complex ideas within their writing will be missed. Playful experiences offer children more open-ended and resource-rich environments where they can explore writing through materially embodied sensations; these sensations are important elements within writing experience for young writers. Playful writing in classrooms, perceived as a frivolous rather than value-laden act, is freed from adult expectations, and for some children who may find the curriculum constraining, it offers unique opportunities to explore meaning-making with others. For children to be motivated writers, then playful activity needs to be planned and become a focus for assessment and practitioner understanding.

Young children are desirous writers who are constantly changing and becoming different as they construct new connections, associations and relationships between themselves, others and materials. They have knowledge to share about this process, but what they are able to say and what is heard is constrained within the generational and curriculum structures of the school classroom. Policy and practice are needed that moves young children's writing beyond literacy viewed in terms of curriculum only. This means 'tuning into' children's literacy voices in different ways by expanding their multimodal opportunities rather than limiting them so that children are able to express to adults, who have responsibility for planning, implementing and assessing their learning, what it is they know about writing and how it is they are learning about it. Finding creative ways to map what is important to children in their learning as writers, as well as recognising and respecting their voice in this, is an essential aspect of children's democratic participation in education. Practitioners need to develop different and astute ways of listening to child writers, recognising that what young child writers are now, in the moment, has import as writing is a process of making and creating, not an action that is evidence, or not, of universal ideals.

Limitations of the study

This research was limited to a small sample of children in one class, in one school, in one part of England, and as a lone researcher, I have been limited to my own interpretations. There was no intention to create generalisations from this; rather, I wanted to allow a depth of knowledge to emerge through the ethnographic data over the year. However, there are implications for this in relation to what arguments can be made. It is not possible in this research to assume that the experiences of these children are common to other children in other Reception classrooms. Further studies across classrooms are needed to test whether these conclusions can be corroborated in other contexts.

Due to my methodological and ethical problematising, this research is high in validity but low in reliability and therefore also low in generalisability. As I have taken an analytical approach based on rhizomatic logic, where linkages have been traced rather than bringing forward specific themes, this study is not able to argue that children, even in the same class, may share these experiences as they are exclusive to particular encounters. As an inductive piece of research, it is not possible to repeat and test out elements of the research to strengthen the findings and refine the conclusions.

I decided to only invite children to be participants in this research, rather than teachers and parents, and have justified this because children's voices in the context of school research are rarely heard, and if they are, they are usually as an adjunct to teachers' voices. However, there is an argument that as an ethnographic study, having children's voices as 'singular' provides only a partial account rather than a fully comprehensive exploration of the social and cultural context. As indicated in the data, the children's relationships and interactions with their parents, teachers and friends formed part of their meshwork of writing activity. In hindsight, exploring these associations by encouraging participation of other children, family members and adults in the classroom may have provided further layers of understanding in how the children's knowledge of writing was being formed. Alongside this, what I have been able to say about young children's writing is limited to the classroom context. The conclusions demonstrate that children seek not to be confined in their writing activity within bounded spaces, and wish to create links between writing experiences in different contexts. This research did not look in detail at how children were writing in the other geographical

spaces, for example their home, and therefore I was not able to trace the connections more definitively.

Additionally, this research was not able to give any conclusions about children's use of digital technologies as tools for writing, apart from as research tools, as these technologies were unusually unavailable in this context, inaccessible within this particular environment.

Recommendations for future research

Young children in England engage in writing activity as part of regular SSP activities in school every day. Research that demonstrates whether these programmes improve children's reading abilities is contested, but what is even more alarming is that no substantial evidence has been provided to show that these activities improve young children's writing in school. This is a significant omission in research about young children's literate lives today. My small-scale study demonstrated that the children were not advantaged as writers through these approaches. The SSP programmes throughout English schools share very similar pedagogical approaches, so there is an imperative that future research explores the impact that these programmes are having on other children as writers in school. Further studies with larger samples in more diverse classroom environments are needed in order to question whether these strategies are enhancing children's writing activity, and to what extent children are able to transfer knowledge about phonemes and graphemes, taught as part of SSP programmes, into other text making activity.

This research shows that young children make connections between their writing experiences at home and their school writing activity. Important relationships with people and materials create entanglements of knowing about writing for children, and so the home writing environment and the activities that occur outside of school matter to how children make sense of writing in school. Previous research on children's literacy in school has convincingly demonstrated the effectiveness of home and school partnerships when knowledge from the home is built upon. Successful strategies include the sharing of culturally significant home objects (Feiler et al., 2008; Scanlan, 2012). By bringing home-based artefacts into the classroom, children are able to explore key aspects of their

literate identities (Scanlan, 2010). Research that looks more closely at the relational associations that children are making in their writing outside of school is important as this will help teachers to recognise learning as a connected activity and literacy in broader terms, as more than 'schooled' literacy. This research has demonstrated that the cultural significance of an object allows children to build essential connections necessary to motivate and extend literacy. Further examination of the associations attached to objects from home specifically looking at how children form literate connections may have the potential to challenge 'assigned' writing behaviours within situated learning contexts, and provide detailed understandings of how children are able to transfer their 'knowing' about writing into different spaces.

Young children exist in school classrooms in a material world, but little is known about how this materiality affects their learning. This is a huge area to be explored, but I suggest that as a starting point, research could be carried out to look at how young children select material resources within classrooms, what they do with them, and what effect they have on their understandings of literacy. A detailed examination of these questions would enable a fuller understanding of whether resources and tools have import, either due to the affordance they offer children or because of how children physically and affectively intra-act with materials. The question could be: What are the qualities of literacy materials, and how do they support young children's literacy?

Further ethnographic research into young children's literate lives needs to be carried out that utilises a range of modes to 'hear' children as readers and writers. Methodologies that rely on representational language alone, based on transcripts of conversation or dialogue, limit what young children are able to tell researchers about their experience. Adult-researchers using multimodal approaches have been effective for some time in employing video as a method to show that young children's bodily movement, gaze and gesture are expressions of language within classrooms (Flewitt, 2006; Cowan, 2014). It is important to utilise these methods of data construction to demonstrate young children's dynamic multimodal communication. However, to adhere to the participatory ideas presented, there is a need to avoid merely viewing video as a way of 'looking at' what children are doing to make meaning of their experience. An ethical participatory methodology that seeks to listen to children effectively should clearly consider multimodal methods to do this. The methods chosen should reflect children's position as co-constructors who, as they go about creating data differently to adults, need the opportunity to both demonstrate their multimodal movements and provide them with an opportunity to control how the data is constructed. As an example, 'headcams'

could provide multimodal data of children's interactions and intra-actions from the child's viewing perspective while also offering the child autonomy over the research encounter as they can decide if, when and where to wear them.

Future literacy research with children also needs to recognise children's literacy experience as sensorial. These sensorial qualities are contained within the physical, material and relational action in the moment. Prospective researchers of children's literacy should attend carefully to these moments and become 'situation sensitive' to children's desires. Researchers need to recognise their own sensory and intuitive responses to children in how they are building understanding of what matters as part of their ethical framework. Further methodological questions need to be explored about what sensation can tell us, but also about adult intuition and ethical positioning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Initial information letter to parents



Information for parents

Research project – ‘*Becoming a Writer – children as writers in their first year of school*’

Hello, my name is Kate Smith and during this school year I will be carrying out a research project in class at

This research will explore some of the ways in which **children think about writing and develop their understanding of writing as part of their literacy development**. The findings of this research will help adults who support young children in their early years to have a greater understanding of the process of learning to become a young writer.

The research project

I will be working alongside Miss within the normal day-to-day school activities. I will be collecting information from the children on how they learn about writing by talking, listening and observing them and I will be recording this by making notes in a research journal, taking photographs and making audio tapes of the children with their help. The research activities will be part of the normal events that take place in the Reception class and the children will not be removed from class. The research is funded through the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities based at Canterbury Christ Church University.

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/CFC/Home.aspx>

About me

I qualified as a primary school teacher in 1993 and have mainly taught Reception and Year 1 children. I have been working as a university lecturer since 2004. This research project is my PhD work. I have a DBS Enhanced Certificate (the new CRB check) for working with children.

Participation

Involvement in the research is completely voluntary. All parents in the class are invited to give consent for their child to be part of the project (see attached forms).

For this type of research, it will not be possible to focus on all of the children in class in depth, so a small group of children will be selected for the study. This will be decided through discussions with Miss and yourselves as parents. During the first term at school, I will be contacting all the parents who have given consent for their child to take part in the project individually and give them further information about how the research will progress during the year.

The timeframe of the project

Autumn Term 2013 to Summer Term 2014	Data will be collected on a small group of children at regular intervals within the Reception class throughout the school year.
Autumn Term 2014 to Autumn Term 2015	The research will be written up, published and findings disseminated to participants.

Confidentiality and privacy

All data and personal information about the children will be stored securely within Canterbury Christ Church University premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the university's own data protection requirements. Observations, recordings and photographs will be secured with password access, and will be used by myself solely for the purposes of this study. The data will only be presented to academic audiences, e.g. within my thesis and at conferences. **No data or visual images of children will appear in any handouts or online.** Usually all data collected is made anonymous; however, this is difficult to do within a study of children's writing, as how and when they write their names may be an important part of the data. Parents and children will have a choice in whether their names will appear in future publications.

If you would like to view the data held on your child at any time or ask for specific elements of data not to be used, then let me know and I will ensure that this happens. My aim is to share the data with parents at regular intervals.

What happens at the end of the project?

Towards the end of the project, I will write a short report for the school of my findings. I will also organise an evening event for the parents of the children featured in the study to discuss their children's development in writing and answer any questions they may have about the project. The finished project will be published as a PhD thesis and kept within the university library. Academic articles may also be published about aspects of the research.

What next?

I expect that you might have questions or concerns about participation and the research project generally. If you have anything you would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact me by email: k.l.smith417@canterbury.ac.uk. I will be happy to give you a ring if you email your number and you would prefer to talk on the phone. Should you decide that you would like your child to participate, you will need to **complete one of the consent forms attached (you keep the other) and return it to the school office in the envelope provided by Friday 4th October 2013**. If you decide to change your mind and withdraw your consent at any point during the project, then this will be respected and you will not have to give a reason. Although you are consenting on behalf of your child, I will also make sure that the children are happy for me to ask them questions and take photographs. I will explain the project to them (in a way that they can understand) and if at any time they appear reluctant to talk to me or share their work, then I will respect their decision. If you feel that your child is negatively affected by being involved in the research project, then please contact me at any time.

How do I complain if I am not happy with how the project is progressing?

Please contact me if you have any concerns during the project; however, if you would like to make a formal complaint then please contact Professor Trisha Maynard who is the head of the research centre: trisha.maynard@canterbury.ac.uk.

Kate Smith k.l.smith417@canterbury.ac.uk

Centre for Research into Children, Families and Communities,
Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Place, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Appendix 2: Parental consent form



PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: 'Becoming a Writer – children as writers in their first year at school'

Name of Researcher:

Kate Smith

Address:

Centre for Research into Children, Families and
Communities

Canterbury Christ Church University

North Holmes Place, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Tel:

01227 782 900

Email:

k.l.smith417@canterbury.ac.uk

As you are consenting on behalf of your child, please make sure that you talk to your child about the project to ensure that both **you and your child** are happy to participate in the research. When I first meet the children, I will explain the project to them in a way that they understand and ask them if they have any questions or worries. I will make sure that I have the child's permission to work with them before any information is collected.

Please initial box below

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free on their behalf to withdraw them from the project at any time,

without giving any reason.

3. I understand that any personal information that my child provides to the researcher will be kept strictly confidential.
4. I agree on behalf of my child to take part in the above study.

Name of parent	Full name of child
Parental signature	Date
Contact number	Email
Name of researcher <i>Kate Smith</i>	Date <i>24/09/13</i>

Copies: one for parent of child participant, one for researcher

Please return one signed copy of this form to the school office – thank you.

Appendix 3: Update letter to parents



8th September 2014

Dear Parent/Carer,

Last academic year, I undertook a research project in Class that focused on children's writing in Reception class. Thank you for providing your consent for to be a participant in this project. All of the children involved helped me to gather data in numerous ways throughout the year. For example, they took photographs of the things that they felt were important to them in learning to be a writer in the classroom, and talked to me about how they thought they learnt to be a writer in school. It was a privilege to spend time with them and to hear what they have to say about their learning, and find out about all the things that they know about writing.

Throughout the research, I have been following ethical guidelines in my work with the children. This means that I have kept all of the data securely protected, and have planned the research carefully so that the children, as participants, are protected from harm and kept safe at all times.

In the summer, I presented some aspects of the research at two academic conferences, one in Finland and another in Canterbury. These presentations included some photographs that both the children and I had taken, and some examples of their work. All of the names of the children discussed in the presentation were changed to protect their identity. When I was working with the children, I asked them if it was OK to share my observations and their photographs with other people. They all consented for me to do this.

At present I am analysing the data and writing my thesis based on this analysis. I aim to publish the results of the study next year. The children's names will remain confidential and identifiable photographs of the children will not be included in any future publications.

I hope that has settled happily into Year One and I want to thank you for allowing his/her voice to be heard as part of this project. I have included a thank you card for

If you have any further questions regarding the study or are concerned about the publication and dissemination of information about your child, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Smith

k.l.smith417@canterbury.ac.uk

Doctoral Candidate

Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities

Canterbury Christ Church University

North Holmes Road

Canterbury

Kent

CT1 1QU

T: 01227 767700