



*Exploring (dis)abled children's embodied experiences in primary school space*

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# Exploring (Dis)abled Children's Embodied Experiences in Primary School Space

Katharine Elizabeth Terrell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

February 2022

# Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree. I am an enrolled student for the following award:

Name of award: Postgraduate Diploma in British Sign Language/English Interpreting

Awarding body: University of Central Lancashire

2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
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## Abstract

This thesis explores how (dis)abled children in one inner-city English primary school experience classroom space in an embodied way. It takes Disabled Children's Childhood Students (DCCS) as a starting point and applies Deleuzoguattarian ideas such as the *assemblage* and *becoming*, to contribute new knowledge to how classroom space disables and enables. The study took place over a seven-month period and involved 47 children who, in a novel approach, took part regardless of a label of special educational needs (SEN), disability or impairment. The children shared their experiences through various creative and visual qualitative methods, including photography, drawings and model rooms. These, combined with observations of the whole classroom space, were analysed thematically, paying attention to *lines of flight*, leading to various significant findings. Firstly, I found that the classroom space was saturated by the idea of vertical development: a normative expectation that children grow physically and metaphorically upwards towards adulthood. However, I also observed resistance from children to this idea. One original contribution to knowledge that this study makes is seeing photography as both a creative method and a form of resistance, as children who took part could turn the lens back on adults. Further insights included how certain forms of embodiment in the classroom are encouraged while others are discouraged. These are linked to ideas of crip epistemic insight: a perspective that privileges the experiences of disabled people's embodied experiences of the world. Finally, I discuss the resistance and joyful potential in "leaks" which challenge the boundaries imposed on children's bodies. Specifically, I contribute to the small but growing field of toilet studies in discussing expected behaviour in and around toilets. The thesis takes ideas from DCCS and assemblage theory and applies them in new ways to (dis)abled children's embodied experiences, making valuable methodological and theoretical contributions.

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This thesis is dedicated to the children of Harbour View School.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

To write about the body and embodiment is akin to singing about colour. It can be done (and indeed it has been done), but to do it well requires imagination and creativity. Even with such qualities, a song can never fully capture the difference between mustard and cerise. Going to a yarn shop and singing about the colour you want will not be a precise science, and if you are trying to get the exact shade you want, you might be disappointed. Yet, this hypothetical song might be more moving, more interesting and more inspiring than a shop display of coloured yarn. The harmonies might create connections, images and emotions not possible through other media. Other people might join in, different voices coming together into a choir, creating endless possibilities of sound. There will be times when you hit a bum note; people's voices might break; you might be out of time and out of tune, or even hate the song altogether. But when it all comes together, after hours of practice, it seems worth it. This thesis will usually, I hope, hit the right notes. Sometimes I may have transposed a note wrongly or misread the key signature, and for that I can only apologise, take responsibility, and learn. Occasionally I might even have created moments of elegance or beauty, which has only been reached by hours of practice with choruses of voices backing me up.

The participants of this study were (dis)abled children at Harbour View Primary School<sup>1</sup> (I explain the term “(dis)abled” at the end of this chapter, in section 1.4.) The focus of my research is (dis)abled children's experiences of school spaces. Those children's “voices” (however they communicate) permeate the thesis and I hope that is clear when reading. However, it is not, really, about individual experiences. Those individual experiences (as important as they are) are used to illustrate wider issues: of embodiment, of surveillance, power, and control, and of spatial *assemblages*: multiplicities which are ever-increasing in their connections and therefore ever changing in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). (This key idea is explained in more detail in the literature review). As explained in my opening paragraph, I am constantly aware of the struggle of putting into words the embodied experiences inherent in my study: the embodiment of the children and adults at Harbour View School, my

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym.

embodiment, and that of my supervisors, colleagues, family, and friends. Words will never be adequate in doing this, but neither would any other medium, and this is the one I have to work with. I hope, however, that I can adequately express what I need to, while also acknowledging (and even highlighting) the difficult, sometimes insurmountable, contradictions and difficulties of putting embodied experiences into words. Some of these difficulties have, to some extent, come to an uneasy truce. For others, I must be content just to show them, acknowledge them and let them be.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will give some background to the study, including introducing disability studies and embodiment, then giving an overview of the thesis. The overview introduces the participants, settings and data collection methods of the study, then details the aims and objectives of the research. This is followed by the thesis structure, giving a summary of each chapter in order.

### 1.1. Where have we been and where are we now?

I align myself primarily with the academic discipline of disabled children's childhood studies (DCCS) and its main priorities, which I discuss shortly. However, before introducing DCCS, it is helpful to give some background and history of disability studies. The rise of disability activism and disability studies heavily criticised how disabled people's lives were not controlled by disabled people themselves, as laid out by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975). Instead, debates centred upon the best ways to centralise disabled people's voices (Stone & Priestley, 1996). However, disabled children were not included in these debates (Connors & Stalker, 2007). As well as children's experiences being overlooked, disability studies for a long time had an uneasy relationship with theories of the body and embodiment, especially in relation to the *impairment/disability* distinction in the social model (Swain, French et al. 2004). However, there is a body of work which developed an embodied geography of disability (Holt, 2004) which considers the physical experiences of disabled people without the return to essentialism that Feely (2016) is keen to avoid. For instance, Stephens, Ruddick and McKeever (2015) capably rise to the challenge of non-pathologising yet embodied accounts of disabled children's

embodiment. They use Deleuzian ideas of *becoming* and *embodiment* and recognised that children experience their everyday environments in assemblages of bodies and space.

Independently of disability studies, a new “sociology of childhood” arose, with researchers developing new ways of thinking about childhood: seeing children as active agents in their social worlds (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2013). Only later have scholars explicitly considered a “disabled children’s childhood studies” (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Curran & Liddiard, 2017). DCCS has three main aims: to move from discussion *about* to research *with* disabled children; to follow ethics and research designs that centre children; and to trouble existing normative hegemonies in research and practice (Curran and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 1618). I situate myself in, and build on, these ideas.

## 1.2. What are we missing and where are we going?

There have been various attempts from DCCS and disability studies more widely to better understand disabled children's own experiences in non-pathologising ways (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Runswick-Cole & Curran, 2013). There have also been forays into youth, disability and embodiment (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018; Smith, 2016; Stephens, Ruddick & McKeever, 2015). However, there has not, to my knowledge, been a study in which children's embodied experiences are studied using these theoretical groundings regardless of disability or impairment label. In other words, all these studies' participants identified as, and/or were labelled as, disabled. I, on the other hand, did not invite or select children to take part based on having an impairment, being disabled or having a label such as 'special educational needs' (SEN) imposed upon them. However, as I explain later, sometimes without asking, adults would have an "urge to tell" me labels which other adults (doctors, psychologists etc) had given to children (see section 3.5.1 for further discussion of this).

This may seem an unusual approach for a study so heavily based upon disability studies and disabled children's childhood studies. However, I argue that it is justified for several reasons. Firstly, 'disabled', and other related labels, are contested. How can we advance ideas about disability if we stick rigidly to categories? As I explain in Chapter 6, adults use containment through borders and boundaries as a strategy for controlling children's bodies, while children can resist and push at these boundaries, create leaks and flows that help us to see boundaries in a different light. Secondly, labels of disability at the age of 5-7 years (the age of the children in my study) seem to come primarily from adults and are applied to children, rather than being a self-identification, and I do not wish either to rely on adults' labels of children, nor to put children into a position where they are forced to put themselves into a box. Beckett & Buckner (2012) found that children often conflate the concepts of impairment and disability (which have distinct definitions under the social model of disability) and focus heavily on bodily experience, while Lewis, Parsons and Robertson (2006) found many "disabled" children did not identify themselves with that label.

Thirdly, embodied experiences happen to everyone, across the spectrum of ability and disability, and I believe that children across that spectrum are worth listening to and have valuable insights. Everyone's ability fluctuates. Lots of (dis)ability research says this but continues to focus on "disabled people" as though it is an immutable category. However, the edges of categories, and the leaks between them, are fertile ground for new insights. Just as "disabled people are **not** the *subject matter* of the social interpretation [social model] of disability" (Finkelstein, 2001, p.1), disabled people are also not the subject of disability studies. Rather, disability is complex, fluctuating, ever-emerging. Studying environments and people (who may be labelled as "disabled", "able", "impaired", having "special needs" and/or being "disordered", and more) including people who have a "naturalised" "normal" "non-disabled" body can tell us about disabling processes. Finally, disabled people already bear a burden of "research fatigue" (Kitchin, 2000) and I do not want to add to this burden by specifically selecting participants who are disabled, although of course they may choose to take part. My approach, to invite children to take part regardless of how they are labelled in relation to SEND (or any other way) is one of my original contributions to knowledge, which I expand upon further in sections 3.6 of the Methodology and 6.5.2 in the Conclusion.

### 1.3. Overview of this study

The following sections give an overview of methods, setting and data collection (1.3.1), aims and objectives of the study (1.3.2), thesis structure (1.3.3) and the limitations of the study (1.3.4).

#### 1.3.1. Methods, setting and data collection

The setting for this study was Harbour View Primary School, a large inner-city school in the north of England. The participants were 47 children in Reception and Year 1, who took part in various creative methods, including drawings and collages; taking photographs on an iPad; decorating and playing with cardboard models of rooms; decorating and playing with paper people; and playing with and photographing a purple toy monkey named Sammy. The final method was my ethnographic observation of the space, and my own embodied experience of becoming part of classroom assemblages. These methods were chosen to be flexible, responsive, and to fit into the children's worlds. I also chose these methods as they are appropriate to meeting the research aims and objectives, to understand children's experiences in their own ways and to explore how they experience their bodies and their classroom spaces. Qualitative methods and interpretation are epistemically essential to provide the depth and complexity of analysis of children's embodied experiences of education, as they can begin to get at the depths and rich complexities of people's constructed social realities which cannot be straightforwardly or objectively understood (Greener, 2011).

This project builds upon the social model of disability, while drawing upon various disciplines including children's studies and geography, to consider how both disabled and non-disabled children view their own and others' bodies (impairment), the barriers they face (disability/disablement) and, crucially, their bodies as the site of educational experience in ways that make sense to them. In addition to the scrutiny placed on (dis)abled children's bodies in education, other forms of embodied experience have not been adequately integrated into existing analyses. This project includes perspectives from disability, d/Deaf and feminist studies. Rather than being a fragmenting approach, this intersectional approach can strengthen our understanding of embodiment in both "non-standard" bodies and naturalised bodies (non-disabled, White, male and non-queer) (Lindgren, 2004; Sherry, 2004). For example, integrating a focus on

d/Deafness can consider non-hearing frames of reference and knowledge through which the gendered and raced bodies of disabled children are understood, as d/Deafness straddles a boundary between impairment/disability and ethnicity/race because of the various ways the community identifies itself through language and culture (Ladd, 2002). There have been relatively few (although valuable) studies which consider, for example, Black and d/Deaf experiences side-by-side, focusing on bodies (and embodied language) which are considered inadequate, unsophisticated and primitive (Stewart & Benson, 1988). This research is critical in creating new knowledge about embodied knowledge itself, and unique in integrating the embodied (disabled, raced and gendered) educational experiences of children.

Combining the social model, assemblage theory and disability/children's geography provides a useful framework for considering how different people in the same physical space experience dis/enablement in constantly shifting ways. The social model is a useful tool for considering the ways in which the environment has various barriers to people with different impairments; assemblage theory allows us to consider this with more nuance by considering how these barriers interact with people in ebbs and flows, and disability/children's geography helps us to place these Deleuze and Guattarian constellations into a world in which children and adults interact with the space in differing ways, with ever-shifting dynamics of power and resistance. Bringing these ideas together makes an original contribution to the literature on (dis)abled children's embodied experiences of school spaces. This is one of three contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes.

### 1.3.2. Contributions to knowledge

This thesis makes three original contributions to knowledge. These are:

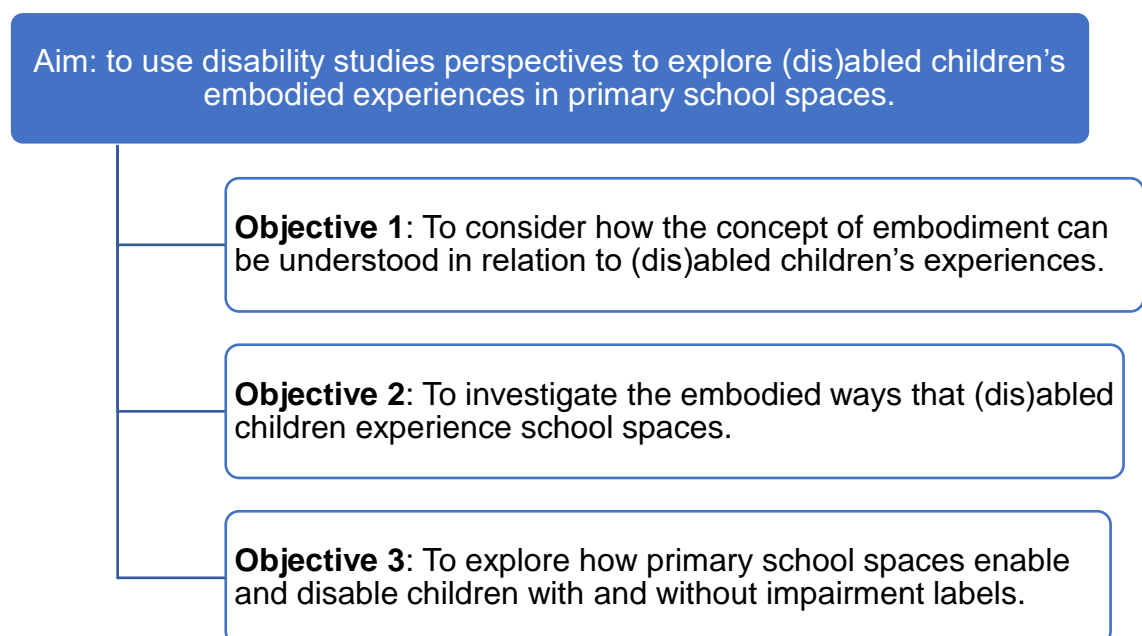
1. Having participants with or without a label of SEND;
2. Using photography with 5–7-year-olds as both method and a form of embodied resistance;
3. Combining theoretical perspectives to produce new insights (as mentioned above).

I will return to these contributions in more detail in the concluding section of my methodology chapter, and again in the conclusion of the thesis. As more

context and analysis develop, the details of these contributions will become clearer. Having given an overview of the study, its methods, and its original contributions to knowledge, I now move on to explain the aims and objectives of the study in detail.

### 1.3.3. Aims and objectives

Building on the gaps in knowledge indicated above, this study had an overarching aim to use disability studies perspectives to explore (dis)abled children's embodied experiences in primary school spaces. This aim was achieved through three objectives:



**Objective 1** involves taking the concept of embodiment, as outlined in the literature review, and exploring how we might apply it to (dis)abled children's experiences in new constellations and articulations that can contribute to the theory around embodiment, (dis)ability, and childhood.

**Objective 2** takes these contested ideas and applies them to real-world situations, investigating children's embodied experiences in the assemblages of various school spaces, primarily the classroom.

**Objective 3** moves from the individual lived experience to wider assemblages, understanding how bodies and space interact with each other, and how such assemblages might enable or disable children in various ways and contexts.



The three objectives together will build on each other to meet the overall aim of the research, to explore (dis)abled children's embodied experiences in the spaces of one primary school, rooted in disability studies.

#### 1.3.4. Thesis structure

At some point in my experience of researching and writing this thesis, I started thinking about it as a knitting project, starting with a tangled ball of yarn (ideas), and ending (hopefully!) with a beautiful knitted piece. Others have also used this metaphor in academia. For example, in their autoethnography of work experiences in the neoliberal academy, Jubas and Seidel (2016) use the metaphor of knitting because "knitting conjures images of joining strands, of creating patterns or making them visible" (p.63). They use the steps of knitting an object to structure their argument, seeing "casting on" as the start of their autoethnographical project; "basic stitches" as the terms they use; "needles and yarn" as their methodology and "casting off" as an end to their project. While I do not dive as deeply into the metaphor as they do, I follow a similar structure of casting on, knitting, and casting off. However, I start one step before them: before casting on, I needed to collect together the strands of yarn (ideas arising from existing literature) and then unpick this tangled web (organise the ideas).

This thesis consists of seven chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 unpicks the tangled yarn of ideas to review the theoretical and empirical literature relating to disability, childhood, embodiment, and space. By the end of this chapter, I have enough order that I can begin knitting. This provides the basis for the methodology (Chapter 3) which covers my methodological approach, the practical aspects of the study, including details about the participants, the school and the methods used to generate data, as well as ethical considerations. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the substantive chapters outlining my finding and data analysis, focusing on verticality, crip epistemic insight and embodiment, and leaks and flows, respectively.

#### *Chapter 2: Literature review*

The literature review gives an overview of relevant research to date, as well as highlighting some of the gaps which this study seeks to address. It covers changing ideas about the body and embodiment, mind/body dualism and the

way “othered” bodies, including those of (dis)abled children, are sites of struggle. It starts from an understanding of embodiment that questions the pervasive idea of mind-body dualism, basing itself instead in phenomenology: foregrounding lived, generative, embodied experiences of bodies in space. I introduce the importance of spatial theories, exploring ideas of the inextricable co-production of bodies and space. I then go on to consider how certain bodies have historically been left out of academic understandings of embodiment despite an apparently contradictory interest in “other” bodies from a white, male, Western perspective. I then bring a focus especially to the body in childhood studies and in disability studies, firstly by introducing the social model of disability and its developments and criticisms, and then connecting these ideas to assemblage theory, which sees space as created through ever-changing connections between people, ideas and things. Then follows an overview of the literature regarding children and childhood, particularly focusing on concerns that children “develop normally”. This is closely tied to the (incomplete) surveillance of (dis)abled children at schools, institutions used by the state to create docile, self-regulating bodies. Finally, I cover some of the ideas around disabled children’s childhood studies, which centres the experiences of children themselves. I conclude by highlighting some of the gaps in the literature which this thesis begins to fill.

### *Chapter 3: Methodology*

The methodology chapter outlines the ontological-epistemological basis of this study and explains the practicalities, including detail about the methods used and the research setting, Harbour View Primary School. I outline the various stages of the study, including accessing the field, the familiarisation period, gaining consent from adults and children to include them in the study, and the methods used to collect data, including observation and creative methods. I explain how the research methods and study design are appropriate ways to answer the research aim and objectives, as well as fitting with the ontological-epistemological perspectives of the study which are bound up in the phenomenological theories of space and embodiment outlined in the literature review. I outline how my approach to choosing methods are strongly influenced by the social model of disability and some of the ideas that come out of emancipatory research and “listening to children’s voices”. In this section I also

discuss the ethical concerns in the study, based on an approach that values children's perspectives and experiences of their lives and recognises the ever-shifting power dynamics between adults and children. Finally, I explain the process of data analysis, laying the groundwork for the three chapters which cover my findings. These are Chapter 4, discussing verticality; Chapter 5, covering *crip* epistemic insight and embodiment; and Chapter 6, exploring leaks and flows in the classroom, which I will now introduce in more detail.

#### *Chapter 4: Verticality*

Having introduced the school and the methodology of the project, I move on to discuss my findings regarding the experiences of children at Harbour View Primary School. Chapter 4 discusses my findings around the idea of *verticality* in the classroom. I begin by discussing the way that metaphorical verticality is used in the classroom, influenced by theories around children's development as a process that climbs ever upward, from lower to higher. This demonstrates an understanding of power whereby children are less powerful, while adults are taller and more powerful. Here I also bring in ideas from disability studies about height and power. Where there are power differences, there is surveillance, and I go on to illustrate through my findings how literal height differences are used by adults in the classroom to their advantage, specifically focusing on the use of photography in the classroom. I end by discussing children's resistance to power in the classroom.

#### *Chapter 5: Crip epistemic insight and embodiment*

The second of my data analysis chapters builds upon ideas of verticality, power and surveillance by demonstrating some of the specific ways that children's embodied practices are encouraged or discouraged depending on how they are seen by adults as helpful or not to learning. I begin the chapter by introducing the idea of *crip epistemic insight*, and specifically *Deaf epistemic insight*, and how these positions might help us to analyse children's experiences of embodied assemblages in classroom space. I take examples of various embodied practices - such as finger-counting - and consider what they might tell us about the power and control adults try to assert over children, especially in relation to "development". I finish the chapter by considering how we might

make classroom space more inclusive to (dis)abled children while moving away from stifling discourses of normality.

#### *Chapter 6: “In the right place at the right time”: Containing leaks and flows*

The final substantive chapter of this thesis builds upon the foundations previously laid: understanding the space of Harbour View Primary School as consisting of ever-changing assemblages, which adults may try to control in some way, while children may resist such control. This chapter expands upon the idea of control, exploring how one aim of classroom surveillance is to contain children’s bodies and behaviour in both literal and figurative ways. At Harbour View, this is exemplified in the school rule, “be in the right place at the right time”. I show how this rule has embodied consequences for the pupil in various areas of the school and in various ways.

#### *Chapter 7: Conclusion*

The concluding chapter ties together the loose ends of the threads that have run throughout. I revisit the journey so far, from the main themes of the existing literature and the gaps in knowledge, to the methodological underpinnings, to the findings. The conclusion brings together my findings from the three previously introduced chapters, bringing together the main themes and exploring the links between them. Specifically, I highlight the power dynamics of the Early Years classroom, and the ways these power dynamics can be disrupted. I also discuss the limitations of the study. The three main limitations I outline are the study is not (and did not aim to be) representative or generalisable; secondly, that my analysis is not the only way of understanding the meanings of the data and there are many other possible interpretations; and finally that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed many of the ways that schools such as Harbour View operate. Despite these limitations, this thesis makes a valuable contribution, and the final parts of the conclusion I make some suggestions for improved practice in schools and explore in more depth my three original contributions to knowledge.

#### 1.4. A note on language

I use the term *disabled people* to mean people with a long-term physical or mental impairment who are disabled by society through physical, cultural and social barriers - broadly, a *social model* approach as described by UPIAS (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975) which I discuss in further detail in my literature review. Some in critical disability studies use the term *dis/ability* (e.g., Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010), “to contest implicit assumptions of a disabled/able duality” (Slater, 2015, p.5). While I also want to make this contestation, I have chosen to use the term *(dis)ability* and *(dis)abled* following Holt (2003, 2004), as I mentioned at the beginning of the introduction to this thesis. I have chosen these terms to emphasise that being *disabled*, *able* or “having” *ability* or *disability* is not a trait inherent to a person or their body - rather, they are enabled or disabled to varying degrees through ever-changing assemblages in society. Furthermore, the term *(dis)abled* also highlights important complications to definitions of who is disabled.

Furthermore, I make use of the term *labelled with SEN*. This follows Goodley’s use of *labelled with learning difficulties*, recognising the social construction and contestation of ideas such as “learning difficulties”. This approach to language aims to hold these possibilities in mind: that a person might or might not be given the label “disabled” and might experience varying levels of enablement and disablement at different times. Like Slater (2015), I “consciously use the term ‘disability’ [and other related terms] ambiguously”, to highlight important complications and contradictions (p. 5). It encompasses those who are disabled, those who are not, and those who might be. In my literature review I go into more depth about the contested definitions and porosity of the boundaries of definitions of disability.

In this chapter, I have given an overview of where we have been and where we are going, and given an overview of how my study fits in. This mass of ideas is like a tangled ball of yarn – not (yet) a neat skein, uniform in colour and texture straight from the factory. It is more like the scraps of thread kept because each has value (this bit is a beautiful colour, that bit would be useful for mending something) but as-yet-unknown use. Over time, each scrap has added to the ball: at first it was small, and kept falling apart, but as more pieces of string are

added, it gets bigger and bigger. The next chapter, the literature review, will add to this ball but, importantly, it will start to carefully untangle and unpick the ideas. It outlines the key theories around bodies and embodiment, disability and childhood, to set the scene for the rest of the thesis,

## Chapter 2: Unpicking tangles: Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction

This literature review takes an overview of the existing knowledge on the subject of (dis)abled children's embodiment. Sometimes the ideas are messy, tangled, even elusive: I aim to acknowledge the leaks between one subject and another, as the ideas sometimes strain against the imposition of boundaries, just I describe in Chapter 6 on leaks, flows and boundaries. However, boundaries are necessary to bring this tangled mess to some order.

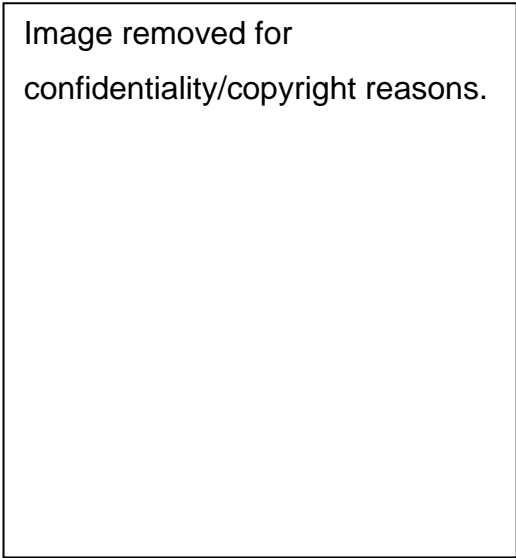


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confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 1 Placing order on messy, tangled ideas!*

*(Ng, 2014)*

Firstly, in 2.2. I give an overview of the “contested terrain” (Rogers, Castree & Kitchin, 2013, not paginated) of theories of the human body from geographical, philosophical and sociological perspectives. This will briefly explore some of the major theoretical issues of how we can understand and explore the body and why such study is important. This theoretical background to the body then culminates in an understanding of people's experiences from an “embodied” perspective. I explain how different scholars from various academic backgrounds define embodiment. To conclude the section on bodies and embodiment, I consider how these theories deal with bodily “difference”. I think consider the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly *assemblages*, *lines of flight* and *becoming* (2.3). Next, in section 2.4, I consider how disability studies, and particularly the social model of disability, have wrestled with ideas of the body and embodiment. I then go on to consider how theories of embodiment

have been applied to the study of education, children and childhood in section 2.5. Finally, I explore the literature around the surveillance of (dis)abled bodies, especially in schools (2.6). Throughout the literature review and the thesis as a whole, I aim “to approach theory not as something to genuflect before, but as a tool kit from which to draw selectively in light of the analytical task at hand” (Deleuze & Foucault, in Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 608).

Over recent years there have been rapid developments in the study of disability and the lives of disabled people more generally, and of the experiences of disabled children specifically. Broadly, speaking, disability studies has considered how disabled children’s experiences might be understood through the social model. Disability studies has certainly gone some way in rejecting the study of disabled children as simply objects of physiological or educational “development” or “lack” thereof. There have been steps towards understanding disabled children’s experiences through the nuances and complexity of the sociology of disability and childhood, both with influences from the sociology of the body.



## 2.2. Bodies and embodiment: Ontology and epistemology

In this first section, I start by exploring what we mean by the “body” and its importance in the theory of various academic disciplines. Cartesian dualism, a “metaphysical view of the world as composed of extended material bodies, on one hand, and souls or minds defined by thought, on the other” (Scott, 2015b, para. 1) has been taken for granted in much Eurocentric thought right across the academy. This has impacted on the way we, often unknowingly, accept and reproduce dualisms when thinking about the body. This dualism demotes the body to the physical form through which our true selves, our minds, experience the material world. For example, the body is “sometimes referred to as the material form through which people interact with the world” (Rogers et al, 2013, para. 1.). Perhaps at first glance this seems simple enough: everyone has a body; it is a physical, material thing; the body exists in the world; and each of us uses our body to interact with the world outside of our skin. However, the idea of the body is not one which we should treat as obvious or take for granted. I will go on to explore how academics have challenged Descartes’ idea of a mind/body split (as well as other dualisms), including how ideas from phenomenology have shaped discussions around the body. I will briefly explore some of Foucault’s (1995 [1977]) ideas of the body as a site of power struggle; I will then talk about the importance of the idea of the “lived body” and how this can be used as a basis for understanding how people experience the world. I will then bring in ideas about how bodies and space are linked: not simply that bodies exist in space, but that bodies are part of space, not separate from it, and that human and non-human bodies co-create spaces. This will lead logically onto understanding how we might understand an embodied perspective, as I explain how others have defined and used the perspective of “embodiment”, and I begin to justify its use in this study. Finally, I end this subsection by beginning to discuss how theories of the body and embodiment have been applied to understanding bodies labelled as “other” because of race<sup>2</sup>, disability and gender.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “*race*” (in inverted commas) is somewhat common in the literature to emphasise that race is a social construct rather than a biological reality. However, others have argued that treating race solely or simply as a social construct ignores the

### 2.2.1. Troubling binaries

The ancient idea of mind-body *dualism*, which sees the human body and mind as two distinct entities, permeates throughout much philosophical thought across the world (Simonson, 2009). This *Cartesian dualism* (Paechter, 2004) or *Cartesian separation* (Longhurst, 1997) sees the mind (thinking, learning, remembering) as more important than the body's ways of being and doing things, and moreover sees the essence of human nature residing in the mind, not the body. This basic understanding of human experiences has heavily influenced the social sciences (Scott, 2015a). Its "heavy legacy" has affected how we educate children and young people, prioritising their minds over their bodies (Paechter, 2004, p. 309) and indeed the entire basis for thinking about knowledge in Western universities (Grosfoguel, 2013) and western metaphysics (Grosz, 1994). Academic thought around the body is also seeped in other dualisms, which include the roles of nature versus culture, individual versus society, essentialism versus constructionism, and structure versus agency (Blackman, 2008, pp. 40 and 46; Longhurst, 1997). However, despite these mind-body, social-biological, nature-culture distinctions, there have been calls to dismantle such dualisms and binaries. Blackman (2008) for example discusses how we might reconsider how people and bodies experience the world. They suggest that instead of focusing on finding physical or social barriers between the self and the other, we might instead seek out "other stories" that might begin to capture the complexity of bodies in the world. Similarly, when discussing the reinforcement of gender binaries in Australian early childhood settings, Callahan and Nicholas (2019) point out that such binaries implicitly create a hierarchy that reinforces gender inequality. We can thus see that binaries are not neutral, but place value, prioritising mind over body, male over female. For this reason, I try not to reinforce a disabled/non-disabled binary, but to understand the complexities of these phenomena.

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material reality of race: "race is not constructed merely from ideas or meanings . . . but it is constructed by and in material reality itself" (Saldanha, 2011, p. 32). Therefore, I use the term *race* without inverted commas, on the basis that other real-yet-socially-constructed ideas such as gender and disability are not put in quotation marks. This follows other scholars of race, e.g., Chaney & Fairfax (2013); Jackson (2006).

### 2.2.2. "I do, therefore I am": Phenomenology

Despite its undeniable influence on our understanding of the world and human experience, this Cartesian dualistic separation of the mind and the body has not accounted "coherently for the special connection between mind and body that constitutes the human person" (Scott, 2015b, para. 2). Husserl's phenomenology rejects mind-body dualism and understand the body through its consciousness and experiences (Blackburn, 2016c). Merleau-Ponty built on Husserl's phenomenologist ideas and was concerned with the body's "way-of-being" in the world, a key figure key in trying to better account for the role of the body in human experience (Blackburn, 2016c). Merleau-Ponty rejected Cartesian dualism's focus on the primacy of the mind: rather than seeing human nature summed up as "I think therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), he argues that the body, not the mind, is the starting point for human experiences of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2005 [1962], pp. 429-475). Thus, he favours an understanding of human experience not based on being but on doing: "I can [do things] therefore I am". Merleau-Ponty argues that the body does not passively receive experiences from "a point of view 'inside' the head" (Blackburn, 2016a, para. 1). These descriptions highlight several important points when considering the study of the body and embodiment: firstly, the importance of lived experience (connected to phenomenology); secondly, the active, not passive, nature of bodies and the co-production of bodies and space. The Merleau-Pontian perspective concerns itself with a body that is "lived, active, generative" (Simonson, 2009, p. 50), (as opposed to Foucault's emphasis on the body being acted upon from without, as will be discussed further later). This understanding of the body as engaged in an "active, living synthesis of movement and awareness of space" (Blackburn, 2016a, para. 1) is deeply enmeshed within phenomenology, which concerns itself with the "lived body" (Rogers et al., 2013, para. 5.). Recent academic work in this area tends to take a phenomenological perspective, considering the "subjective experience of one's own body" (Blackburn, 2016b, para. 1) and the ways bodies are "active" (Mayhew, 2015, para. 2) in their interactions with space and other bodies. For disabled children, this might be seen in understanding that communication can be embodied as well as spoken or written; Maconochie (2018), for example, explains how one child, Haniya, communicates her views at nursery through

bodily resistance to certain activities. Maconochie argues that this “challenges the Cartesian dualistic separation of mind and body” (p. 134). Blackman (2008) explains that this approach to studying bodies goes beyond thinking about "how bodies are represented" to think about how we live in our bodies.

Despite the usefulness of a Merleau-Pontian, phenomenological understanding of the body, it has been challenged: Merleau-Ponty's “universal body” is in fact not gender-neutral but male (Butler, 1989, 2006, in Weiss, 2015, p. 83). Butler argues that Merleau-Ponty overlooks specificities in the practices that socialise people as male or female. Young (2005, in Weiss, 2015) has consequently argued that Merleau-Ponty's challenge to Cartesian dualism--the "I can" versus the "I think"--might be less straightforward for women than men precisely because Merleau-Ponty writes from the perspective of a man that he nonetheless considers to be neutral. Young, like Butler, argues that the Merleau-Pontian perspective does not consider the way women are socialised to move, and interact with the world, differently to men. Butler (1993) further argued that in developing theory around the materiality of bodies, specifically related to sex/gender, we should neither presume materiality, nor negate it. In other words, the material body is no more “natural” or basic than the meanings attached to bodies – it is not simply the case that a natural body pre-exists meanings and we place meaning upon it, but rather the physical, material body should be understood as also constructed by and through power. Butler's contribution went some way to include more than the White, male, non-disabled body, as has disability studies (of which more later) which has at times embraced an embodied, phenomenological perspective, understanding that the body is the material basis of every person's experience of the world (Hughes, 2004, p. 67).

This approach contrasts to the many thinkers who have considered the "cultural meanings attached to bodies" (Scott, 2015a, para. 1). Blackman (2008) explains that this "cultural inscription became one of the dominant traditions within sociology" which led to criticisms that the body was disappearing to be replaced by signs and symbols (p. 21). Burke and Duncan (2015), in considering the cultural meanings of children's bodies in early childhood education, outline some of the ways this has been done. Douglas, for example, considered how bodies can be seen as symbols, and Mauss explored how bodily techniques--

the movements and actions of bodies--are both influenced by and influence culture, and are not just physical (both in Burke & Duncan, 2015). This inscription of culture on bodies comes in various ways: for example, some have explored how the inscription of bodies happens externally to the self and relates to both discursive and material differences between different people (Rogers et al. 2013, para. 3.). This study is influenced by the phenomenological stance, concerned more with thinking about a lived body and its corporeal, material experiences of the world than considering how bodies are represented. This contrasts with certain studies of bodies in childhood which have explicitly rejected taking a position of understanding the body's "being-in-the-world" (Csordas, 1999, in Burke & Duncan, 2015, p. 6). Whilst I recognise the contribution made to sociology through the study of cultural and social meanings attached to the body, this study will focus more on the Merleau-Pontian lived body.

As explored earlier, Cartesian mind-body dualism "has led to great difficulties in dealing adequately with . . . human embodiment" (Scott, 2015b, para. 2). I will therefore set out some other ways we might consider our ontological-epistemological understanding of the body. Embodiment has been variously described as "a perspective that roots social existence and experience through the body" (Mayhew, 2015, para. 1) and centralising the "subjective experience of one's own body" (Blackburn, 2016b, para. 1). These two different definitions, taken from geography and philosophy respectively, both show the central importance of the body in understanding the theory of embodiment. However, they elide the complexity and controversy of the subject in the way they connect "experience" and "body". Mayhew (2015) asserts that embodiment is concerned with experience *through* the body while Blackburn (2016b) suggests that the key concern is experience *of* the body. Far from being mere semantics, these subtle differences cut to the core of some of the most contentious issues around the theory of embodiment. The idea that we experience the world *through* our bodies suggests, like Rogers et al. (2013) that a body is the medium or way a person takes in and processes information from the outside world. This relies on a conception of the world in which phenomena happen in the world outside of the body, and the mind experiences these phenomena through its corporeal, material form: the body (recalling classic Cartesian mind-body dualism).

I pick up on my phenomenological underpinnings in the methodology section.

### 2.2.3. Space

So far, I have only briefly mentioned space, in relation to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the co-creation of bodies and space. It is important therefore to have a working definition of *space*, drawing on Massey's (2005) important theorisation because, as the title *For space* suggests, "*space matters*": it is full of possibilities and potential (Anderson, 2008, p. 229). Massey makes three main "propositions" about the nature of space: Firstly, space is "the product of interrelations" as "constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (p. 9) – for my purposes, this is important when we consider the interrelations between people, things and space in the classroom. Secondly, Massey asserts that "without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space" – space is a sphere which contains the possibility "of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality" and "coexisting heterogeneity" (p. 9) – in other words, many and varied things happen in and through space at the same time. Massey's third proposition is that, because space "is a product of relations-between" (proposition one), it is "always under construction" (p. 9). This is because these relations-between are "necessarily embedded in material practices which have to be carried out"; these relational processes are always being made, Massey argues, and therefore space "is never finished; never closed" (p. 9). This echoes Deleuzian ideas of *becoming* – processes that are never finished (see Hall and Wilton, 2016, and Stephens, et al., 2015, discussed below). These ideas about space – being made of interactions, having multiplicity, and always being under construction – indicate Massey's attempts "to think space as a verb" (Anderson, 2008, p. 230). Massey's ideas have been applied to schools, recognising that their "particular configurations of socio-spatial relations" are being continually made and remade (McGregor, 2003, p. 354). In McGregor's study of teachers' "workplace topographies", these configurations were explored using "micro-ethnographic methods" including photography. While my fieldwork did not involve mapping in the same way, the methods I used (described in the next chapter) were also developed to capture some of the participants' experiences of space in the classroom. I will return to ideas about space later when discussing Titchkosky (2011), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Hansen and Philo (2007).

#### 2.2.4. "Other" bodies

So far, this review has discussed some of the contested areas of the body and embodiment while only briefly considering certain important differences between human bodies which may shape our experience of the world. Descartes, Foucault and Merleau-Ponty were all White French men writing from their own embodied perspectives. Despite some claims that these male, European thinkers could be writing about a neutral, universal body, many scholars have resisted this when considering gender, race and disability. Weiss (2015), for example, argues that Merleau-Ponty's accounts of embodiment are "[disability,] gender and race-neutral" (i.e., do not take these differences into account) (p. 86 and 78). It is important at this point to recognise that gender, race and disability are socially constructed ideas, not physical truths. Even the "distinction between sex (nature) and gender (culture)" had become "passé by the 1980s" (Hughes, 2004, p. 63). Similarly, experiences of disability and impairment are neither innate nor natural, as I explain later in the section on disability. Nevertheless, it remains true that all bodies are different and Weiss, therefore, makes an important point that no body can be seen as universal. She goes on to say, however, that his "phenomenology of perception" can still make a useful contribution to considering the embodied experiences of people with different experiences of race, gender or disability, as this account supports the ideas that such differences are not natural, innate, or fixed. Weiss (2015) argues that gender, race and disability are phenomena in constant flux in relation to other bodies and environments, created through interactions. Consequently, it is argued that social forms of oppression such as sexism, racism and disablism or "compulsory able-bodiedness" (McRuer, 2006, in Weiss, 2015, p. 78) all stop bodies from reaching their full potential by pre-determining the meanings of bodies' interactions with each other within certain cultural norms. Merleau-Ponty argues that gestures take on meaning through a complex web of historical and cultural context and background (Weiss, 2015, p. 85) and therefore different bodies which experience different forms of oppression have a "way of existing" which is a "historical expression of the relationship [a person] sustains with . . . society". One example of this from disability studies is Titchkosky's (2011) understanding of access "as a complex form of perception that organizes socio-political relations between people in

social space" (p.4). This relationship between people and space, considered through disability, is crucial.

The importance of the body in experiencing the world has also been highlighted by scholars of race studies. They have argued, for example, that Black<sup>3</sup> bodies are racialised--that is, they are noted as having race, or being raced--in ways that White bodies are not. Rather, White is defined against Black, the subaltern group, whose bodies are seen as "different" or "other", while White bodies, culture and language are naturalised and seen as "normal" (Carr, 2002; Mills, 1997). Much of this comes from the history of colonialism, during which time (and continuing into the present) White colonisers defined Blackness on their own terms and for their own purposes (Mills, 1997). This has led to a modern world in which Black bodies are seen as deficient, pathologised, problematised and placed under scrutiny (Jackson, 2006). This invades every area of life including around debates about how Black people, especially children at school, should speak and write: a form of policing of "Black language [which] goes hand in hand with the policing of Black bodies" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 49). Schools' concerns with educating Black children in ways which normalise their language has clear connections to Foucault's (1995 [1977]) analysis of schools as sites of control over children's bodies. The push towards normalisation becomes even more harmful when children's bodies are seen as deficient in more than one way. For example, like Black children, d/Deaf<sup>4</sup> children's bodies

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<sup>3</sup> When talking about race, I capitalise the word *Black* because "Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other 'minorities,' constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1332). While some (such as Greene, 2011) do not capitalise *white*, I capitalise the words *Black* and *White* to recognise that they are both racial categories. This follows Appiah (2020), Chaney & Fairfax (2013, p. 21), and Jackson (2006).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term *Deaf* (written with an upper-case initial D) to refer to those who identify as culturally Deaf, that is, belonging to a minority who use sign language as a first or primary language. This assumes the cultural/linguistic minority model of Deafness which rejects the positioning of hearing impairment as a disability and asserts that Deaf people are a distinct social group. I use *deaf* (written with a lower-case initial d) to refer to anyone with a hearing impairment (whether or not they



are pathologised and problematised (Lane, 1992). Stewart and Benson (1988), in one of the earliest in-depth studies of Black d/Deaf children in the United States of America, described how bodies which are both d/Deaf and Black are seen as posing a challenge to the education system that must be solved, underlining how their bodies are sites of scrutiny and concern. Further sections of this literature review discuss in greater depth how some (dis)abled children's bodies are problematised in education. For now, I will introduce key ideas from Deleuze and Guattari that help us to understand bodies and space and their complex relations.

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consider themselves to be culturally Deaf). I follow the convention of using the term *d/Deaf* when referring to both groups at once (Napier, 2002).

### 2.3. Deleuze and Guattari

This section introduces key ideas from Deleuze and Guattari's 1987 *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. The first subsection deals with assemblages; the second with lines of flight, leaks and flows, striation and smoothness; and the third, the idea of becoming.

#### 2.3.1. Assemblages

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) consider the world of multiplicities, rather than of binaries or individuals or unity. They consider these ever-increasing, ever-changing multiplicities to be the third principle in their concept of *rhizomes* and describe the *assemblage* as the "increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (p. 8). These assemblages are "emergent unities that nonetheless respect the heterogeneity of their components" (Smith & Protevi, 2020, section 2, para. 7) – again, rejecting the binary of individual vs collective and recognising that both exist at once. The idea of assemblages has been applied to individual bodies, understanding each body to be "an assemblage comprising myriad component parts and processes which are broken-down for purposes of observation" (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 613). (I discuss the surveillance of bodies later in this chapter). We might link this to the idea of the body as the "geography closest in" (Rich, 1984, in Nast & Pile, p.2; see also Longhurst, 1994). However, if we are rejecting the individual/collective binary, we might also imagine a complex web of individuals acting with/against/next to/around each other, and all these interactions happening through/within space. There have been calls to consider a conception of the body looking not at the individualised, bounded body that separates the self and others, but understanding the importance of "connectedness and mixing, rather than singularity and separation" (Blackman, 2008, p. 46). This allows us to think in more complex and creative ways about how bodies and space co-create and construct each other (Mayhew, 2015).

#### 2.3.2. Lines of flight - Leaks and flows

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state that "there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (p. 8). They describe each of these as a *line of flight* (*ligne de fuite*), which relates not only to ideas of "fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking" (Deleuze

& Guattari, 1987, p. xvi [Massumi's translation note]). Deleuze and Guattari describe space as *smooth* ("vectorial, projective, or topological") and *striated* ("metric" pp. 361-2). They argue that assemblages are part of a "state form" which tends to "create bounded physical and cognitive spaces, and introduce processes designed to capture flows" – to "striae the space over which it reigns" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, cited in Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 608). In other words, the state aims to introduce "breaks and divisions into otherwise free-flowing phenomena" – interrupting smooth space and trying to capture flows, temporarily and spatially fixed (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 608). Youdell and Armstrong (2011) use these ideas to better understand the "smooth spaces of schooling", arguing that:

Striations are the deep scores or grooves cut by the rigid lines of the assemblage, defining and constraining meaning and practice. The smooth spaces against which these are contrasted are not distinct spaces, but are moments and sites of possibility when and where the assemblage and its striations might be disrupted (p. 145).

Youdell and Armstrong argue, for example, that classrooms are striated along lines which enforce "proper" student conduct – through teacher-enforced discipline and timetables regulating the schedule of activities (p. 149). There are moments, however, where smoothness, and therefore possibility, emerges. Youdell and Armstrong give as an example the struggle between three pupils all trying to squeeze onto a two-seater sofa: the literal division of the sofa into two by the meeting of the two cushions in a "groove that demands two bodies only" (p. 149). This event is brought into sharper contrast when considering the pupils' designation as boys with "social, emotional and behavioural difficulties" – their bodies therefore seen through the lens of both non-normative behaviour and gender expectations of boys. Because of time and space constraints, I do not go in depth the Deleuzoguattarian concept of *affect* and *affectivity* nor Foucault's *discourse* that Youdell and Armstrong centralise. Nevertheless, we both use ideas of space, power and assemblages and how these (do not) allow bodies to do certain things in the classroom.

Normativity and gender expectations around leakiness have also been theorised by feminists such as Grosz (1994), Shildrick (1994) and Longhurst (1997), who consider women's embodiment "from a more symbolic perspective" as characterised by "permeability, blurriness of boundaries, and liquidities"

(Lupton, 2012, p.4). Perhaps most notably, Shildrick (1994) considers how women's embodiment is considered through its inability to contain: its "leakiness". She argues, however, that no body is bounded and secure, but rather that leakiness is inherent to all bodies and also to the structures that we take for granted and the very ontology and epistemology of the world we live in; we are not neatly bounded and contained individuals. Neimanis (2012) similarly argues that this approach, *hydrofeminism*, poses a challenge to Western metaphysics: we are all bodies of water "experiencing ourselves less as isolated entities and more as oceanic eddies" (p. 1). Liquid and leaky embodiment, Neimanis argues, is "neither essentialist nor purely discursive, this watery feminism is critically materialist" (p. 103) - like Butler, she emphasises that studying embodiment entails considering both the meaning of bodies and their materiality. Neimanis also picks up on Tuana's term *viscousporosity* which recognises the leaks and flows of our embodiment (porosity) but also recognises that different individual bodies do exist and there is not an open body of water with endless possibilities, but rather there are sites of resistance (viscosity) which stops us all becoming one watery mass (p. 104). Once again, we see that binary thinking can be unhelpful – there is sometimes viscosity, sometimes porosity, sometimes a mixture of the two.

These leaky connections are closely linked to the "flowing, leaking" lines of flight for Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. xvi). Lines of flight can start as "perhaps only a tiny trickle to begin with" (p. 216) but these tiny trickles can leak into cracks and cause overflows and floods. Kushinski's (2019) work links leaks with lines of flight, arguing that "leaks always symbolize opportunity" (p. 1) - new connections, links and *ands*. Kushinski's work also highlights that the very definition of leaks necessitates the existence of boundaries: only when boundaries are breached do flows become leaks. Yet despite the possibilities of leaks to radically rupture and disrupt, Kushinski is careful to point out that "leaks do not necessarily run counter to the interests of dominant modes of power" (p. 263). Therefore, it is important not to posit leakiness as inherently disruptive of existing power dynamics (in, for example, a classroom); it is far more complex than that.

Further on I go into more detail regarding leaks, flows and assemblages in relation to (dis)abled bodies; however, it is worth mentioning here that

metaphorical and literal *leakiness* is often attributed to disabled bodies as undesirable. Goodley & Runswick-Cole (2013) build on Shildrick (1999), exploring ideas of disabled children's bodies as leaking, lacking and excessive. Their embodied approach emphasises the importance of considering "bodies that literally leak" about which "disability studies have had very little to say" (p. 11). (I discuss disability studies and the body further below.) They discuss taboo subjects such as shitting rather than adhering to the idea of a perfectly bounded body. Similarly, Liddiard and Slater (2017) discuss the expectation of bodies containing themselves, literally and figuratively; the requirement of such containment for normative adulthood; and the implications this has for young disabled people. Holt, Lea and Bowlby (2012) also describe how a school autism spectrum disorder (ASD) unit acts as a (porous) space of containment "abnormally behaving" children (p. 2200). This area of study is ripe for further exploration, and I pick it up in my chapter on leaks and flows.

### 2.3.3. Bodily becomings

Some in disability studies have not engaged with Deleuze and Guattari perhaps due to the "widely misunderstood figure of the body without organs" (Shildrick & Price, 2005, p. 13). However, the body without organs (which could be human or non-human) "is not an empty body stripped of organs" but rather a body whose organs are in the form of "molecular multiplicities":

Thus the body without organs is opposed less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism. The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization . . . The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 30)

Thus, argue Shildrick and Price, "the body without organs figures a dis-organisation [*sic*] that will open up myriad unpredictable and temporary lines of connection and encounter" (p. 13), opening up understanding bodies and assemblages in new ways. This also encourages us to move away from thinking of singular physiological bodies as the unit of study (which might reinforce Cartesian understandings of the human: that each person (mind/soul) has a body, and that each of these bodies can act either alone or in groups). Rather than understanding bodies as units bounded by skin, we can consider each person's body in a constant state of becoming with its environment - in this

way, we might consider more complex, interconnected embodiment. This might be achieved through considering "other stories", relying on our unit of study being something beyond individual bodies experiencing external phenomena (Blackman, 2008, p. 46), instead understanding the complexities of bodies and assemblages.

Some in disability studies have embraced Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, however. Hall and Wilton (2016) and Stephens, et al. (2015) both use Deleuzian ideas of the *becoming* of bodies to frame their research. They offer "provocative ways of thinking through disabled and non-disabled becoming" (Hall & Wilton, 2016, p. 5) which describe bodies in ever-changing state of becoming, rather than in a single, fixed, authentic and stable identity position. These ever-shifting relations between human and non-human bodies, they argue, can create arrangements that can both enable and disable individuals. Hall and Wilton (2016) use non-representational theory (NRT), a form of relational geography, both to understand the geographies of disability and to "unsettle" assumptions of the "able-body". NRT, they argue, moves from an epistemic "emphasis on meaning and identity" towards an ontological "concern with bodies and material doings" (Hall & Wilton, 2016, p. 2). It also enables a way of thinking not of a stable and "authentic" disabled self, but rather of "relational becomings" (Hall & Wilton, 2016, p. 729) – bodies constantly in a process of changing and becoming in relation to others. (We can clearly see here a connection to Massey's (2005) first proposition about space as discussed above.) This thinking foregrounds a concern with embodied practice and the importance of analysing the everyday, mundane activities that nonetheless hold social importance. They argue that although the social model of disability was an important "conceptual hook" in the development of disability studies scholarship, it has been criticised for ignoring the lived reality of the impaired body (p. 2). Hall and Wilton argue that social environments are not straightforwardly either inclusive or exclusive, but rather are "contexts in which people engage and perform their embodiment and in doing so re/produce and transform both themselves and their surroundings". They also highlight the importance of seeing people's dependencies on other people and on things not as a negative. In this way, we can consider the how everyone is dependent upon and part of complex assemblages.

Similarly, Stephens et al (2015) describe how the becoming of bodies happens in relationship to other people and environments, in a Deleuzian assemblage consisting of a trio of aspects: bodies; built form; and social expectations (Stephens et al., 2015). This assemblage approach, they argue, allows for an understanding of an ever-changing, flexible reality in which bodies and the built form (and the natural environment) are in a constant process of becoming and performing, and children's capacity to act waxes and wanes according to the assemblage (Stephens et al., 2015, pp. 198-200). Stephens et al.'s (2015) fieldwork considered children's experiences of two forms of physical movement, falling and crawling, and adaptations to the physical environment in the school and home. They found that children viewed their bodily movements and environmental adaptations differently according to the setting, and argue that a child's choice to walk, crawl and/or use an adaptation is a complex decision made within a system of values set up by adults, and influenced by other children and their environments, in which there is no absolute fixed moral position. For example, participants in the study had mixed views about crawling: some saw it as an undesired form of movement which is embarrassing to do in front of strangers, while others preferred it because it is faster than walking. We can clearly see here how the idea of "mis/fitting", discussed further later, can also apply (Garland-Thomson, 2011). This "situational ethics" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 206) means that the authors recommend responding to children's own realities because "children miss out when their own embodied experiences, emotions and assessments are not part of what shapes the social rules and built forms" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 205). For example, they found that some families were more accepting of children moving in a less "orthodox" way which, they suggest, might be because the private sphere produces "more inclusive forms of care" (Fisher, 2007, in Stephens et al., 2015, p. 210) rather than viewing difference as something to be resolved. They conclude that assumptions cannot be made about a space being simply inclusive or exclusive, and that to improve spaces for children we must work with children from their perspective and consider the social meaning of spaces and assemblages as well as physical access. This means, for example, that adaptations to schools should not be markers of difference, and that in enhancing the capacities of a

body we should respond to situational contexts rather than aim for “normalcy” (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 214), a concept I will return to shortly.

In the preceding sub-sections, I have given an overview of the complexities of Deleuzoguattarian assemblages, an idea I return to again and again throughout the thesis. Then I explored lines of flight and leaks/flows, and the ideas of striation of space compared to smoothness, and how these ideas might relate to disability. Throughout the thesis I consider the tussle between the attempts by adults to striate classroom space, and children’s resistance and attempts to make the space smooth, pushing at edges and allowing leaks and flows to take over. This is especially evidence in Chapter 6. Then, I discussed the idea of becoming, an idea I pick up again in Chapters 4 and 5.



## 2.4. Disabled embodiment/embodied disability

In the following sub-sections, I will explore some of the key issue around the complex connection between theories of disability and theories of embodiment. I first outline the tricky relationship between the social model of disability and the body, before moving on to explore some of the developments of the social model in understanding the importance of embodied experiences.

### 2.4.1. Impairment vs. disability: The social model binary

Epistemologically the origins of disability studies arose from disabled people's organisations, and particularly a politically and academically ground-breaking idea formulated by UPIAS (approach (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975): the "social model" (Oliver, 1990) or "social interpretation" (Finkelstein, 2001) of disability. The social model of disability focuses on the social barriers facing people with impairments and has shifted the discourse away from disability as an individual tragedy sited in the body (Campbell & Oliver, 1996). It also makes a crucial distinction between impairment (a physical or mental deficiency) and disability (how people with impairments are prevented from full access to all areas of life because of social, economic and physical barriers) (Campbell & Oliver, 1996). UPIAS argued that the essential task of disabled people's organisations was to help "disabled people to organise together to take a more active part in struggling for the changes in society which will ensure that we are brought into the mainstream of life, rather than being excluded" (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975, p. 4 in original).

Part of this understanding of disability was highlighting a difference between physical impairments and disablement by social factors. In a meeting with the Disability Alliance, UPIAS stated: "disability is a situation, caused by social conditions, which requires for its elimination" and "it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society" (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975, p. 3 in original). In this meeting, they also highlighted how medical and other professional "experts", along with the state, measure, analyse, and "assess physically impaired people . . . as though we were things" (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975, p. 18 in original). Consequently, they argued,

the best way to improve disabled people's lives was not to treat "physically impaired people" as "things" but rather for disabled people to assess, and change, "things" within wider society that disable them (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975, p. 18 in original). Therefore, disability studies generally focused on social barriers and how to change them, rather than people's bodies or embodied experiences. After all, as Garland-Thomson (1997, in Markotic, 2001) argues, "extraordinary bodies" are "constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance," and "the physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity" (p. 136). The urgent need was to get away from these medicalised ideas about bodies. My research, however, wishes to build upon the literature that has since begun to rehabilitate the idea of the body and embodiment in disability studies, understanding the body "not merely as a surface of contested representations or an inert object latched on to by social processes, but rather as the three-dimensional site where the biological and the societal fuse" (Hansen & Philo, 2007, p. 495).

#### 2.4.2. Social model criticism and development

So important was the idea of identifying and removing "disabling barriers" to the development of disability studies that it was used in the title *Disabling Barriers - Enabling Environments* (Swain, Finkelstein, French & Oliver, 1993), a collection that "became, arguably, the most widely used reader in disability studies" (Swain, French, Barnes & Thomas, 2004, p. 1). Hughes' (2004) chapter in the second edition of that book (Swain, French et al. 2004) explains how the 1990s saw the development of critiques of the social model based on its "failure to account for impairment, in part brought about by the focus on physical access to wheelchair-users" (p. 63). This included calls for a "social model of impairment" and recognising that impairment is, like disability, socially constructed rather than natural (p. 65). This viewpoint has been espoused by feminists such as Thomas (1999) who coined the term "impairment effects" - which should be understood but not naturalised or viewed as pre-social, biological phenomena. There was therefore a call to better account for the bodies of disabled people. Yet there is still a fine line to be trodden: while everyone has a body, "only some bodies, only some of the time and only in some places, are understood as disabled ones" (Titchkosky, 2011, p.4). We need, then, to also consider the

“able body” – how it is neither more natural nor less constructed by and through space than the impaired/disabled body (Hughes, 2004; McRuer, 2013). Yet, as discussed above, we should not imagine that there is a simple binarised dichotomy between disabled bodies and non-disabled bodies. As Titchkosky argues, we must interrogate and understand why and how the world seems “naturally” accessible to some but not others, (p. 6) including, for example, through the bureaucratic processes and structures which maintain individuals in particular roles.

This brings us on to another central issue: access. It has been argued that some social model-based scholarship on disabled people's lives and experiences has missed the connection between "social identity and process" and "spatial or geographical points of reference" (Imrie & Edwards, 2007, p. 623). Dolmage (2017) argues that it is not simply that disabled people are oppressed through the production of space (although that may be true), but that disability is also created by and through space (p. 102). To explore this, Dolmage uses ideas about access to various spaces and the metaphors around the language of access. Despite its ubiquity, the term *access* is slippery. Titchkosky (2011) considers it to be “a way people have of relating to the ways they are embodied as beings in particular places where they find themselves”; central to the idea of access, then is the idea of embodiment, which is “all the ways we have to sense, feel, and move in the world” (p.3). Titchkosky argues that to really understand access requires thinking about disability, bodies and space as complex phenomena, and understanding both access and disability as ways of perceiving and orienting to the world and explains that “little is straightforward in the quest for access, and even less is certain in the meaning of the relation between embodiment and social space” (p. 10). Despite not being straightforward, many have considered this embodiment-space relationship in disability studies. Pritchard (2020), for example, considers how the built environment can be disabling to people with different body sizes who may be disabled, such as those with dwarfism. I discuss some of the issues around height in the classroom in my chapter on verticality.

Goodley (2011) suggests that *critical disability studies* should consider how the phenomenon of disability relates to the intersections of other identities, and “impairment and disability are interrogated as phenomena enacted at the levels

of the psyche, culture and society . . . remaining ever vigilant of political, ontological and theoretical complexity” (p. 157). Just as feminist and sexuality scholars have challenged the Cartesian mind-body dualism that lies at the heart of much Western thought (Lindgren, 2004; Foucault, 2012), critical disability studies take their cues from other areas of academia such as critical race and feminist theories (Goodley, 2011; Asch, 2004). Critical disability studies assist “the queer feminist strategy of pulling the (male) homeless mind back into the body” (Goodley, 2011, p. 157). This places the body back into a central position when considering the experiences of disabled people, for example exploring the embodiment of gender and sexuality in young disabled people (Slater, 2015), rather than leaving the body an unexplored absent presence (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001).

## 2.5. What about the (disabled) children? Disability studies and childhood

Earlier work on disability and childhood had a strong focus on education, exploring issues such as segregation and the quality of education for disabled children. For example, Swain, Finkelstein, et al's (1993) volume has several chapters focusing on education, including Corker (1993), Swain (1993) and Oliver (1993a). Finkelstein's (1993) chapter compares segregated schooling to segregated living, suggesting that educating disabled children in mainstream education is the best way (p. 40). This argument is picked up by Oliver and Barnes (1993) who argue that in the 1990s, disabled children had no option but to accept segregated schooling because mainstream schools are not set up to accommodate them (p. 273). This situation, Oliver and Barnes argue, does not prepare disabled children for independent adulthood, instead perpetuating the idea of disabled people as being in need of care (p. 273). Clearly, for nearly 30 years, disabled children's experiences of education were of concern to disability studies, although generally the focus was not on embodiment and experiences of space - which, as we shall see, became a focus later.

Non-pathologising, sociological interest in disabled children's lives has existed for at least 20 years. For example, the "Life as a disabled child" project produced 14 research papers from 1998 onwards (Watson et al., c. 1999, p. 22-23). This study used qualitative methods with a range of children aged 11-16, focusing on the experiences of the children themselves, rather than the views of their parents or professionals. One "striking" finding "was the high levels of surveillance of disabled children by adults . . . . Disabled children spent a disproportionately large amount of their time in the company of adults and in social spaces where adults were actively present" (p. 11). Priestley (1998) similarly notes the scrutiny disabled children are under at school (I pick up on this theme later in this chapter, in the section School Surveillance and Embodiment). Priestley encourages recognising the heterogeneity of disabled childhoods and disabled children's potential for agency.

Connors and Stalker (2007) consider how the social model of disability might be applied to disabled children's experiences. They use a theoretical framework based on the new sociology of childhood that moves beyond the 1990s focus on the "psychological, physical and social development" of children as "adults in

training” (p. 20). This framework understands childhood as socially constructed and recognising children’s perspectives and their role as social agents, rather than simply as passive. Connors and Stalker studied the lived experience of 26 children aged 7 to 15 through activities such as “spidergrams” and picture cards, avoiding questions that related directly to disability or impairment. They found that children experienced disability in four main ways: firstly, in relation to their impairment (in a social model sense of their physical or mental condition); secondly in relation to the feeling that they were different to non-disabled children; thirdly, how other people behaved towards them; and finally, in experiencing material barriers. Connors and Stalker use Thomas’ (1999) “social relational model” in which the oppression of disabled people is connected to unequal power relations in society. Although the children reported sometimes feeling difference from their peers, Connors and Stalker also found that they presented themselves as being similar to non-disabled children, and hypothesised that they may lack positive ways to describe their feelings of difference. Connors and Stalker identify two ways of thinking about “difference”: firstly, in ideas espoused by feminist disability scholars such as Thomas (1999) and Morris (1991), who consider that disabled people are “essentially” different; or alternatively, that essential difference does not exist and is constructed and maintained by social structures (Price & Shildrick, 1998, in Connors & Stalker, p. 21).

Yet despite this long-standing interest in some areas, disabled children’s lives continue to be overlooked in children’s studies. For example, Wyn and Cahill’s (2015) *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies* claims to offer “a comprehensive introduction” to the area of study (p. v) yet there is not a single entry in the index for “disabled” or “disability”, compared to, for example, numerous entries for “class”, “gender” and “race”. This exclusion of disability as a topic comes despite the handbook’s explicit aim to move away from a “reductive problem-centric view of childhood” (p. v). Perhaps because of this kind of exclusion, there especially remains questions “about how disabled children experience their bodies and how, crucially, others experience and respond to their bodies” (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 1). Nevertheless, there is a small (but very welcome) body of literature which considers children’s experiences of their own lives in a non-pathologising way. Boggis’s (2017a)

edited collection brings together interdisciplinary work on disability and childhood. This collection focuses on legislation and policy (Ayling, 2017), the safeguarding of young disabled people (Boggis, 2017b) and SEND policy and practice (Rawlings, 2017).

The development of disabled children's childhood studies may begin to answer some of those questions. Disabled children's childhood studies draw on both the new studies of childhood and disability studies, but is distinct from both (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2013 & 2014, p. 1617). As mentioned in my introduction, Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) identify three key concerns for this discipline: firstly, moving away from "discussion 'about' disabled children" towards research that centres working *with* disabled children; secondly, following ethics and research designs that centre the child; and thirdly, contributing to an agenda for change which troubles existing normative hegemonies (p. 1618). They borrow Overboe's term "normative shadows" (2004) to describe the position that many disabled children find themselves in, and they argue that disabled children's childhood studies aim to "enable disabled children to step outside of the 'normative shadows' that so often cloud discussions of their lives" (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 1618). Furthermore, Curran and Runswick-Cole state that the "insights from disabled children's childhood studies extend beyond service-based research and beyond impairment-based 'problems' and illustrate the impact of the deficit and managerial preoccupations of the Global North" (p. 1618). These deficit models, along with concerns with normative development and productivity, are discussed further in the following sub-sections. This dissertation aligns itself with disabled children's childhood studies, recognising that disability studies has side-lined children while children's studies has side-lined disabled children.

#### 2.5.1. Inclusive education? The push for normalcy

Disability studies have for some time considered the effects of educational segregation and comparatively lower standards of education for disabled children (Campbell & Oliver, 1996). This stems partly from concern about disabled children's educational outcomes on developmentalist measures such as employment prospects which serve neoliberal capitalism (Goodley, 2011, Ch. 9). Disabled children's education demands "normalcy"/"normality" and

integration with non-disabled peers while simultaneously setting disabled children apart as having “special needs” (Davis, 1995; Hunt, 1996). Davis argues that the idea of normalcy in relation to bodies is bound up with the development of industrialism and capitalism, which “redefined the body” as an “able-bodied” extension of factory machinery (p. 87). Capitalism’s demand for normalcy, it is argued, is a central aspect of the Foucauldian understanding of the governmentality of education which aims to shape children into “civil and productive members of society” in an “unambiguously normative” way in service of the modern nation-state (Goddard, 2009, p. 31).

However, recent research considers the pedagogical potential of “anti-disablist” (Beckett & Buckner, 2012) and “inclusive” education (Goodley, 2011) which does not simply demand integration (i.e., normalcy) but actively considers what “inclusion” means for children whose bodies are sites of scrutiny and oppression.

The connection between bodies, space and inclusion is discussed in some areas of human geography. Imrie and Edwards (2007) argue that the way bodies move through space(s) – especially when spaces are designed for “normal”, non-disabled bodies – tells us a lot about how the processes of disablement occur and/or are resisted. Other geographers interested in this area include Hansen and Philo (2007) who discuss disabled people’s embodied experiences and the treatment of the body in both disability studies and disability geography. They focus on asking disabled people about their own bodily practices, especially those that are not considered “normal”, and advocate creating a “normality of doing things differently” (p. 502). Hansen and Philo highlight the complex ways that disabled people practice, and sometimes master, the “embodied ‘art’ of managing the time, space and speed realities of ‘doing’ daily living” (p. 497) and suggest that this “doing things differently” should be embraced when considering (dis)abled bodies in space.

In relation to schools, the physical layout of the classroom is an important part of the way children’s bodies are regulated and controlled: “classrooms, playground, and corridors . . . in their architectural design and layout . . . prescribe, to some extent, the type of movement that is possible and desirable” for children (Kehily, 2015, p. 219). For Kehily, bodies in schools can be seen in



various ways: “collectively as a student body to be controlled and moved about with ease; alternatively as individual bodies to be, simultaneously, trained and protected; or . . . a site of activity and engagement” (p. 218). We can see this in literature designed for teachers, such as a guide for early childhood educators entitled *How to handle hard-to-handle preschoolers* (Appelbaum, 2013) which clearly positions children’s bodies as a problem to be solved. However, (dis)abling classroom assemblages do not only come from adults; Holt (2007), for example, considers how children themselves are part of the (re)production of disability in primary school playgrounds. For example, Holt explains how some children are only partially included in playground games because of their perceived difference (p.794), and “many children cuddle and pet those with body differences” (p. 795) in ways that negatively reinforce ideas about physical dependency. We might make a connection here to Kushinski (2019) who reminds us that leakiness (e.g., behaviour “leaking out” that adults might disapprove of such as “petting” a disabled peer) does not necessarily confront or resist dominant modes of power (e.g., this potentially inappropriate behaviour reinforces disability).

Karmiris (2019) argues that we must question the common rhetoric of “inclusion” in classrooms, recognising that inclusionary school practices sustain the idea of normalcy through medicalising and labelling. Karmiris explains that such “inclusion” in the classroom is for some people always conditional, whereas bodies that are white, male, middle-class and non-disabled feel at home because education systems have been designed for bodies like theirs. Karmiris argues that we need to reconsider how inclusion looks for normative and non-normative bodies through radically reimagining our relationships to each other. Similarly, in the Australian context, Watson (2017) encourages us to question ideas about normalcy in early childhood classrooms, and to move our analysis from individual children to wider power structures, questioning the idea of normalcy. Watson also encourages us to consider the moments of silence that reinforce power structures, giving the example of Hugo, “a child with a diagnosis”, lying on the floor crying at the start of the school day while other children file past him in silence, reinforcing their categorisation as normal (pp. 147-9). Rather than focusing on the child crying, Watson considers turning the gaze onto the silences and power structures, focusing on the unmarked

category of normal to better understand the situation in which Hugo's behaviour is marked by silence and taboo, reinforcing ideas of his abnormal behaviour "resulting from" his diagnosis. I pick up on some of these ideas throughout this thesis, including my chapter on verticality, which considers how children use floor space as a form of embodied resistance.

Other ways of thinking about children's experiences in classroom space include Stephens et al.'s (2015) "framework of flexible emplaced subjectivity" (p. 206) whereby disabled children's embodied experiences (and their ability to act) change according to particular arrangements of bodies, social expectations and the physical environment. For example, crawling might be seen as a failure to develop normally in a school system which prioritises normalisation; however, a "framework of flexible emplaced subjectivity" might see crawling as a positive form of resistance to such practices, which opens up possibilities of becoming (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 206). Crawling could also be viewed neither negatively nor positively but as a neutral form of doing things differently (Hansen & Philo, 2007). Holt et al. caution, however, that this approach should not overlook specific moments in space and time where bodies become fixed in their abilities to do things, while still looking for "potential enabling moments" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 201). This can be compared to Garland-Thomson's work on *misfitting* (2011). Garland-Thomson describes a *misfit* as "an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole. The problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition, the awkward attempt to fit them together" (pp. 592-3). This concept is a counterpoint to the medical model/social model dichotomy that typifies much early work in disability studies, as previously discussed in this literature review. Weiss (2015) builds on Garland-Thomson's misfit by relating the concept to Merleau-Pontian ideas. Weiss suggests that, despite not explicitly citing Merleau-Ponty, Garland-Thomson considers disability to involve both the body and its environment in a misfit with each other, just as Merleau-Ponty theorises experience as emerging from world-body interactions (p. 90). Everyone exists on a constantly shifting spectrum of (mis)fitting, according to Garland-Thomson, with body-environment dynamics constantly shifting.

### 2.5.2. The “problems” of children’s bodies

There has been useful research on children’s bodies in relation to space and place. This includes Wexler and Eglinton’s (2015) argument that we should understand children’s wellbeing in a relational way, existing in complex interactions with physical and social geographies, as well as fluidity reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari. Thorne (1993) explores how children’s bodies move around in the playground in apparent chaos, how they interact with each other’s body, and how they playfully use their bodies - drawing on them, showing them off, using them in creative ways - that she sees as “little oases of imagination in dryly routinized scenes” (pp. 15-16). She cautions, however, about over-idealising children’s openness to new experiences, as it creates a false dichotomy between open, creative, sensuous children and closed, repressed, developed adults (p. 16). Despite these promising moments, Coffey and Watson (2015) argue that the body has been overlooked in childhood and youth studies, or studied only obliquely. Where it has been a focus as part of the more recent “material turn” (p. 261), bodies are conceived of primarily in terms of pathologised “problems” such as “obesity” and “binge” drinking. One nod towards understanding disabled children’s embodied experiences is the focus on “healthy” and/or “risky” embodiment - for example in relation to young people’s sexualities (Kehily, 2015) and the concern with children’s “successful completion of developmental objectives” without considering wider contexts and agency (Coffey & Watson, 2015). Much of the medical, psychological and educational literature on children’s lives - and perhaps especially their bodies - takes an uncritical perspective that children are “not quite ‘finished humans’ and are therefore subject to developmental scrutiny and targeted interventions to ensure ‘proper growth’” (Wexler & Eglinton, 2015, p. 128).

This concern with developmental objectives is apparent in the way that “play provides a mechanism for assessment, diagnosis and therapeutic intervention for atypically developing children” (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 500). Goodley and Runswick-Cole argue that when play is seen only, or mainly, as a tool for development, this is “risky for the disabled child” and “threatens the spontaneity and intrinsic value of play as adults colonise the world of play, directing the ‘goals’ and judging the ‘quality’ of the play” (p. 503). While we should take Thorne’s (1993) warning seriously, and not over-idealise children’s

activities (p. 16), it is important to recognise the way play, along with other activities, are measured as developmental yardsticks on normative understandings of development which close off, rather than open, children's potential (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, p. 503). Again, we can understand this closing or opening as connected to Deleuzoguattarian smoothness and striation – this study continues to expand upon how these work in school spaces.

The importance of developmental discourse is also important in Kehily's (2015) consideration of her own and children's embodied experiences which "appeared to take on heightened significance for children on the cusp of adolescence" (p. 218). This reflects the social and cultural importance of the idea of the adolescent in a clear developmental stage between child and adult. Yet Burman (2012) analyses common discourses around child development and argues that developmental psychology approaches to studying childhood normalise ideas of standard forms of development which not all children fit into. Similarly, Tisdall (2003) suggests that disabled children are labelled variously as "dependent", "troubled", or "needy" and are seen as a "policy concern" mostly in relation to transitions from school to work (p. 19, see also Atkin & Hussain, 2003). This concern is based on a preoccupation with becoming a "productive" adult, implicitly meaning having employment and independence, both of which are seen as essential parts of adulthood (Tisdall, 2003, p. 20; see also Hanson & Philo, 2006). Not only are children prepared for adulthood at school, she argues, but they are defined against adulthood as "not yet adult" and "naturally" dependent on others. This has particular significance for disabled children and when considering gender, as both disability studies and feminism have criticised a dichotomy of (in)dependence which relies on assumption of productive waged labour (Tisdall, 2003, p. 21). This continues into adulthood for disabled people: "disabled people are often treated as though their way of doing things is disruptive to the 'normal' speed, flow or circulation of people, commodities and capital because they 'waste' more time and space than they should, maybe reducing profit margins (Hansen & Philo, 2007, pp. 498-9). This demonstrates how disabled people's bodies are continually assessed for their productivity or apparent lack thereof.

This concern with normative development leading to productive adulthood is reflected in policy. Burch (2017) argues convincingly that the *Special*

*educational needs and disability code of practice* (SENDCoP) (Department for Education [DfE], 2014) reflected the political ideology of the UK's Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, and was "a site where political ideology meets practical reality" (Burch, 2017, p. 95), a tool to further the political and economic agenda rather than to support children labelled with SEN. She uses Foucault's (1991a, in Burch, 2017) concept of governmentality, "the art of exercising power in the form of the economy" (p. 98), to explore how disabled children are at the mercy of a system which prioritises ideas about normative development in the service of neoliberal politics. Similarly, Winter (2012) argues that the statutory inclusion statement in the English National Curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007) makes use of three discourses (the technical curriculum perspective, ableist normativity and developmentalism) which are logocentric: they prioritise language as the ultimate way to understand the world. These logocentric "discourses appear to confer order on the complexity of the world and lead unproblematically towards the truth" (Winter, 2012, p. 554). Through the ideas of governmentality and logocentrism, we can see how policies pathologise children who "do not achieve universally standardized developmental targets", resulting in many professionals viewing disability as the result of impairments and showing "little awareness of the possibility that disability and a lack of ability to meet targets associated with developmental stages may have social and cultural roots" (Davis, Watson & Cunningham-Burley, 2008, p. 222).

So far, we might get the impression that disabled children's embodiment can only be discussed in terms of oppression. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that literature based on the social model has also been criticised for relying too heavily on the idea that the world is "structurally and materially determined" and does not consider that "disabled children may be capable of affecting the structures surrounding their lives and re-negotiating" those structures" (Davis, Watson & Cunningham-Burley, 2008, p. 223). We might see this agency as part of Deleuzian becoming in the context of assemblages. For example, Smith (2016) (later Pluquailec) discusses the embodied becoming of autism and childhood. She argues that the dominant understanding of autistic childhood uses a "disembodied autistic-child-research assemblage" (p. 12), one which does not adequately consider the body or embodiment. To move beyond

this, she takes “a line of flight from the disembodied autistic-child-research assemblage into new spaces where the becomings of bodies within the collision of autism and childhood can be celebrated” (p. 19). This celebration and openness to possibilities seems to me to be absolutely crucial and I have picked this up throughout the thesis, including in Chapter 4, where I discuss children’s use of photography as resistance.

### 2.5.3. Embodiment and the curriculum

Logocentrism, prioritising literacy over the body (Winter, 2012) also presents itself in discourses around deficit models of language skills of certain groups of children. Burnett, Merchant and Neumann (2019), for example, outline how children from working class and/or ethnic minority backgrounds are particularly subject to dominant ideas about language paucity at home, and therefore subject to “interventions” to improve their language (although they point out the deficit model is not the only way teachers view children’s language skills). They argue that a better understanding of children’s embodied experiences of literacy can help to tease out some of the materialities of literacy. There has been some interest in the importance of an embodied (rather than a logocentric) understanding of other subjects, too, for example in mathematics (Boylan & Reaney, 2018, p. 17 and 18). Boylan and Reaney’s project focused on group embodied activities to encourage children to think about maths in new ways and discourage ideas about who is “good” or “bad” at maths.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many studies of children’s embodiment focus on activities that are seen as primarily physical such as physical education (PE). Some see PE as “distinctive in curriculum studies” because of the “centrality of the body in physical education” (Benn, Dagkas, & Jawad, 2011, p. 22). This seems to be especially the case in relation to children whose bodies are marked as other or seen as non-normatively embodied. For example, one research team explored how Muslim girls in the United Kingdom (UK) are included or excluded from PE (Benn et al., 2011; Dagkas, Benn & Jawad, 2011). They consider how religion is embodied by British Muslim girls, focusing particularly on hijab (defined as the expectation of girls and women in Islam to dress modestly including, in some cases, covering the head, arms and legs). Benn et al. (2011) explain that “faith is embodied in the sense that presentation of the

body, appearance, physicality, social interaction and behaviour is integral to religious identity, to lived reality of the daily embodiment of religious belief” (pp. 23-24). They go on to say that “such embodiment of faith has been lost in the Western challenge of individualisation, isolation and dehumanisation that accompanied the technological culture” (Benn et al., 2011, p.24). This presents us with another dichotomy: concepts of "Western" and "Eastern" ideals which conflict with each other, and where school children’s bodies are battlegrounds where apparent ideas of faith and modesty are pitted against modernism and liberalism.

Other studies have considered disabled school pupils’ lived experiences of PE (Bantjes, Swartz, Conchar & Derman, 2015; Conchar, Bantjes, Swartz & Derman, 2016). These papers consider various aspects of disabled pupils’ participation in sports activities in one South African secondary school. They explain how post-apartheid South Africa, despite its avowed dedication to inclusion of disabled people, still creates environments in which there are unintended “embodied consequences for people positioned discursively as included but who in fact may in some respects be further marginalised than they had been under apartheid” (Bantjes et al., 2015, p. 475). Despite using the term “embodied”, the authors do not clearly state what they mean by this. Taken within the context of the rest of the paper, it appears to mean that despite the theory and rhetoric of inclusion, a group of children whose bodies are marked as different are physically, corporeally excluded. They are, literally, left on the side-lines when the other children play soccer (football) in a clear example of exclusion. We might see this as part of the conditional inclusion discussed by Karmiris (2019) – despite a legal right to educational inclusion, exclusion from certain activities is justified on the basis that some children’s bodies do not fit (Garland-Thomson, 2011). The schools in question have evidently not considered ways of adjusting the environment to fit the child, nor considered how (dis)abled children might be enabled to do things differently (Hansen & Philo, 2007).

It is noteworthy that there are more studies on embodiment in PE than in subjects or activities that are perceived as having less to do with the body. I suggest this is because mind-body duality is so embedded in our approach to the world and the way we educate children (Bantjes et al., 2015; Conchar et al.,

2016; Paechter, 2004) that it appears to us to be self-evident that English, for example, involves the body less than PE. Yet a Merleau-Pontian approach would suggest that everything that might take place in a “typical” English lesson (sitting in a seat, looking at a whiteboard, reading out loud or listening, getting distracted and looking out of the window) are ways in which the body-in-the-world exists, does things and becomes. Of course, one might argue that the most important part of an English lesson is not the body’s existence and interaction with the environment: that moving, listening, looking are simply how information enters our minds, separate from our bodies. We might argue that the important things - the real learning, thinking, reflecting – happen inside the mind. But this of course it to reinforce the Cartesian idea that the mind, some kind of human essence, exists separately to the body. This may also suggest why there seems to be more studies on embodiment which focus on children whose bodies are marked as other by race, gender or disability. In these cases, children’s embodied, lived experiences are already noted as being connected to their body in some way. Yet this overlooks the important fact that bodies not marked as other – White, male, not disabled – must surely also experience the world in an embodied way.



## 2.6. School surveillance and embodiment

Having considered embodiment and education, we can begin to see how "the body is a site of contestation, regulation and resistance" (Rogers et al., 2013, para. 5). A key focus in the sociology of the body is how "are controlled, regulated and reproduced" (Scott, 2015a, para. 1) and exist as sites of struggle (Simonson, 2009). There has been relatively high level of interest in considering how surveillance (and to some extent "surveillant assemblages", see below) work in schools. Much of it is rooted in Foucault (1995 [1977]) in "a superlative touchstone for surveillance studies" (Taylor, 2013, p. 82), who argues that various institutions, including schools, induce people's submission to power. Foucault asks rhetorically, "is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (Foucault, 1995 [1977], p. 112). Schools are therefore seen as places where children are moulded to create "docile bodies" (Foucault, p. 67). These various institutions, Foucault argues, use similar methods of control: time-tabling daily activities and controlling people's movements and use of space until they automatically comply (p. 106-112). Central to the control of people's bodies, Foucault argues, is aiming for a state of *panopticism*: that is, a situation in which a person in an institution is in a state of being permanently aware that they are being watched which induces their submission to power (pp. 99-105. Foucault's writings consider the how the body is "acted upon from without", as opposed to Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of an active body (Simonson, 2009). He argues that sociology has neglected the body, while still asserting that there is a human "soul" which:

exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished - and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. (Foucault, 1995 [1977], p.20)

In this way, he argues that certain groups of people, including those labelled "madmen"; children; people who are colonised; and the proletariat, are subject to treatment resulting from the power held over them by others. This interest in the way certain groups of people are surveilled has been picked up innumerable times in academia. For example, Shildrick (1994) argues that "Foucault's overall

concern to write a non-essentialist and yet fully material account of the body is just that which grounds a particular form of feminist endeavour” (p. 36).

Shildrick, who was also writing about disability, picks up an essential point in the ways that the body is both central yet absent in both feminist and disability studies. I will return to this point shortly.

Haggerty and Ericson (2000) apply Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of assemblage, flows and rhizomes to develop the idea of that *surveillant assemblage* in a study described by Sharma and Nijjar (2018) as “influential” (p. 75). Haggerty and Ericson argue that the modern world turns individual bodies into a “series of discrete flows” which are reassembled into “data doubles”; these doubles, they argue, are “scrutinized and targeted for intervention” (p. 167). This abstracting of humans from their bodies into data doubles is part of “a rhizomatic leveling of the hierarchy of surveillance, such that groups which were previously exempt from routine surveillance are now increasingly being monitored” (p.167). They surveillant assemblage is a visual metaphor to better imagine “a host of heretofore opaque flows of auditory, scent, chemical, visual, ultraviolet and informational stimuli. Much of the visualization pertains to the human body, and exists beyond our normal range of perception” (p. 611). They caution however that there is not *one* surveillant assemblage that is fixed and stable - it cannot “be attacked by focusing criticism on a single bureaucracy or institution” (p. 609) but is rather embedded into the world in multiple ways.

#### 2.6.1. Surveilling (dis)abled bodies

Influenced by Foucauldian ideas, we might see “the impaired body [as] a historically contingent product of power” (Hughes, 2004, p. 65-66). However we look at it, disabled people’s bodies are often under intense scrutiny via surveillance. Shildrick (1994) argues, for example, that the state forces disabled people to turn the gaze onto themselves through the administration of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) (now being replaced by Personal Independence Payments). The process for applying for such benefits means that for disabled people, “no area of bodily functioning escapes the requirement of total visibility, and further, the ever more detailed subdivision of bodily behaviour into a set of discontinuous functions speaks to a fetishistic fragmentation of the embodied [disabled] person” (Shildrick, 1994, p. 39). This self-surveillance continues

beyond the boundaries of state intervention, with disabled adults in one study, for example, explained the impact of the fear of surveillance on their lives, especially being concerned that people would think they were “fake” disabled people: this fear “resulted in activity avoidance, in non-disclosure of disability, and failure to access support, adjustments and accommodations that could facilitate inclusion and participation” (Hale, Benstead, Lyus, Odell & Ruddock, 2020, p. 12). Clearly, these two examples demonstrate Foucault’s argument that the panopticon induces self-surveillance “in conjunction with explicitly articulated behavioural norms” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 167)

#### 2.6.2. School surveillance

Burke and Duncan (2015) take up Foucault’s argument that in educational settings (they focus on the Early Years), children’s bodies are sites of discipline connected to the state’s concern with producing docile bodies. They use the common English translation *surveillance* for the French *surveiller*, which also carries connotations of “inspect”, “supervise” and “observe” (Foucault, 1995 [1977], p. 7 “Translator’s Note”). Burke and Duncan argue that:

the early childhood setting becomes a site of constant surveillance, both in structural terms as buildings are redesigned to open viewing and in terms of policy which sees staff, parents and members of the community entering in, out and around the centre each day (2015, p. 32).

Here, the authors identify two important routes through which surveillance happens: the way the physical environment is designed to allow for easy viewing of all areas; and policy. The former aspect, the physical layout of the classroom, is considered by many to typify the panopticon which forces teachers to become “instruments of surveillance” (Crawford, 2017, p. 197). Within the classroom, this happens directly, but also through technology. As Haggerty and Ericson state: “humans are born free, and are immediately electronically monitored” (2000, p. 611). Much of the more recent work on school surveillance focuses on modern technology, in such varied forms as closed-circuit television (CCTV) (Taylor, 2013, pp. 16-19 and 40-60; Nemorin, 2017), mobile phones (Marx & Steeves, 2010; Nemorin, 2017), technology educational “platforms” (Nemorin, 2017; Kumar, Vitak, Chetty & Clegg, 2019); “pre-natal testing, baby monitors and nanny cams, [radio-frequency identification]-enabled clothing, [global positioning system] tracking devices . . .

home drug and semen tests, and surveillance toys” (Marx & Steeves, 2010) and more. Ironically, the same schools which prohibit parents from taking photographs at school events (to protect children) “routinely record the movements, habits and behaviours of pupils” (Taylor, 2013, p.4).

Sparrman and Lindgren (2010) argue that the ever-present use of photography is both normal and normalising in preschool – this is, it is so common as to be unremarked-upon, and also is used in processes that expect children to aim towards normality. Specifically, they challenge the use of visual documentation of preschool children’s learning and argue that it can cross the line into surveillance. This visual documentation is strongly linked to expectations of normative development (discussed above). Some kinds of technological surveillance, it is argued, that “orient teachers to see student data as interchangeable with students” (Kumar et al., 2019, p. 145). This means that rather than seeing students as whole, complex individuals, teachers’ roles are reduced to improving students’ data (such as grades) in and of themselves, rather than seeing improved grades as an outcome of learning (i.e., an imperfect proxy for things that are difficult to measure). Although Kumar et al. discuss technology platforms such as management systems, we can see the same logic applied to other kinds of school surveillance. For example, the teachers’ union NASUWT (2018) criticises “the use by schools of crude pupil performance targets as performance management objectives for teachers” and “the over-collection of assessment data and how commercial assessment packages are used in schools are not only of questionable educational value but also add to unnecessary and excessive workload burdens for teachers” (p.1). Similarly, some have argued that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) plays a role in surveilling schools in the UK in a post-panoptic era (Perryman, Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2018). It is thus clear that teachers and other school staff find themselves in a position of surveilling and being surveilled, within assemblages that include policy, social expectations and the classroom environment. I build upon these ideas in my chapter on verticality, showing how photography is used by adults to demonstrate children’s “learning journeys”, a reference to the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) of the Standards and Testing Agency (STA), an executive agency of the Department for Education, which provides a “robust testing, assessment and moderation system to

measure and monitor pupils' progress and attainment through primary school from reception" onwards (STA, 2014). Furthermore, I explore the way photography can be "turned around" by children as a way of resisting adult surveillance. I also discuss some of the ethics of photographing children in my methodology, as well as the advantages of using photography.

### 2.6.3. Power in space

I have already briefly touched upon power and space: Butler (1993) understands the body as being constructed by and through power; Kushinski (2019) explains that leaks might not necessarily disrupt dominant modes of power; Watson (2017) explores how power structures mark some children as (not) normal. Here I pick up on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality (Foucault 1991a, cited in Burch 2017, as mentioned above) and of power relations (Foucault, 1995 [1977]). Power dynamics are of central importance to the expression of education's governmentality of children's bodies, whereby "more powerful individuals or groups seek to instil in less powerful individuals and groups preferred knowledges and what the former deem to be desirable attitudes and behaviours" - those behaviours which are seen as contributing to society in the appropriate ways (Goddard, 2009, p. 31). Youdell and Armstrong (2011), discussed above in the sections on Deleuzoguattarian leaks and flows, describe the ebbs and flows of power relations in the classroom as a kind of choreography. They describe the "emergence of smooth spaces that unsettle the education assemblage" and aim to focus not "on the individual subject and body" but rather on "bodies as amalgam and an analysis that foregrounds collectivities" (p. 150). My study picks up on their invitation to look out for smooth spaces and collectivities (as I do in section 5.4); however, I aim to continually resist false dichotomies, and not to overlook individual bodies within their assemblages.

An important part of child-adult power dynamics is surveillance. While some have argued that classrooms are straightforwardly panoptic, Gallagher (2010) argues that this over-simplifies Foucault's conceptions of surveillance and the panopticon, as well as how surveillance works in schools. Gallagher argues that, in fact, schools are not entirely panoptic, with possibilities for children to escape and resist surveillance (2010). Goddard argues that instead of schools

inducing submission to power, “education must equip individuals to understand their own formation as subjects so that they might comply with, refuse or transform those practices” (2010, pp. 32-3). Pike (2008, 2010) also considers Foucauldian ideas of power, space and resistance, not in the classroom but in primary school dining rooms, showing that school spaces and adult-child power relations stretch beyond the classroom walls and do not just include teachers, but other adults such as “dinner ladies”.

The second aspect of Burke and Duncan’s (2015) discussion of surveillance in early childhood settings is policy. Similarly, Kehily (2015) emphasises the way that policy documents and governmental initiatives encode children’s bodies as both needing protection and needing regulation (p. 219). Although the meanings ascribed to bodies are less the focus of this dissertation, it remains valuable to consider adults’ reflections upon children’s embodiment and also the cultural and social meanings projected onto bodies when adults are the decision-makers controlling children’s lives (Tisdall, 2003). Burke and Duncan consider how spaces are used, in culturally specific ways, and how children’s bodies within those spaces are controlled in different ways. However, they do not go into much depth about how spaces and bodies are co-produced, or how the use of spaces might differ from their intended use. Rather, they focus on the kinds of responses adults have to their own school and a school from a different country, and explore in detail how children’s bodies are seen by adults as variously sites that produce anxiety (in the New Zealand context) and sites that produce nostalgia (in the Japanese context). For example, they consider the differences in the outdoor play spaces of a New Zealand and a Japanese pre-school. For the Japanese teachers, the idea of a play area being completely fenced off was surprising and was considered to reflect New Zealand’s concerns about child abuse, with one Japanese teacher even asking whether New Zealand has such a bad problem with adults abusing children that they must lock unknown adults out. New Zealand teachers, on the other hand, thought that it was unsafe for children to be able to play in an open space. This approach considers the meanings that adults give to children’s bodies and embodiment.

However, Burke and Duncan (2015, p. 6) are explicit in considering the body as an object of study rather than considering bodies’ phenomenological “being-in-

the-world". Their perspective, which asks adults to reflect on children's embodied experiences and the meanings of such experiences, leaves out the agency of children to reflect upon their own experiences and act as experts in their own lives. It also focuses on interpreting social meanings from bodies rather than taking a Merleau-Pontian perspective of understanding embodiment as having inherent meaning even without interpreting or reflecting on such meanings.

Some research on (dis)abled children's embodiment has focus on children with specific impairment label. For example, Quek and McNeill (2006) focus on blind children's embodied experiences with mathematics; others consider children labelled with Down Syndrome (Ewan & Mair, 2002; Faragher, Brady & Gervasoni, 2008; Nye, 2006, Nye, Buckley & Bird, 2005, Wing & Tacon, 2007); ASD (Flippin, Reszka & Watson, 2010; Holt, Lea & Bowlby, 2012); wheelchair users (Hjelle & Vik, 2011; Liesener & Mills, 1999; Sapey, Stewart & Donaldson, 2004) and restricted growth (Shakespeare, Thompson & Wright, 2010, discussed further in section 4.3.2). Others take a wider approach, for example Holt (2004) who considers the way that children with "mind-body differences" are (dis)abled through everyday practices in the classroom. While all these approaches have their pros and cons, my participants were not chosen because they had a particular label (as explained in the introduction). This thesis therefore contributes to the literature, such as Holt (2004), which takes into account various labels, but goes a step further by including children with no label of SEND.

## 2.7. Conclusion

In this review of the literature on the body and embodiment, I have unpicked some of the major theoretical issues that underpin this study, bringing together threads from various disciplinary areas. This has included a brief overview of Cartesian mind-body dualism, a concept absolutely central to our understanding of the world which underpins many of our assumptions about bodies and the world. This idea has nevertheless been critiqued by philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenological perspective explores how people experience the world primarily through their bodies not, as Descartes asserted, in their minds. Merleau-Ponty is also concerned with considering how bodies are lived and active through space. I connected this thread to another: the relationship between bodies and space and how a phenomenological embodiment might look for more complex subtle ways of understanding how these interact with each other without considering space and bodies to be separate. I then introduced Foucault's ideas about the body as a site of power struggle, whereby the state is interested in using the physical spaces of various institutions, including schools, to create docile, self-regulating bodies. However, this account does not take into consideration how embodied subjects are active agents. I have then briefly explored challenges to these perspectives from feminist and race studies, considering how bodies which are marked as "other" or "different" might be left out of previous accounts of embodied experiences. Finally, I have introduced some of the ways a phenomenological, embodied perspective has been used in studying the experiences of children at school, especially in PE and for bodies marked as "other". With these strands now untangled and in order, I can start to think about knitting them together.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

Having gathered together various strands, in the last chapter I unpicked the tangled mass of yarn, slowly but surely, and it is now recognisably a ball. Most of the yarn is hidden under the surface, but it can only be fully three-dimensional with all the other pieces inside. Furthermore, now it is untangled, it can be carefully unravelled, knitted into something, anything: endless possibilities. But, while it is a colourful mass, it is not much use to anyone, as pretty as it might be. This methodology chapter explains how I started to make something out of this ball of yarn: creating a patchwork of texture and colour from my own embodied experiences, photos and words. It is here that I pick up my needles and start knitting, although perhaps you will not see the shape of the piece until later.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

Figure 2 A ball of scrap yarn

*MatayaMade (2020)*

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of project, including the school where my research took place and introduction to the key details of the project. I then situate my methodological approach, supported by theories covered in the literature review, including embodiment. Next, I describe the ethical concerns around doing research with (dis)abled children, and how I managed these

dilemmas, both theoretically and practically. The aforementioned sections all provide the groundwork for the substantive discussions that follow regarding selecting participants – (dis)abled children at Harbour View – and the methods I used to understand their experiences, including observations and creative methods. I describe how I analysed the data, bringing in theories about disability, childhood and embodiment. Finally, I show how I make original contributions to knowledge through this research in my methodological approach.

### 3.2. Overview

The following sections give a brief overview of, firstly, the school where I undertook my fieldwork, and, secondly, the project.

#### 3.2.1. The school

Harbour View Primary School is a large, 3-form entry, inner-city primary school in the North of England with over 700 pupils from Nursery to Year Six (ages 2-11). The school is mixed gender, state-funded and does not have any religious denomination (DfE, 2018), although the school website states that Islam is the religion of most pupils (see below). Ofsted rated it “good” at its last inspection, and states that around half of pupils meet the “expected standard” in reading, writing and maths, with only a very small proportion achieving a higher standard. These are significantly below both the local authority averages, and the England averages of 61% and 9% respectively (DfE, 2018). Ofsted also states that around 1 in 3 of the pupils at the school receive free school meals, compared to around 1 in 4 nationally. The school website gives the following information on pupil demographics:

- Nearly 100% are from “minority ethnic backgrounds” (compared with around 50% of the staff). (In conversation with staff, they stated that the vast majority of these pupils were of South Asian backgrounds, especially Bangladesh and Pakistan, with a minority from Black Caribbean, African and Eastern European backgrounds).
- Around 90% speak English as an additional language (EAL).
- Most are from Muslim families.
- Around 20% are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Around 20% are labelled as having “special educational needs and disability” (SEND), mostly learning difficulties and disabilities compared with around 5% of staff who have declared that they are disabled.
- 90% of children starting at the nursery do not meet the “expected” levels for personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development.

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) outlines some of the major trends across England relating to children’s attainment at school (Hutchinson, Bonetti, Crenna-Jennings & Akhal, 2019). Harbour View School is in the North of England, where there is a particularly large disadvantage gap compared to the South of England (Hutchinson, Bonetti, Crenna-Jennings & Akhal, 2019, p. 18). They define the *disadvantage gap* as the gap in “between more disadvantaged

pupils and their peers” (p. 7) in relation to expected achievements, e.g., “the average total point score children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)”, p. 10. (As I discuss later in this chapter, and in later chapters including in relation to verticality, the EYFSP is not unproblematic – however it is a crude measure that illustrates a point around some of the differences in dis/advantage across the country). The gap in the Early Years is 4.5 months and by the end of primary school, aged 11, more disadvantaged pupils can expect to be over 9 months behind their less-disadvantaged pupils (p. 10, Hutchinson et al, 2019). One predictor for achievement is race. Black Caribbean pupils are particularly disadvantaged compared to white pupils, with a gap of around 9 months between them, which is only increasing. However, the gap has closed considerably for Pakistani pupils, who in 2018 are only 0.5 months behind their white peers on average. The biggest gap, however, is between pupils labelled with SEND and those not. The Education Policy Institute recommends that the “government should consider whether it is providing adequate support to this group of pupils” (EPI, 2019, “How are different pupil groups performing?”, para. 4.).

### 3.2.2. The project

I spent my time with pupils in Reception and Year One (aged 5-6). 47 children participated (22 children from Reception and 25 from Year One). I undertook ethnographic observations, and I offered the children a variety of creative activities to participate in. Each of the methods listed here will be explained in further depth later in the chapter, in section 3.5.3:

1. Ethnographic observations
2. Drawings and collages
3. Taking photographs on an iPad
4. Model rooms
5. Paper people
6. Sammy the monkey

The final data included:

- Around 5000 words of fieldnotes and my diary reflections;
- 701 photographs;
- 23 drawings/collages;
- 6 model classrooms (covered in dozens of stickers!)

from 47 children. Each of the methods is described in further detail in later sections of this chapter.

I spent most of my time in the Reception and Year One classrooms (see diagrams below). However, I also sometimes went with the children outside into the play areas or to other areas of the school.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 3 The Reception space.*

*Floorplan of the open-plan reception space with three classes in one space divided into three, with each class area having a door out to the playground.*

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 4 The Year One space.*

*It has three separate classrooms, each of which opens onto a corridor, where the toilets are.*

Activity type	Dates (2018)	Hours spent in school
Familiarisation period in school: joining in daily classroom activities; introducing myself and my work to the children (although see “Familiarisation” section below for complexities of this).	2nd January–9th February (First half of spring term)	6 hours x 6 weeks (one morning in Reception and one afternoon in Year One each week).
Half term break	12th–16th February	-
Start of data collection	19th February–3rd June (Second half of spring term)	6 hours x 6 weeks (one morning in Reception and one afternoon in Year One each week).
Easter break	2nd–13th April	-
Data collection continues	16th April–25th May (First half of summer term)	6 hours x 6 weeks (one morning in Reception and one afternoon in Year One each week).
Half term break	28th May–1st June	-
Leaving the field: no further data collection. Continuing to join in with classroom activities, talking to children about the end of the project and my leaving.	4th June–24th July (Second half of summer term)	6 hours x 8 weeks (one morning in Reception and one afternoon in Year One each week).

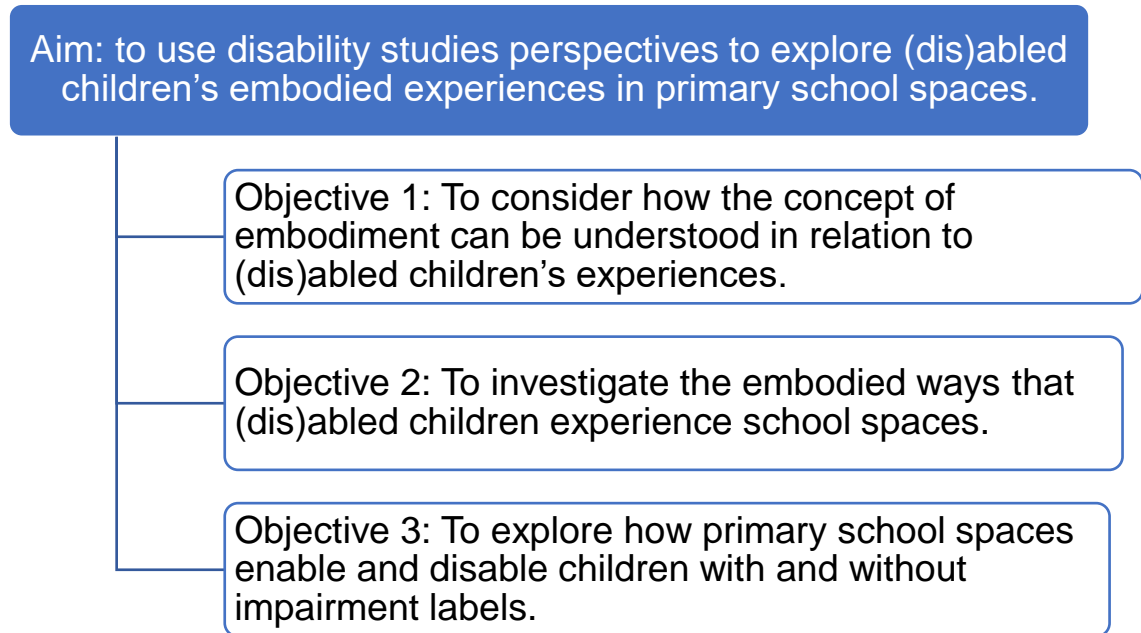
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7 months</b>	<b>156 hours (78 hours in Reception and 78 hours in Year One)</b>
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*Table 1 showing my time in the school.*



### 3.3. Methodological approach

The aim of this study was to explore children's embodied experiences in primary school spaces, under which there were three objectives.



These aims and objectives are part of a framework underpinned by certain theoretical positions, a discussion of which forms the first part of this chapter. In that section, I outline my ontological and epistemological positions, and build on the literature review to cover some key theoretical issues, including debates around doing research with disabled people, children and disabled children. This includes consideration of the ways in which embodiment and space can be researched; the role of the embodied researcher; and how ethics is embedded into theories. In the second part of this chapter, I explain how the methods used in this study cascade from the ontological, epistemological and theoretical discussions of the study's aim and objectives. I explain how I chose methods that served the study by meeting the objectives and suiting the participants. In the third and final part of this chapter, I introduce the school and the participants, and cover some of the practical elements of the study. Finally, I conclude the chapter, highlighting my methodological and theoretical contributions to knowledge.

### 3.3.1. Listening to disabled people: The social model of disability and emancipatory research

Disability studies scholars following the social model approach made a clear break away from pathologising accounts of disabled people's individual experiences towards accounts of how systemic and structural issues disable people. Oliver (1992) argues that disability research has failed disabled people by not reflecting their own experiences of disability; not contributing to materially improving their lives; and not recognising their political struggles. He therefore suggests engaging with disabled people in "emancipatory research" (Oliver, 1992, 2002). This means, among other things, rejecting the positivist research paradigm by which "social research has been dominated" and which reflects the natural sciences' aim for objectivity (Oliver, 1992, p.106). Stone and Priestley (1996) argued that research based on the social model "will have less to do with the ability of disabled people to 'cope with' or 'adapt to' their situation and more to do with the identification and removal of disabling physical and social barriers" (pp. 4-5). Many years later Finkelstein (one of the UPIAS members who initially developed the idea of the social model) asserted that "disabled people are **not** the *subject matter* of the social interpretation of disability" (2001, p.1, emphases in original). Rather, it has been argued, disability researchers should focus on social barriers and their removal (Oliver, 1997), actively contributing to ending disablement and not pretending to be neutral observers of disabled people (Sullivan, 2009).

I do not claim that this research meets all the requirements of emancipatory research as envisioned by Oliver. For example, I have not worked "with those seeking to emancipate themselves" as co-researchers (Oliver, 1997, "Research praxis", para. 1.). For some politically aware groups (such as people active in the Disabled People's Movement) it might be a useful starting point, and certainly I was heavily influenced by collective voices of such groups, as evident in my literature review. However, my starting point was not assuming that the children felt they needed to be emancipated as a discrete group or class of people. To do so would be to put my adult concerns about their lives first and foremost. This does not mean that I ever lost sight of my view that children are in a less powerful position than adults, (albeit that this power can be resisted,

e.g., Pike, 2008 & 2010, Basile, 2018); rather, it meant that I tried to follow what the children thought was important.

There are parts of the emancipatory approach, however, that I question. Oliver exhorts researchers to do research which contributes to the removal of disabling barriers. Certainly, I agree with the broad intention of this: disability research should, I believe, consider how people with impairments are disabled and how this disablement can be reduced, removed or resisted. However, I am concerned that the heavy legacy of the social model can put the blinkers on our capacity to understand and remove barriers. While it can and must be our starting point it cannot be everything and can over-simplify the issues (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Therefore, while I agree with the spirit of Oliver's aim, it is too narrow a focus. If we are only looking for barriers, we will only see barriers; if we are looking at complex, ever-changing assemblages, within which people are more or less enabled or disabled, a more complex, nuanced picture of disablement in the classroom emerges. This avoids the danger of disability studies simply becoming an accessibility audit: a checklist that makes building an accessible, inclusive world seem like a technical issue rather than a complex social one (Slee, 2013).

This does not mean that I reject the ideas of emancipatory research wholesale. I believe that aspects of the approach should continue to be pursued: for example, research has the power to affect the participants' lives and their wider communities, and therefore must aim for positive change (Oliver, 1997). I agree with Sullivan (2009) that I am not a neutral observer of disabled people, just as any researcher cannot be a neutral observer of any people, and that this subjective positioning requires reflection on my part and a consideration of how my research affects the lives of the participants and the wider world.

### 3.3.2. The embodied researcher

In rejecting Descartes' rationalist/idealist position (see the Literature Review), I align myself more closely with the empirical tradition, believing that we can only study what is experienced through perception (Baillie, 2011, p. 94). My ontological position (my understanding of "the nature of social reality") and my epistemology (my position on "how we know that we know something", Baillie, p. 94) lead me to believe that childhood and disability (as well as concepts such

as gender and race) are real phenomena within the social world inasmuch as they are experienced by, hold meaning for, and have material effects upon different people. They are nevertheless socially constructed (and contested) ideas which do not exist outside of the social meaning that we give to them and the social consequences that arise from them (for example, laws and customs that children go to school). This is not to say that biological facts such as physical differences and chronological ages do not exist in a way that can be, at least to some extent, objectively measured and known. However, this thesis concerns itself with the subjective, social meaning of these phenomena which are liable to be more slippery, “messy”, ever-changing and never knowable except through glimpses into the worlds of others. Gomm (2009, p. 332-2) suggests that social research can begin to unpick how and in what ways people (and groups of people) develop, justify and communicate their social realities.

The literature review covered some of the theoretical positions on embodiment that underpin this study. It is important to remember that as a researcher, I am not exempt from embodied becomings. Rather, my own embodiment and becoming is absolutely central to the research: I walk, talk and feel through and within the same assemblages as the participants in the study. In a study looking at schooling and the production of gender identities through embodied experiences, Kehily (2015) demonstrated how the experience of data collection can be a shared embodied experience. She finds herself with a group of school pupils “lying on the floor, pinching my fat bits . . . followed by the serious business of comparing the wad of flab squeezed between my thumb and forefinger with that of other girls in the room”. She explains that rather than this being “a *Bridget Jones* moment of weakness on a girlie night in with your mates”, it actually “happened during a research encounter, not so long ago, while [she] was doing an ethnographic study in a primary school” (p. 217). This demonstrates clearly how a researcher should not try to be an unembodied presence. Furthermore, even if one did try, it would be impossible: we are always in our bodies and always experiencing everything through them. Perhaps inevitably, then, this thesis is as much about my embodied experience as the children’s.

This also brings into question what, exactly, I am researching. Smith writes the following in relation to her research on the “embodied becoming of autism and childhood”:

I spend time with children and families in their homes, schools, allotments and parks. We talk or do not talk. We play or do not play. We eat, we think, we make things, we share things, we build dens, we dig gardens and we craft meanings. Or we do not. (2016, pp. 183-4)

This raises a number of important parts of any typical methodology: the list of methods used (talking, playing, etc.); the conversion of methods and collected data into a report (re-telling, re-casting and re-presenting the day’s events); and some of the ethical issues involved. However, it also breaks some of the conventions of around research, and specifically researching with children. For example, it is rare to see a researcher admit that part of their “data collection” (a cold phrase which hides a variety of complexities) is to “not talk” or “not play”. Yet this chimes with me and my approach as an embodied researcher. Simply “being” with children was an integral part of the process - or, more accurately, being in a process of *becoming* within, through and part of many shifting assemblages in and outside the classroom.

### 3.4. Ethics

In February 2018 I received ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 1). Whilst the ethical considerations of this research are woven through this thesis, it is important to address them specifically. Any academic research should forefront ethical concerns first and foremost, but there are particular power dynamics when considering disability and childhood that deserve particular attention. This is not because children and/or disabled people are inherently vulnerable. Rather, it is because of complex systems that enable or disable people in complex, ever-changing ways. Perhaps at the forefront of my mind was an ethical concern with ensuring that I was committed at each stage to anti-disablism and inclusion. Pluquailec (2018) sums up the ethical responsibilities of researchers with disabled children as:

understanding and valuing the everyday lived experiences of children and their families as valuable in and of themselves; to challenge the dominant discourses of medicalisation, pathologisation and psychologisation that stalk disabled children's childhood; to value and speak to their childhoods and their humanity and to trouble discourses and practises that do otherwise (p. 215)

This is central to this study. Rather than this separate ethics section suggesting a "tick-box" approach, I hope this introduces some of the nuances of a study of this type that continue throughout the rest of the thesis. In the spirit of avoiding tick-boxes, I used the 10 points outlined by Alderson (1995, in Roberts, 2017, p. 147-8) not as a complete list, but as starting points for *lines of flight* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) which often overlap considerably. As Roberts (2017) argues, "although ethical guidelines cannot give definitive answers, they can lead us to ask the right kinds of questions" (p. 147).

One of the key ethical considerations was the power difference between myself and the children, and how children are expected to obey adults (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Like many researchers, Atkinson (2019) followed a "new sociology of childhood" approach which posits Mandell's (1988) "least adult role" as the best way for adult researchers to understand the world of the children they are researching (with). Atkinson, however, found ethical and practical problems with this approach, not least of which that children continued to see her as different from them: she was, they saw, very clearly an adult but

with a role perhaps different from the other adults in their lives. Atkinson instead suggests the role of “honorary” child, a status which recognises that the researcher is allowed into children’s worlds only with the permission of the children, which can be given or taken away at any time. This has echoes with Thorne’s (1993) idea of the researcher’s “free-lancing privilege of an adult visitor” (p. 14), saying:

I could, and did, come and go, shift groups, choose and alter my daily routines. Unlike the kids, I was relatively, although not entirely, free from the control of the principal, teachers, and aides. Without a fixed, school-based routine, I also had more spatial mobility than the teachers and aide (p. 14)

Like Thorne, I was always intensely aware that I was an adult with the concordant benefit of comparative freedom.

This again links back to ideas around bodies and embodiment: I still had certain cultural rules to follow about where my body was and was not allowed (such as using the adults’ toilets, as Atkinson discusses). However, I could also be a “freelance” child, more able to be on children’s levels, sometimes literally: while I never saw a teacher or a teaching assistant lying on the floor, I felt able to do so, although still with some disapproving or surprising looks. The difference between my experience of lying on the floor and a child’s is that I would not be told off for it (at least, not explicitly) whereas children were told in no uncertain terms that it was not allowed.

Much of the ethical considerations are woven in throughout this chapter. However, one important aspect that I will highlight here is privacy and confidentiality. All the children and adults mentioned in this study, and the school, have been given pseudonyms. I have endeavoured to remove as much identifying information as possible from all data presented. It would therefore be very unlikely for someone outside of the school to recognise any of the participants from the information presented here. However, I am aware that in a classroom setting, strong relationships can develop and it may be possible, for example, for a teaching assistant to recognise a child from a very small identifying detail. Generally, I have done my best to remove such details. However, there are times when the detail is important to include. For example, there are times when it was relevant to mention that a child had a label of SEN.

If possible, I have not mentioned the child's specific label, instead using the phrase "labelled with SEN" or similar. When being more specific than this, I have described the important details, e.g., "child who used a walking aid" rather than "child with Cerebral Palsy" if the important point is that there was not enough room for the child to use their aid (this is a fictitious example). Furthermore, if a child is mentioned more than once in the study, their pseudonym is changed, so that readers cannot develop a broader picture of a child that might make it easier to identify them. Finally, if a child said anything that could potentially be controversial, I make every effort to remove all identifying information. For example, if a child says, "I hate x teacher" (again, a fictitious example).

Despite all of these considerations, it might still be possible that a knowing reader (e.g., one of the children reading this in the future) could make an accurate guess about the person I am writing about. This is a risk that must be carefully balanced with the benefits of the research. As with previous research that I have undertaken (e.g., Terrell, 2016) I have been cautious about participants saying that they are happy for their words or images to be used in *any way*: although they might consent to me using their data in any way, I still have an ethical obligation to consider carefully how I analyse and present their words and images. This also comes from a sense of my use of their words and images and my observations. I cannot ever present them neutrally or objectively, although I do present them according to (my) truth, i.e. I do not intend to be misleading. This means that a participant's data may be presented in a way they disagree with or even taken and used by someone else, for example if quoting my work. My privileged position as an academic researcher allows me to see the potential ways in which data can take on a "life of its own" and my ethical obligations to the people who co-created this study with me.

Like the rest of the ethical considerations, I carefully considered these issues in relation to the power dynamics around adults and children within the school and beyond. For example, I considered my legal obligations towards children in relation to "safeguarding" - broadly speaking, keeping children safe from harm. However, this concept is not straightforward. Hollomotz (2011), for example, outlines the way in which protecting "vulnerable" people from harm can in fact be a paternalistic approach which does not allow people to make their own



mistakes and develop the tools to protect themselves from risk. Although Hollomotz's research is based on adults with learning difficulties, children, especially disabled children, are also labelled as vulnerable and in inherent need of protection. We need to think carefully, as adults, about the effects that we create if, for example, a child wants to participate but is deemed not to have the capacity to consent to taking part in research. Building on the literature, Sheffield Hallam University's best practice guidelines (Appendix 2) and conversations with the school, I made the ethical decision that every child had the ability to communicate whether they wanted to take part in the research activities, and I had an obligation to pay attention carefully to these opinions. I discuss the consent process in the next section.

Finally, it is important to note that my theoretical and political positionality in relation to education policy and practice is also an ethical concern. It has been argued, for example, that some kinds of research in schools "tends to adopt, at least implicitly, reformers' agendas" and is based on a "rationalist model of teaching, which privileges teachers' motivations, knowledge, and understanding" (Lefstein, 2008, p. 704-5). Taking this perspective without explicitly naming it could perhaps lead to an idea that the researcher is taking a neutral position. On the other hand, small-scale research on classroom interactions, such as mine, tends to collect a lot of data on a small group of people and "subject brief stretches of interaction to detailed analysis"; this kind of research aims to "deconstruct dominant discourses and associated policies" and "highlights the importance of social norms, interdependence, and tacit knowledge" (pp. 704-5). I wish to name this and make it clear: rather than accepting that school environments are understood best by teachers or other adult professionals, I take a critical perspective, aiming to recognise that adults and children in classrooms live in a complex, ever-changing world which can never be completely "pinned down". I therefore have an ethical duty to represent, honestly and as fully as I can, these complexities.

#### 3.4.1. Information for children and gaining consent

As part of the ethics process, I had prepared information sheets (Appendix 3) and consent forms for adults (Appendix 4), a consent form for school staff to sign for children *in loco parentis* (Appendix 5) and illustrated information sheets

and consent forms for children (Appendix 6). However, when it came to using these, I found that the children did not seem particularly interested in engaging with the information sheets in the way I had hoped. Although I created illustrated consent forms for children, I found them to be largely useless apart from for my own record-keeping. In the beginning I tried to discuss the forms with children, but found they were uninterested. A few children indicated their consent, which I then marked on the sheets, but quickly abandoned this when I realised that in the abstract it did not make much sense to potential participants. I therefore changed my approach to speak to them about the study in small groups of four to six pupils at a time, explaining that I was interested in finding out about children and the school, and that I would write about the things I saw. I further explained that if they did not want me to write about them or photograph them or the things they produced (i.e., data) they should tell me. I explained that if they wanted, they could make drawings or do activities and, optionally, I could keep the things they made to go into my “book” that other adults would read (the way I described my PhD thesis). I reminded children periodically of my role and asked for consent to collect the data as and when it was created. For example, when a child produced a picture, I would ask them if I was allowed to keep the picture. If they said yes, I asked if I could show it to other people and put it into “my book”. I assumed that lots of children would be reluctant, but actually many were proud of what they had produced and seemed very keen for other people to see them. It is therefore part of my ethical practice to give these data the respect they deserve, and to take them seriously as the creation of children who want their opinions heard. However, there were some children who wanted to keep their pictures for themselves or were not interested in talking to me, and those decisions were respected.

### 3.4.2. Familiarisation

I followed Barley and Bath (2014) by building a “familiarisation period” into the beginning of my fieldwork in January 2018, visiting the school twice a week, dividing my time between taking children out of the classroom for gardening club and spending time in normal timetabled activities. This included, for example: watching and participating in classroom activities; helping in the classroom and playground; and talking and playing with the children. This familiarisation served various purposes both practical and ethical. In practical

terms, the familiarisation period gave me time to get to know children, especially in the smaller gardening club, where we talked about everything from their favourite food to their families and their school. This time also gave them time to become familiar with certain methods, such as using cameras (Moss & Clark, 2017, pp. 79 & 147). It also gave participants more time to understand that, in a reversal of usual power dynamics, I was asking children to be a “teacher” to an adult, therefore potentially allowing children to be more open and honest, rather than giving me answers that they thought I expected (Cheney, 2011, in Barley & Bath, 2014).

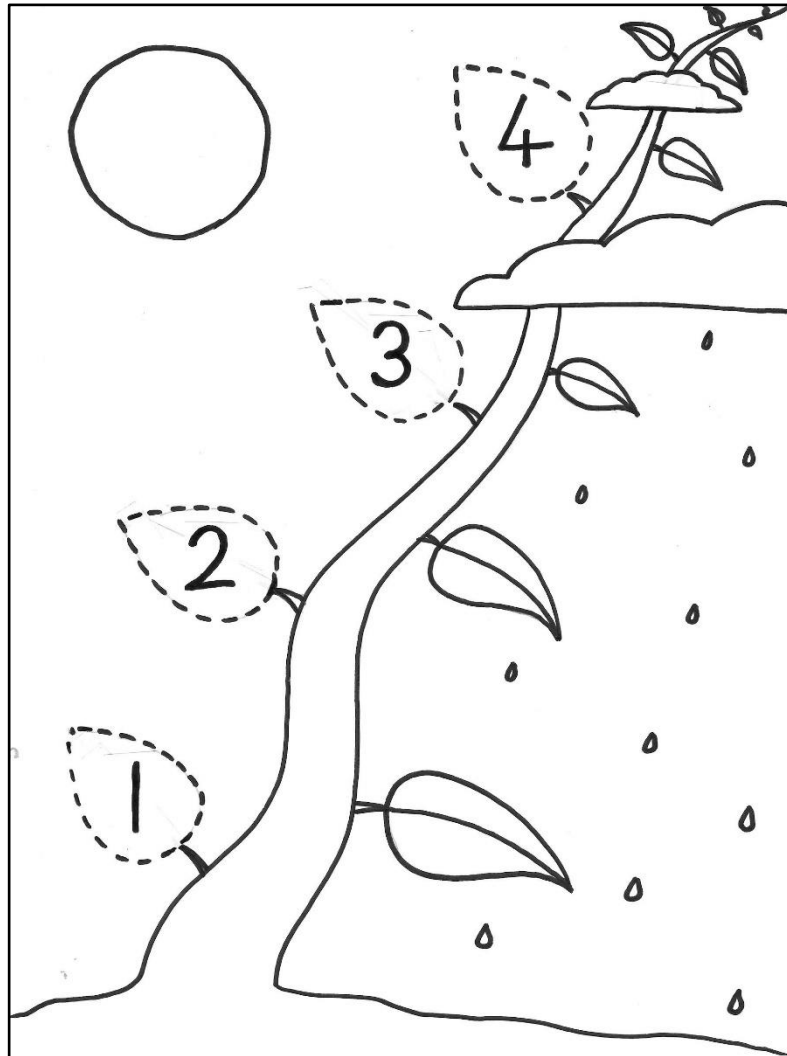
In ethical terms, it gave the children the chance to become familiar with my presence, ask me questions or interact with me if they wished (which many did) and build up trust. This mutual trust helped children to understand that they could refuse to take part in the activities or withdraw at any time, and I could better know if they might be uncomfortable. Barley and Bath outline similar reasons for having a familiarisation period and emphasise the importance of this for young children (aged 4-5) because it helps the adult researcher to make a better judgement of whether a particular child consents to taking part in a particular activity. I certainly found this in my case. For example, a child being very quiet in response to a question from me might be typical for them, or it might be unusual and therefore indicate that they did not want to participate; as such, I could better gauge whether I had their informed consent. Again, it is important to note that ethical and methodological reasons are not separate: my ethical responsibility towards the research community and potential beneficiaries of the research includes the responsibility for co-creating and collecting high quality, rigorous data. A potential drawback of this approach is over-familiarisation (Barley & Bath, 2014). I tried to avoid this by making notes and observations from day one; in fact, many of the key arguments in the substantive chapters of this dissertation are based on some very early observations of my first impressions of the school, when the strangeness and novelty had not worn off.

For the purpose of drawing a line between familiarisation and data collection, I began to collect data from 19th February onwards (see table at start of chapter). In practice, this meant that I checked with children whether they wanted me to use their data in the project. For example, if a child joined me in a drawing

activity, I would check at the end whether they wanted to keep it, throw it away, or give it to me to keep and put in my PhD (“book”). I gained consent at regular intervals (i.e. I checked for each drawing whether I could use it for the project, rather than assuming blanket consent. This contrasts to the familiarisation period, where I would not keep drawings made by the children. Instead, I would use the drawing process to better understand children’s worlds (for example, their interests, families and friends).

Furthermore, I did not wish to “parachute” into or “fly-in, fly-out” of participants’ lives (Bockarie, Machingaidze, Nyirenda, Olesen & Makanga, 2018). While these concerns generally concern researchers from the global North researching in the global South, Thorne (1993) has argued that “like Westerners doing fieldwork in colonized Third World cultures, or academics studying the urban poor, when adults research children, they ‘study down,’ seeking understanding across lines of difference and inequality” (p. 12). This uneven power relationship can create “parasites” (Bockarie et al., 2018, Stone & Priestley, 1996). Therefore, as important as the familiarisation process is the exiting process. In the second part of the summer term (June and July) I “wound down” the study, reminding pupils that I would be leaving in the summer, letting them ask questions or discuss anything they wanted, and continuing to be part of classroom life. I designed the below “beanstalk” to explain to pupils when I only had four sessions left with them. The plan was for them to stick a leaf on each number until they reached the top, indicating that they would not see me anymore. However, for various reasons, the last four sessions did not go as planned: some were cancelled by the school because of activities that disrupted the formal timetable, for example. However, in the end this did not feel like such a problem: I told the children I would be there until the end of term, and then they would not see me after the school holidays, and they all seemed quite happy with this, fitting as it did with the rest of the adults such as teachers and teaching assistants who they would not see once they moved up to the next

year. However, it serves as a reminder that the best laid plans can be thrown off, but honesty throughout the process makes it easier.



*Figure 5 Beanstalk*

*Activity made by me for the last 4 weeks of school to show visually how long I would stay in the classroom*

### 3.4.3. Embodied vulnerability and power dynamics

The bureaucratic process of gaining institutional ethical approval for research involving disabled children relies on the idea of all children, and especially disabled children, as being vulnerable. This bureaucratic and institutional process can therefore be seen as taking a conservative stance that remains uncritical in its understanding of vulnerability. This is in line with official publications such as the government's statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for example, which defers to a legal definition of children's vulnerability by citing the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (DfE, 2017, p. 19). This Act refers to "children and vulnerable adults", therefore simply declaring in law that all children are vulnerable. As Farrell (2014) explains, such specialist terminology or jargon is common in areas such as law, but should be used with caution outside of that area (pp. 39-40). However, the law and other official documents underpin national educational policy such as the EYFS and the SENDCoP (DfE, 2014) as well as Harbour View School's policies on issues such as safeguarding. These uncritical definitions are therefore widespread in practice, and perhaps also form part of the uncritical approach to research that Lefstein (2008) illuminates.

Yet for many years, social research has recognised that children's vulnerability is not a given (Morrow & Richards, 1996) and that children's bodies are culturally constituted as vulnerable (Christensen & Campling, 2000). This raises a number of questions: who says that children are vulnerable? Sometimes perceptions of vulnerability come from parents, such as in Atkin and Hussain's 2003 study, but often it is not clear who made that judgement. To what are children vulnerable? In some cases, authors make this clear: for example, the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) says, in relation to deaf children in primary school, that "children with [SEND] have many characteristics that may make them more vulnerable to bullying" (NDCS with National Sensory Impairment Partnership [NatSIP], 2015, p. 65). Yet vulnerability is sometimes discussed as though it is a blanket condition, even though children's vulnerability is not homogenous: for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) young people may be seen as more vulnerable than cis, heterosexual young people (Valentine, Butler & Skelton, 2001). Even when vulnerability is discussed in more nuanced ways, such as the previous two

examples of disabled and LGBTQ young people respectively, it is not always explored adequately. NDCS may be right that disabled children are more likely to be bullied than non-disabled children, but they attribute this to “characteristics” OF the child. In other words, they consider vulnerability to be something inherent to the child rather than social or other conditions. This is a disturbing echo of the individual model.

I therefore did not take a blanket approach of labelling the children I did research with as “vulnerable”. Rather, I tried to get to know them on their own terms and prioritise their perspectives and identities – and no children told me that they were “vulnerable”! Of course, many of the children told me personal, even sensitive, information, and I took seriously my responsibility towards them. There were times, for example, that a child told me something concerning, which I raised with school staff. But I also had a responsibility to recognise the ways that children were being made vulnerable through wider social and educational assemblages, and to listen to what they had to say about these. I also took seriously my ethical obligation to recognise ways in which children were not vulnerable – seeing, for example, their resistance to power and their agency in shaping their lives in the classroom. I have tried therefore to neither over- nor understate ways in which children can be vulnerable.

### 3.5. Data generation and analysis

I found very limited information on how to find a school in which to do my research. It seemed rare for published work to explain the process, therefore I have included this brief description of how I accessed the school. In July 2017 I emailed the headteachers and deputy headteachers of state and maintained schools in the North of England, including introductory information about the background, aims and methodology of the project. I hoped it would be timely for schools planning their autumn terms; however, despite sending out nearly 100 emails I received very few responses, and the responses I received indicated that that time of year was inconvenient for schools. At this point I reconsidered my approach and spoke to personal contacts who worked in schools, and through these conversations I was introduced to a member of staff at Harbour View Primary School. I emailed the senior management of the school and then in September 2017 I visited this school for an initial discussion with senior management and to look around the school for the first time, including meeting the pupils and staff in Reception and Year One. At this meeting we informally agreed that I would be able to collect data at the school, subject to ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University and the school's own processes and procedures for volunteers being followed (including a Disclosure and Barring Service check which was completed in October 2017).

#### 3.5.1. Participants: selection, inclusion and exclusion

I chose to focus on the spaces of younger primary school pupils (Reception and Year One classes). There seems to be a fairly even spread across children's and childhood studies literature of different age ranges, with perhaps slightly fewer studies with children aged 4 to 6 (e.g. Barley, 2013; Carter and Nutbrown, 2016) compared to 7- to 10-year-olds (Eleftheriou, Stamou, Alevriadou & Tsakiridou, 2013; Gallagher, 2011; Holt, 2004), 10- to 16-year-olds (Holt, 2010; MacArthur, Gaffney, Sharp & Kelly, 2007; Noonan, Boddy, Fairclough, & Knowles, 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015), and some taking a wider age range, such as Connors & Stalker, 2007 whose participants were aged 7 to 15. I focused on children aged five to seven because I saw space to develop creative methods which do not rely too heavily on detached observations and/or developmental approaches but seek out younger children's views and recognises their agency. Some such studies have been undertaken, e.g., Barley



(2013) who focused primarily on ethnicity through observations, conversations with children and other activities.

I spent time with the classes in Reception and Year One at the end of the EYFS and the start of Key Stage 1 respectively, with pupils aged 5 to 7. I had agreed that I would work with small groups (six to eight children at a time), as well as spending time in the classroom as a whole. I therefore decided to expand the sample to allow any child who wanted to contribute to do so. Other studies have involved similar numbers of children and young people, e.g., Islam (2008) who interviewed 13 Pakistani and Bangladeshi young disabled people; and Holt's (2010) study with 18 young people. This meant that I ended up with many children taking part who might have contributed as little as one piece of data (a photograph, a drawing etc). These are nevertheless very valuable data and I felt it was important to listen to those children. At the other end of the scale, some children built up a close relationship with me and contributed many pieces of data - in some cases, dozens of drawings and photographs. My sample of children was not intended to be representative of either the children in the school nor the wider population. Instead, I used a convenience sample. This has the disadvantage that wider inferences cannot be made from the data (Scott, 2015c). However, a deep exploration of individual cases has the advantage of bringing rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973, p. 310-323). Furthermore, I saw my subject of study not as the children themselves, but as the classroom space.

As part of my reflexive practice as a researcher, I tried at each stage to consider how my opinions of these children were affected by these labels given to them by adults, and I also had to consider whether or how to report these labels in my analysis and findings. On the one hand, I wanted the children's own identities and experiences to shine through and be central to my research. On the other hand, the labels given to these children affected them, both in ways they might understand (e.g., being singled out for certain activities) or ways that they might not understand (e.g., the school receiving extra funding for them). I have tried to strike a balance between giving relevant information so that the reader can understand the context, while trying not to label the children in a way that might create prejudices.

All pupils were welcome to take part in all activities, to ensure that there was no perception of favouritism, but data was only collected from those taking part in the study. I invited children to take part if they expressed an interest in the project when asked, in a way that is 'normal' for them. My time with the children during familiarisation was crucial here, as I got to know better how each child communicates. This helped to mitigate against excluding children based on ableist assumptions about 'normal' communication methods. I supported children in understanding the activities, but did not wish to exclude the experiences of people who I judged, from a particular perspective, to be 'less able' to understand this.

As explained in the introduction, I am using disability studies perspectives as a starting point to explore the embodied experiences of a range of children, whether or not they have been labelled as having SEND. I am therefore not relying on understanding individual children's experiences through the dichotomy which assumes that children either *are* or *are not* impaired or disabled. Instead, I will include in my analysis the complexities of waning and waxing capacities throughout ever-changing assemblages. Crucially, I made efforts to anticipate potentially disabling barriers in my research methods by offering a variety of opportunities for children to communicate their perspectives with me, engaging with each child as an individual and following their lead. My intention was to work with pupils in Reception and Year One to get to know which pupils might want to be involved in the project. Participants were a convenience sample, and therefore not representative of all children, nor of a subset (e.g., British disabled children). My sample consisted of pupils at that school aged 5-7 years who wanted to participate.

It was not until later that I realised the groups I had been allocated by the school in Reception were those who were lacking evidence to show that they meet the ELG "The World" which "focuses on nature and the environment, and the things children see or learn about within these areas such as plants and animals, items that have been made, structures such as buildings, and so on" (Langston, 2014, p. 116). The ELG "The World" comes under a broader heading of "Understanding the World", which:

is concerned with developing children's awareness of the world around them, their connection to it and with different people, communities and places. The way this is presented in the EYFS is through focusing on people, places, the environment and technology in three aspects, visually. (Langston, 2014, p. 116)

When collecting data from/creating data with pupils, I did not ask the school to provide me with individual demographic data for each child. Some might think it important, when conducting research about (disabled) children, to provide some demographic data about them – for example, their age, gender, class, ethnicity and impairment. However, I do not believe this is necessarily a straightforward task, for a number of reasons. Firstly, many of terms are used by adults to describe children, not by children themselves. (No child, for example, said to me that they “had additional needs”, whereas adults did say this about children). Replacing children's own description of themselves with other language is a form of down-playing children's autonomy and asserting adult dominance.

Additionally, whether children understand the adult-named categories, they might not consider them to be relevant. For example, a child might not think that their “ethnicity” as reported in government data, such as Asian, is as important as their language or religion. Using ethnicity categories such as White, Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British and Chinese (as is used in the England and Wales census [Race Disparity Unit, no date]) overlooks important differences between and within these groups. Barley (2019) for example, found that children (especially boys) prioritised their Muslim identities, rather than their skin colour, in discussions around race and ethnicity. Finally, giving a list of preconceived parts of identity may preclude other important identities to come forward. E.g., asking, “Are you a boy or a girl?” precludes the possibility that a child may identify as neither, both, or something else, or might move from one category to another during their life.

Despite not asking directly for pupils' demographic data, when I worked with certain groups of pupils, teachers and other adults gave me such information without me asking. For example, when I first arrived in Reception, the staff gave me a list of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium grant (PPG), “additional [government] funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between

them and their peers” (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018, no page).<sup>5</sup> PPG is calculated for a school depending on how many pupils are: eligible for free school meals in the last six years; were “looked-after children”; or are/were children of service personnel, and there is additional funding for looked-after children (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018; Ministry of Defence, 2018). The school-provided list gave certain data about the children, and as I spent more time in the classroom, adults gave me other information about the children, usually unbidden. For example, an adult might tell me that a child “has SEN” or “is mute” or “is really behind her peers” or “comes from a really difficult family life”.

Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2016) explore how impairment labels function as a way of marking what is seen as abnormal against what is normal, and satisfying people’s “urge to know”. I contend that my privileged position as an adult researcher gave me access to what education professionals thought would be important for me to know: in this way, this information, which I did not ask for, can be seen as labelling by adults of children satisfying an “urge to tell”. Both Danna and Naomi drew pictures of their mums next to their house. Both gave short, mostly one-word answers to my questions. However, Danna’s labels as having “SEN”, being “mute” and having EAL marked her out, along with other children so labelled, as a particular focus for the teachers who were concerned about children reaching certain goals in the EYFS framework. Thus, in a self-fulfilling prophecy the labels become important: Danna is marked as different and therefore everything she does is viewed, by education professionals, as a chance to demonstrate her “abnormality”. This increased scrutiny should instead be turned around upon education professionals and the education system, asking what the purpose of such labels are and whether they are in children’s best interests. The teacher seemed concerned that I would not “get much out” of Danna. Instead, my interactions with Danna were just as meaningful as with other children. We played together, she drew things for me, we made each other laugh. All of these are valuable embodied experiences, but they are generally lost in an education system that values hard data.

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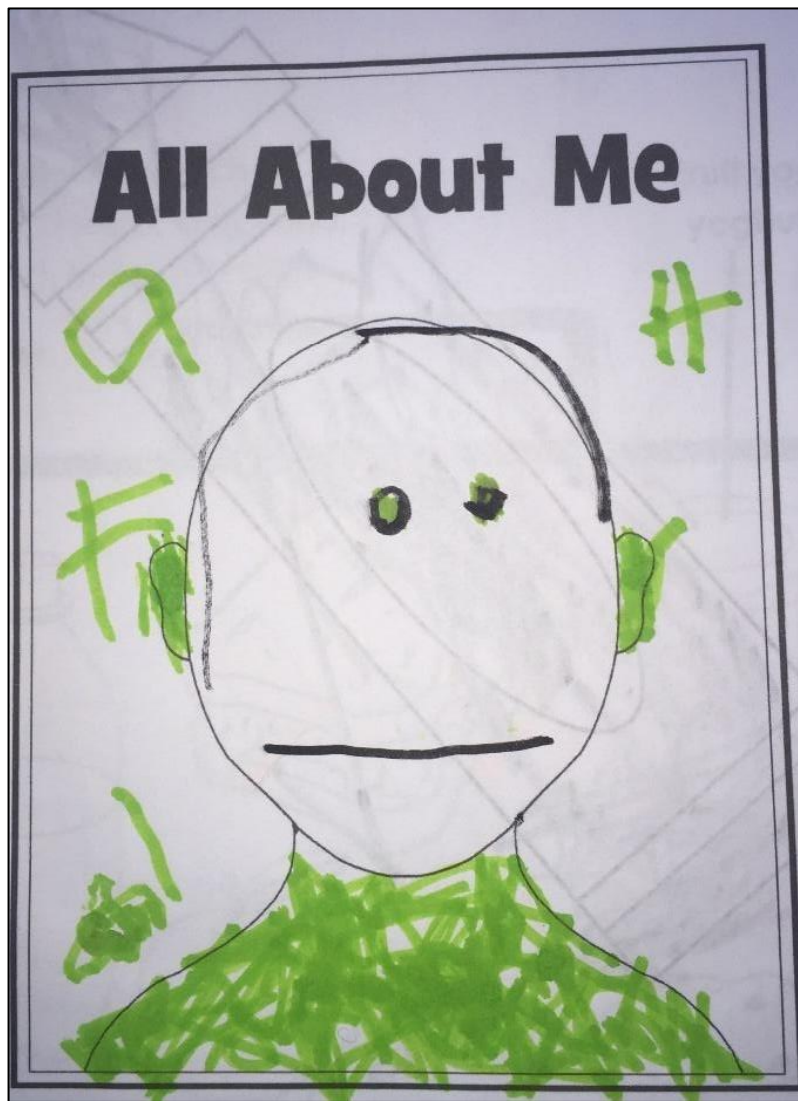
<sup>5</sup> This guidance has since been updated but was in place at the time of the study.

### *Pen portraits*

Instead of relying on demographic data, I give pen portraits of some of the children involved (those who feature significantly in later chapters). However, I have necessarily limited the information given to keep them confidential, and in some cases can only give limited information about some of the children involved.

### *Ahmed*

Ahmed is in Reception. His favourite colour is black. He did not want to talk to me with words, but he enjoyed colouring in and sharing that with me, and always wanted to use the “right” colour. For example, in his colouring in of the food in a lunchbox below he has only coloured the orange, carrot and strawberries because the only colour he had at the time was orange. He also enjoyed decorating and playing with the model rooms and showing those to me. He stuck lots of pictures of people onto the rooms, and also made them “fight” with each other. I discuss Ahmed’s “learning journey” in Chapter 4 Verticality and you can see him playing with model rooms in Chapter 6 Leaks and Flows.



*Figure 6 Ahmed's self-portrait*

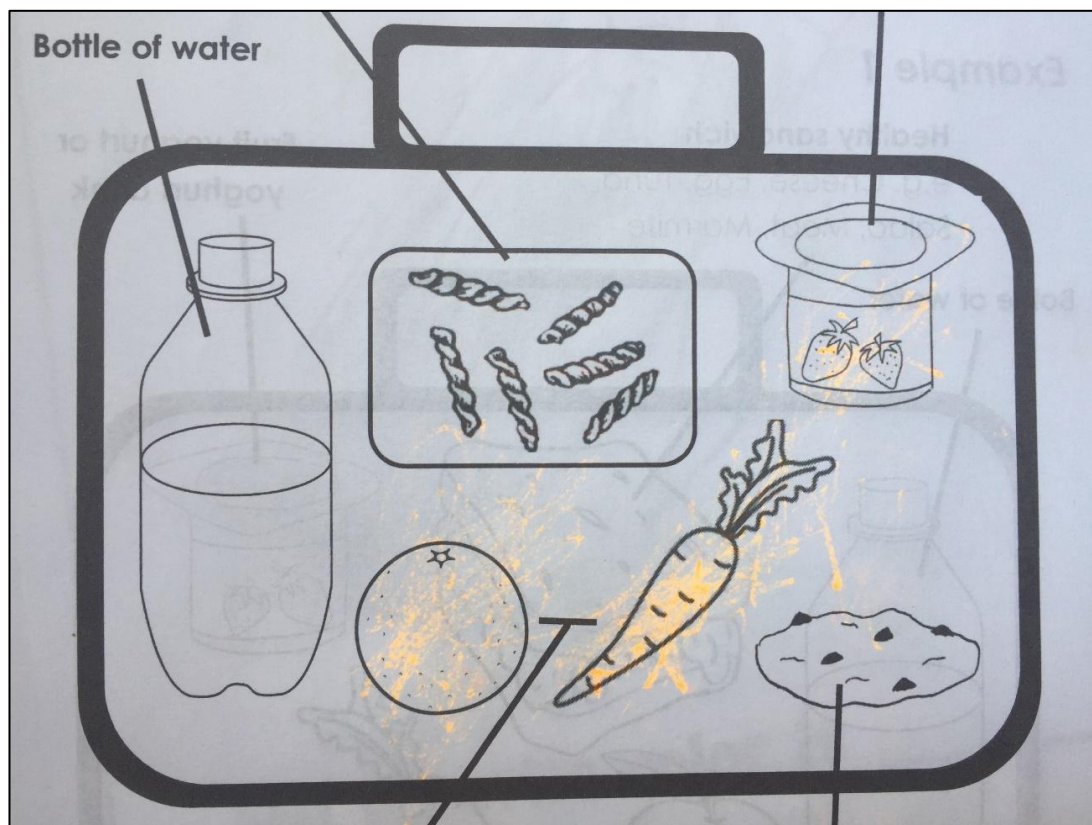


Figure 7 Ahmed's colouring-in



*Figure 8 Ahmed playing two men "fighting" in a cardboard box*



## Danna

Danna is in Reception. She enjoys reading books with adults. She liked joining in with my creative activities, especially the model room activity, when she decorated the model cloakroom with stickers with a friend. She also loved sticking smiley face stickers on paper, and her paper person collage is used below in the section 5.3.5. I discuss one of Danna's drawings below.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 9 Danna and another pupil holding the model cloakroom.*

### Hajrah

Hajrah liked running around the classroom and sometimes drawing, although she did not enjoy playing with other children so much. She would sometimes get an adult's attention by grabbing their hand. She has a label of SEND and usually had a teaching assistant with her. I discuss Hajrah's resistance to adults and her use of the floor in Chapter 4 Verticality.

### Hasim

Hasim is in Reception. He enjoys running and playing with his friends. He does not enjoy sitting down activities and was not interested in colouring or collage. Hasim appears in Chapter 4 Verticality.

### Inaya

Inaya liked to be on her own in the classroom. Usually, she was not interested in joining in my activities, but she did do one drawing. She had a personalised timetable as adults considered that she was not meeting developmental goals. Her assigned teaching assistant was often with her. Inaya appears in Chapter 6, eating a sandwich in the "wrong" place.

### Isla

Isla was often running or skipping around the class. She was interested in what was going on around her, and often dashed from activity to activity. Sometimes she was looking at books in the reading corner, although usually not for long, and other times she liked to look at the wall displays. She was often "on the go" and seemed less interested in sedentary activities like drawing and colouring. She also liked to dance and sing, usually on her own, and always seemed happy and in "her own world". When the class gained some pet chicks (Figure 10) she, like many other pupils, took an active interest in them. The photo shows a light-coloured chick sitting in a plastic container of small food pellets. Lots of the children stuck their fingers into the cage to try to stroke the chicks, and some children tried to feed the chicks bits of various things they found in the classroom, despite adults telling them not to touch or feed the chicks. On one occasion I found Isla stirring a bowl of small yellow plastic pieces, which she tells me is "food". She then started throwing the plastic pieces into the cage to "feed" the chicks - I quickly intervened, concerned for the chicks' health, to say that the chicks had special food and they didn't need more! On another day,

Isla grabbed my hand and told me she wanted to show me the “ducklings”. I followed her over to them and we both looked at the chicks with another adult and two other children. I offered her the tablet and she took some photos of the chicks. Isla’s story appears in Chapter 5 Surveillance.



*Figure 10 The chicks in the cage, with food pellets visible*

## Izobel

Izobel is very smiley and cheeky. She loves physical affection, and would often give adults hugs and kisses. She often preferred the company of adults to children, and often tried to get adults' attention by showing us things that she was doing. She loved taking photos with the iPad, often taking photos of her peers. She also had an eye for detail, taking photos of things that other pupils didn't notice, for example an elastic band on the floor (Figure 11). Izobel, like me, wears glasses. However, she often takes them off and loses them. She was particularly interested in my glasses, and sometimes tried to take them off me (Figure 13)! Izobel appears in Chapter 4 Verticality.



*Figure 11 Photo taken by Izobel of band on floor [Image edited for confidentiality reasons]*

Image removed for  
confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 12 Photo of pupils drawing and playing by Izobel*



*Figure 13 Izobel taking my glasses*

*(photo taken by another child) [Image edited for confidentiality reasons]*

#### Kali

Kali is in Reception 1, and she is chatty and confident. She likes drawing and colouring, and she especially likes “love hearts” which appeared on a lot of her drawings (see self-portrait below). Her favourite food is ice-cream, and her



favourite colour is pink, which also appears in a lot of her drawings. She appears in Chapter 4 Verticality.

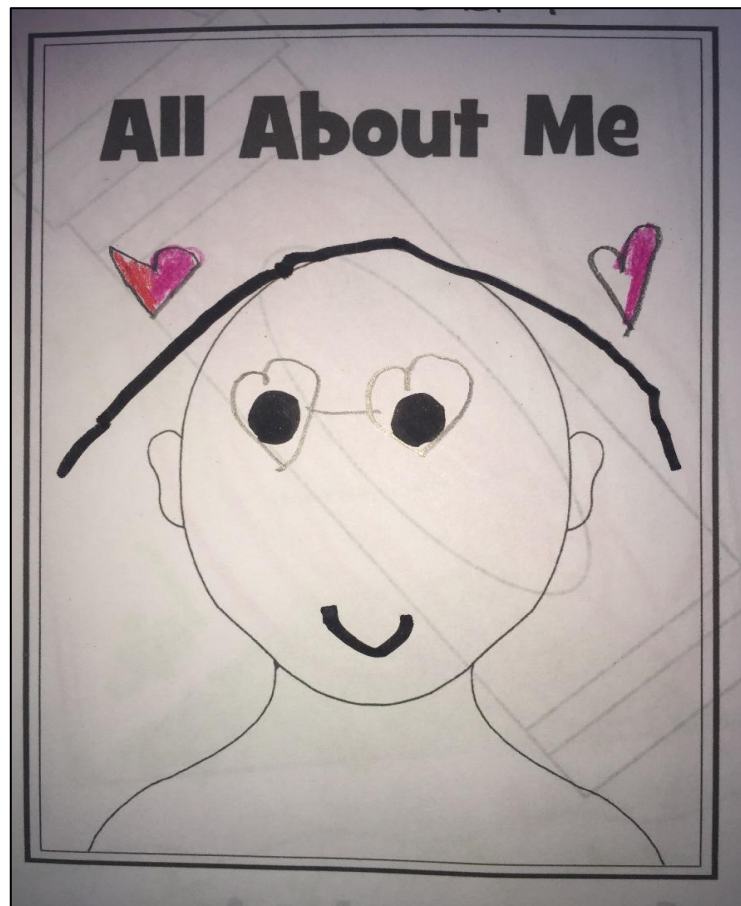
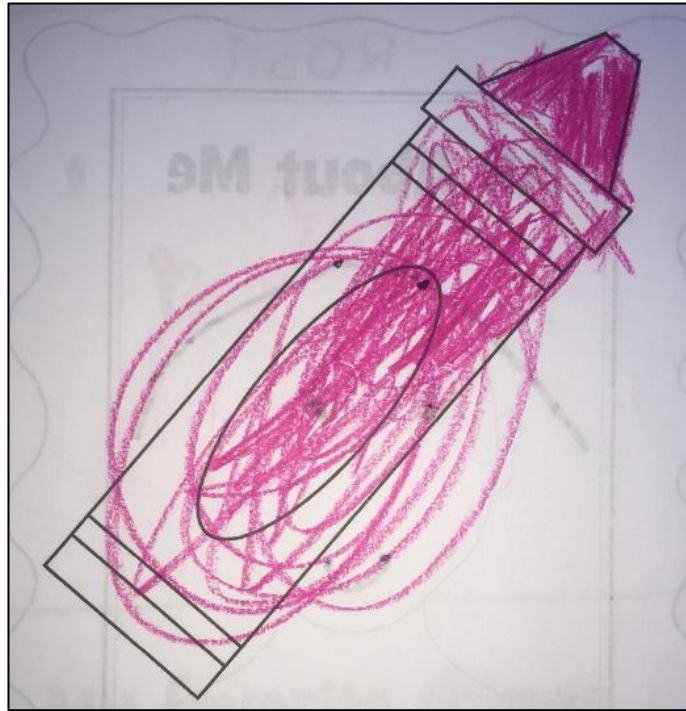


Figure 15 Kali's self-portrait



Figure 14 Kali's favourite food, ice-cream



*Figure 16 Kali's favourite colour, pink*

#### Maram

Maram enjoyed doing gardening activities with me, and was keen to help plant and water the plants. She was curious about the gardening and asked me lots of questions, and she seemed pleased when I said she was doing well.

Maram's drawings are used in Chapter 6 when talking about containing leaks and flows.

#### Naomi

Naomi is in Reception and is outgoing and friendly. She enjoys colouring in and drawing. She also likes writing love letters to adults, including me. Because of this, I made sure to keep boundaries clear, by clarifying my relationship with her and being kind but firm. I discuss one of Naomi's drawings below.

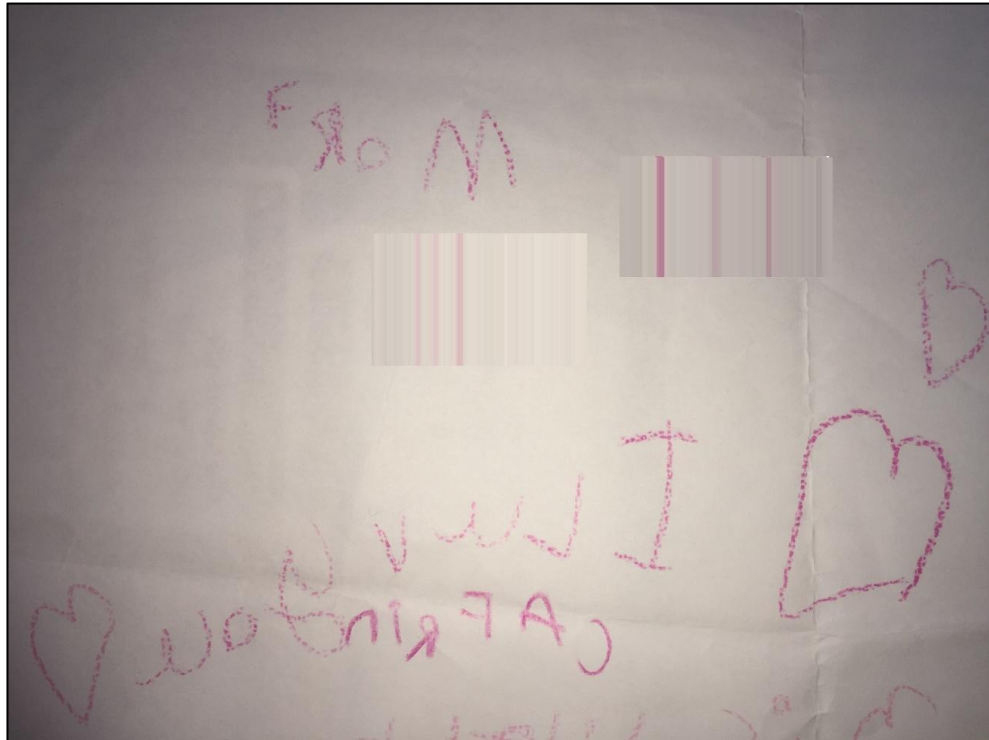


Figure 17 Naomi's note

*In pink crayon it states "From [Naomi] I luv you Cafrin" (the last words written backwards), surrounded by hearts.*

Yasmeen

Yasmeen comes across as confident and happy. She loved using the iPad to take photos of her friends. She also enjoyed using it to take “selfies” (photographs of herself), including with me. Although she liked drawing and colouring in, she did not want to do any drawings with me. She appears in Chapter 5 Surveillance.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 18 Selfie of me and Yasmeen.*

*(Taken by Yasmeen)*

Zara

Zara appears in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 talking about babies and numbers. She was judged by adults to be good at maths, and she liked to talk to me about her drawings and her family.

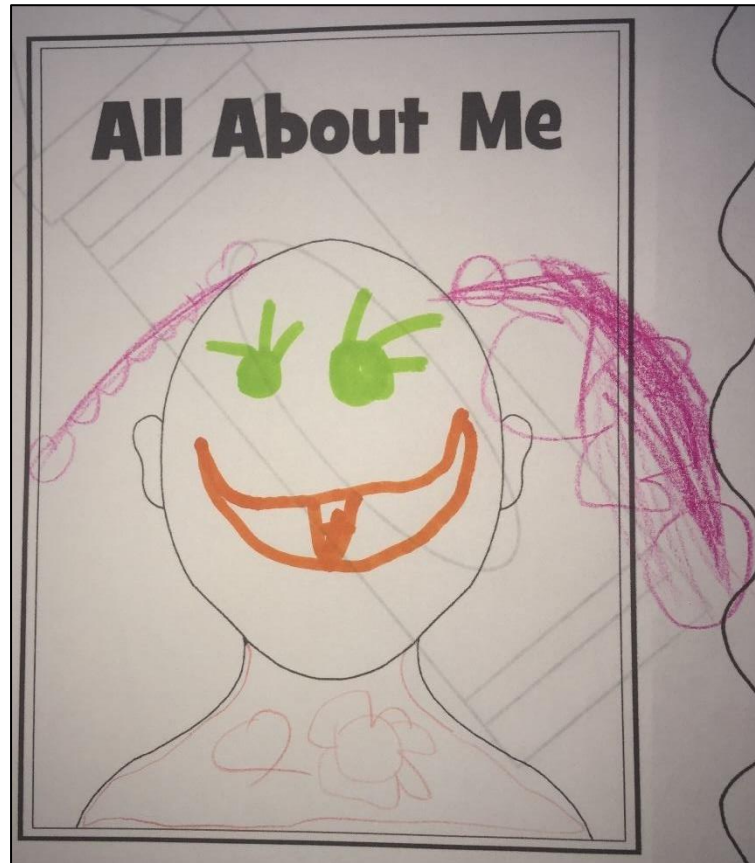


Figure 19 Zara's self-portrait

### 3.5.2. Theory to methods

Choosing the methods of data collection was not just a technical matter but involved decisions tied up with ethics and the substantive issues of the project. It was thus not a static, pre-made framework but rather a set of ever-developing, flexible and responsive tools that serve the study (Mason, 2007). The specific qualitative methods chosen for this study were designed to reflect three major concerns. Firstly, the methods have been developed from the ontological-epistemological basis previously described, and therefore reflect the ways in which embodied experiences of disability and childhood are knowable and on-going theoretical discussion about this. Secondly, methods were chosen that were likely to fit into the world of the participants and were flexible enough

to adapt to the preferences and needs of the children involved. This meant developing loose plans based on what previous researchers have successfully used (e.g., formal interviews may be less appropriate than informal discussions). It does not, however, presuppose that “children” are a homogenous group and that “one size fits all”. Rather, it recognises that there are (socially constructed) differences between adults and children based on complex issues like power dynamics, and adult researchers need to take these differences into consideration, while also not relying on “taken for granted notions about the differences and similarities between children and adults” (Christensen & Prout, 2005, in Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2008, p. 227).

Finally, the methods chosen were designed to produce data that meets the three objectives of the study. As this research aims to explore embodied experiences, it borrows from phenomenology, especially in understanding the body as central to people’s experiences of the world. Goodley (2011) has stated that phenomenology “places the dilemmas and possibilities of disability at the level of embodiment. Phenomenologists attend to the capacities of the body to be a source of self and society” (p. 56). (I covered phenomenology in greater detail in the literature review.) Qualitative research is generally associated with interpretivist traditions, especially phenomenology, because it deals with human experiences of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2005; Weiss, 2015). Therefore, to meet the objectives of the study from a phenomenological basis, qualitative methods are needed to provide the required depth of analysis of children’s experiences. This is because such methods can begin to get at the rich complexities of people’s constructed social realities which cannot be straightforwardly or objectively understood (Greener, 2011; Mason, 2007).

The chosen methodological underpinnings are designed to fit into the world of the children themselves, and to reflect ongoing theoretical discussions about childhood and embodiment. I talk about “responsive, flexible research tools” but this language hides the mess, the confusion, the leaks. To say “methods” reflects a scientific positivism that I feel uncomfortable promoting.

For at least 20 years it has been accepted that "research about disability in childhood must seek to understand the child's experience and to obtain the

views and opinions of the children themselves” (Beresford, 1997, p. 1) because children (like adults) are experts in their own lives and can critically consider the meaning of their own experiences. However, we must also consider the possibility that each person, adult or child, does not have a perfect understanding of why they do or think certain things, and nobody is a fully autonomous, rational “subject” (Stephens, et al., 2015, p. 199). Therefore, I aimed to continuously reflect on my own positionality when co-creating and analysing data, recognising that there is no “correct” way to understand the data. I did my best to understand children’s lives on their own terms, while recognising that there will inevitably always be gaps in understanding, as children and adults, despite occupying the same physical space, live in different cultures (Opie & Opie, 1991, cited in Beresford, 1997, p. 8). Therefore, as an adult researcher I carefully considered how I entered children’s worlds to talk to them about their personal experiences. For example, children are generally used to adults controlling all aspects of their lives, including in school settings, where systems and spaces are designed and created by adults (Tisdall, 2003). Children might take some time to get used to the idea that an adult researcher is, in some sense, asking to be taught about children’s worlds. This is further compounded because an adult researcher does not fit easily into the adult roles with which they are likely to be familiar, such as a family member, teacher or support worker. Studies with children have employed a variety of methods (e.g., Carter & Nutbrown, 2016) and offered children a choice of methods (Islam, 2008). Therefore, I used this as a starting point to develop my own set of methods.

I will now further expand upon my chosen methods, which fell into two categories: firstly, to observe assemblages; secondly to ask (in a very broad sense) about children’s experiences – using drawings, photographs and other methods as I will describe. This was influenced in part by the “Mosaic approach”, a “multi-method, polyvocal approach that brings together different perspectives to create with children an image of their worlds” that combines traditional ethnographic observations with creative, participatory methods (Moss & Clark, 2017, p. 17, see also Clark, 2004, 2005).

### 3.5.3. Methods

After the familiarisation process and receiving formal ethical approval from the University, I began the formal process of data collection after the spring mid-term break. Many of my activities (as described in the familiarisation section 3.4.2. above) remained the same. However, I also began to introduce activities such as drawing and photographs. Data was therefore created through interactions between the children and me; that is, I did not generally collect pre-existing data, but co-generated new data with the children with me in the forms of observations, drawings, writing and photographs. This continued through the second half of the spring term and first half of the summer term (March to May). I focused on collecting data on what was important in the children's lives and how they experienced school, including learning and play.

#### *Ethnographic observations*

This subsection outlines how I observed the assemblages of the classroom, making field notes as I went along. Some of these were written in the moment, giving the advantage of immediacy but the disadvantage of not fully engaging with classroom life, distancing myself as I made notes. Others I wrote down later that day or the even occasionally later – with the advantage that I could be more fully present in the moment as it happened, but perhaps losing some details to memory.

One of my most basic decisions when designing this research was “what is my unit of study?”. I realised that I did not have a straightforward answer to this question, and without an answer, I could not move on to deciding what my methods would be. Deciding this was an iterative process of returning to and reviewing the aim and objectives, informed by the existing literature, and then using the refined objectives to explore the literature further and identify gaps in knowledge. This process continued even into and throughout my time “in the field”. Building on an understanding of embodiment, space, assemblage and surveillance as outlined in my literature review, my initial observations at the school (before formal data generation began) felt like complex fractals composed of lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). For example, I might notice a particular interaction between two people in the book corner. Was the unit of study one or both people? Or the interaction between them? Or the



interaction between both and the space around them, the objects, and the time that was passing? My only answer to this was that I was studying all of these things: everything that makes up the space.

Inevitably, therefore, it seemed that the only way to capture data on the whole space as multiplicity and assemblage (as discussed in the literature review section on Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) was through ethnographic observations of that space. However, at first, I felt very reluctant to use this approach, because of the historical (and indeed continuing) of colonial, oppressive, white-centric use of ethnography in areas such as anthropology. Use of observation of disabled people, children and especially disabled children in “professional settings” (as discussed earlier in this chapter) seemed to echo this dark history and I did not want to contribute to that. In the forefront of my mind was the way statutory guidance expects teachers to assess children at the age of five, at which point an adult must complete the EYFSP which includes “ongoing observation; all relevant records held by the setting; discussions with parents and carers, and any other adults whom the teacher, parent or carer judges can offer a useful contribution” (DfE, 2017, p. 14); notable by its absence is any contribution by children themselves. Having realised, however, that my unit of study was not “the disabled child” but the complex assemblages of the classroom, and informed by theories of embodiment, I came to view “observations” not as distanced, “objective”, outsider views but encompassing my experience of the space as a co-creator of that space. Indeed, how could it be any other way? A Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, as explored in the literature review, posits that these interactions have meaning even if no-one analyses or reflects upon them (Weiss, 2015) - but a researcher must observe, analyse and reflect on them to write about them. As I took a social-model-informed, embodied approach to children’s experiences of school spaces, it seemed inevitable that the only option I had (or indeed any researcher would have) was to “be” in the space and write about that experience. In the words of Kehily (2015), “ethnographic school-based observations highlight how bodies in school incite celebratory performance, embrace bodily change, and particularly demonstrate a ‘knowingness’ that is generally under-acknowledged in policy accounts” (p. 218) which overlook the embodiedness of being in school spaces. Similarly, Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley (2008) found that

“ethnographic processes enabled [them] to: [among other things] question [their] own and other academic understandings of childhood and disability” (p. 220). They highlight the importance of researcher reflexivity, understanding and thinking about their own positions in the world. I therefore felt comfortable going forward with a reflexive, embodied approach to ethnography.

So, I observed school life, and how different people in the school (children and adults) move through and use the space. Observation was a useful tool in understanding how assemblages work in relation to children and adults’ bodies, but I tried to use it in a critical and self-reflective way which does not simply pathologise the bodies of disabled children. Moreover, I was never “just” observing: ‘observation’ and ‘interactions’ did not feel like two separate data collection methods. This is because I used observation in the broadest sense of paying attention to what was happening around me while also always recognising my role as an ever-present participant, as well as more conventional data collection such as talking to children about their school experiences, sometimes using pictures as prompts for discussion of educational experiences (Connors & Stalker, 2007). Even when I was not actively interacting with children (e.g., through conversations or play), my presence was not neutral. Additionally, I attempted to use observation judiciously: observation can be done ethically but has the danger of slipping into an adult researcher watching (and analysing) children from a pseudo-detached position. This would not chime well with this study, which aims to centralise children’s accounts of their lives. Having said this, in understanding embodiment within social and material assemblages, valuable insights can be gained from observing the whole environment (e.g., a classroom at a particular time of day), rather than an observation of an individual child. These observations of whole assemblages can become useful starting points for a discussion with a child. Overarching everything was my own embodied experience of being in various spaces in school interacting with children and adults in the school. Often, this data was harder to capture: for example, the experience of a child giving me a hug or pulling on my lanyard. I tried to record examples of these in my field notes.

### *Visual and creative methods*

When it came to creative methods, I developed a multimethod, participatory approach inspired by the Mosaic approach which has been used with young children (Moss & Clark, 2017). Children could “pick and mix” which methods they wanted to use, which gave children greater autonomy (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014) over how they express their embodied experiences of school. I gave children a broad scope to choose among the creative, visual or more “traditional” forms of data: make drawings, write, talk, play or interact with me in any way they felt comfortable, and always remaining child led. This follows many other successful studies that have employed creative methods, e.g., Slater (2015); Beckett & Buckner (2012); Garbutt, Boycott-Garnett, Tattersall, & Dunn (2010). Visual methods, it has been argued, are more appropriate for certain age groups, such as the young children whose opinions I sought. However, McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain (2018) argue that “it is not enough to ask participants to take photographs, what is also required is that the researcher explores the intent of the photographer in producing” (p. 365). In other words, visual methods are a useful tool to begin to explore and understand how a (dis)abled child fits and/or misfits (Garland-Thompson, 2011) into complex assemblages. I gave participants visual and verbal prompts (based on themes that emerged in my literature review) in ways that felt appropriate to that particular child. This of course sometimes required some experimentation and getting to know how the pupils preferred to communicate (or indeed if they wanted to communicate with me at all). I hesitate to over-emphasise how much control children had over their choices: I was always bound by the time the school gave me and the available activities. However, I hope that by offering children various options (including not taking part) I showed a clear divide between their school activities and the optional, ‘no wrong answers’ nature of their interactions with me.

In section 3.2.2. I gave a list of the methods available to children, which were: drawings and collages, taking photographs on an iPad, model rooms, paper people, and Sammy the monkey. I explore these in further detail here.

### 1. Drawings and collages

Children's drawings have long been used in studies of childhood, for example by Carter & Nutbrown, 2016; Islam, 2008; Noonan, et al., 2016 and many others. Often, they are used as a prompt or starting point for further discussion with a researcher, for example about early childhood settings (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 22). This is a popular tool for research with younger children as art is seen as "the *literacy par excellence* of the early years of child development" because drawing is expected to develop before reading and writing (Wright, 2007b, in Wright 2010). In discussions about the embodiment inherent in children's drawings, Wright provides useful real-life examples of how drawing is an embodied process, an "integrated drawing-narrative-embodied text [which] becomes a single, multimodal communicative act" (p. 13). For example, one 5-year-old child did a drawing of a rocket in space with stars and moons, and as he drew, he enacted and embodied important parts, through gesture and using the pencil to demonstrate movement as an on-going phenomenon, not a final image (p. 96).

I therefore considered each drawing not just as a finished product, but a lasting reminder of a child's becoming in a particular period of time in particular assemblages. For this reason, I tried to record conversations, activities and feelings that happened before, during and after a drawing was made in my field notes, or on the drawing itself if the child wanted. However, this was virtually impossible in the hustle and bustle of the classroom. Much of the drawings still evoke memories of particular times and places within the classroom in a Proustian madeleine moment. There was also the practical difficulty of not knowing which drawings would become "data" - sometimes children made drawings with me that they decided they wanted to keep for themselves or take home to show to their parents rather than give to me. On other occasions children gave me drawings that they had done unprompted. With all this, it was impossible to record as much as I would have liked about the processes and assemblages around the children's drawings; nevertheless, when analysing them I tried, as far as possible, to situate them in their context.

At the start of data collection, I mostly worked with a few small groups of children (see the section on participants for more information). I gave children

some of the pages from an “All About Me” booklet (A to Z Teacher Stuff, no date, Appendix 7) including “self-portrait” and “my favorite [sic] things”. These provided a starting point for conversations and a good opportunity to get to know the children and what was important to them.

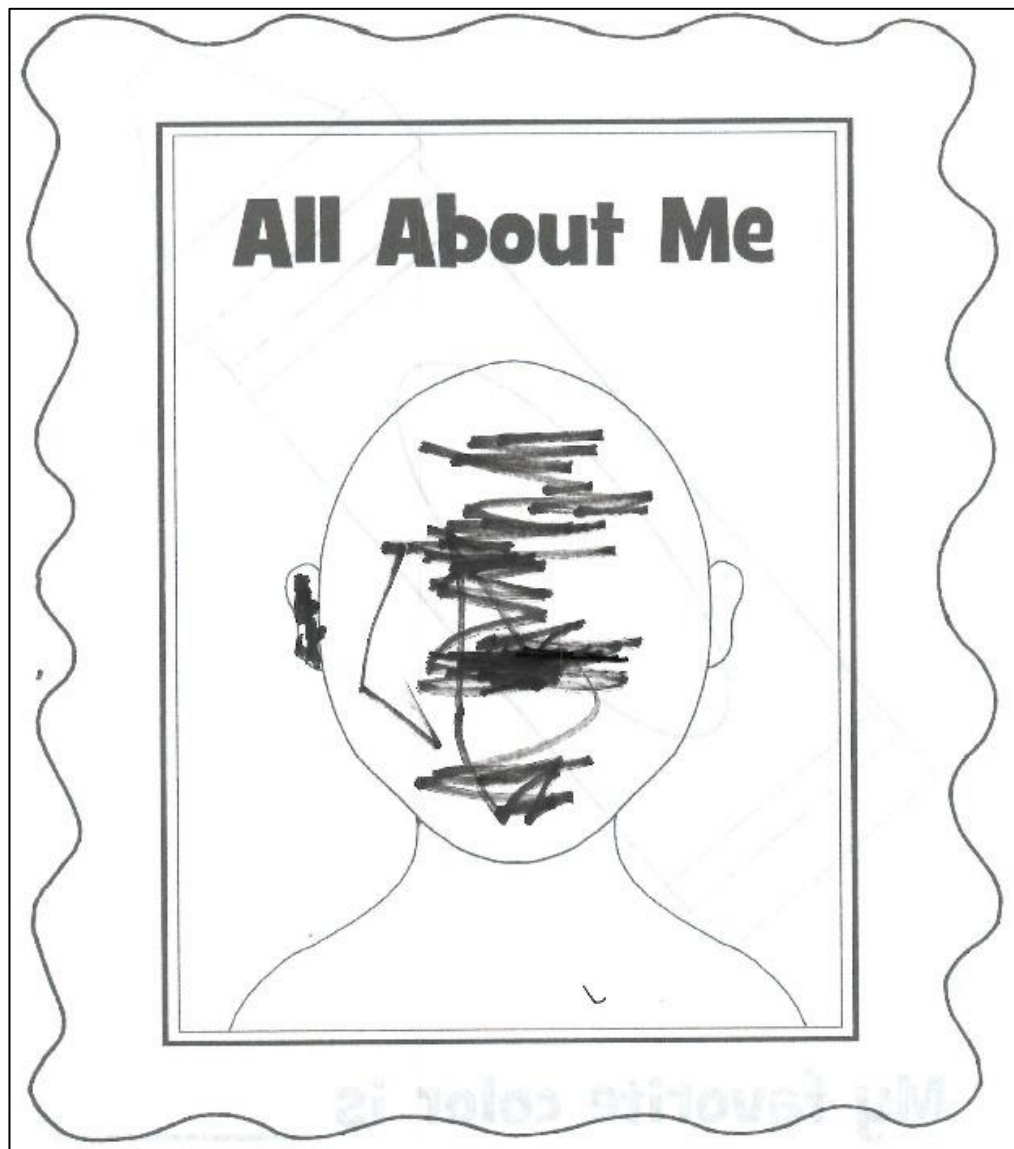


Figure 20 Izobel's self-portrait

After the “All About Me” booklets, I gave children a variety of coloured paper to use (pink being the overwhelming favourite), and they had access to plain paper, pencils and pens in the classroom. Many of the children took part in the study in this way. The analysis of these drawings was done partly thematically, but this posed a problem to drawings which were not obviously “of” something specific. An example is this picture by Malika:



Figure 21 Malika's drawing in green felt-tip pen

The child who drew it pulled me to the side, put a piece of paper on the floor and drew this picture with a green felt-tip pen. They then handed the drawing to me. Malika might typically be excluded from some types of research because they do not use verbal communication, and their drawings might be less easy to “read” and understand than other students’ because they do not contain easily identifiable objects or people. It might be easy to view these only through the lens of developmentalism and a “deficit model” used in earlier drawing research, which focused on what children *omitted* from their drawings, e.g., eyelashes, the “correct” number of fingers (Wright, 2010, p. 27). Wright argues that, instead, we should try to “understand what is *meant* by a child’s drawing in relation to his/her ideas, actions and feelings” - an approach which relies on talking to the child artist (p. 11). However, it was important to me not to create a binary of images that I “understood” and images that remained inscrutable. Instead, I took each image as part of a “Mosaic” (Moss & Clark, 2017) that included the process of creating the image, what I knew about the child, and the assemblages around us.

In this case, the child's purposeful insistence that I watch and then take the drawing was enough to persuade me that this was important and worth paying attention to. Although the final piece of "data" is the drawing – something tangible that I can share with others – I do not want to lose sight of the embodied context in which this child drew this drawing for me, and the embodied communication that convinced me that the child wanted me to accept and recognise this creation. Maconochie (2018) argues that it is important for children to be able to participate in research through embodied interactions with the material world. Similarly, I viewed these creative methods as embodied, mindful as much of the embodied process of creating and sharing drawings as of the final product, which, without context, might be harder to analyse.

I also take drawings in context with other interactions with children. For Malika, that meant coming into her world through photography. When I handed her the iPad, she took it willingly, and started to use it like a window, looking at different things in the room but not taking pictures with it. I tried to show her how to press the button on the iPad to capture a picture, but she did not follow my lead. I then realised that as I was sharing this moment with her, watching the things she was watching, I could also share the creation of the data. Hence the following images are co-created – framed by Malika and captured by me. This idea of co-creation continues throughout the data – the children and I co-created drawings, discussions, photographs and model rooms. This enriches the data, as it

highlights the relationship between me and the participants, and our positions in complex assemblages

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 22 Photograph taken by Malika and me.*

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 23 Photo of grey toy elephant on the green carpeted floor, taken by Malika and me.*





*Figure 25 Photo taken by Malika and me.*



*Figure 24 Photo of Malika's hand half covering the lens.*

*In the background a sign saying "[Malika's] Book"*

Other drawings might have been clearer in their depictions of people and objects. Figure 26, for example, was of a gardening session I did with the children.



*Figure 26 A drawing of gardening by a Year One pupil.*

It is on yellow paper, on the left is a shorter figure (the child) with dark hair, next to a taller figure (me) with brown hair. In the middle and on the right are raised plant beds with various colourful plants growing. I felt fairly confident understanding what pictures like this depicted. However, I still did not take for granted what the pictures showed, and always took them in the context they were produced.

I also provided lots of stickers, including smiley faces, animals, people and objects. In Figure 27, a child has drawn the school, with children and parents queuing up outside. In the top right corner, a sad face sticker has been applied. The child artist wanted to remove the face, preferring that all the faces were smiling. However, as she tried to remove the sticker, it tore a hole in the paper. She, therefore, reluctantly, stuck it back on. This understanding of the process of creating visual images helps to better understand children's ideas and motivations.

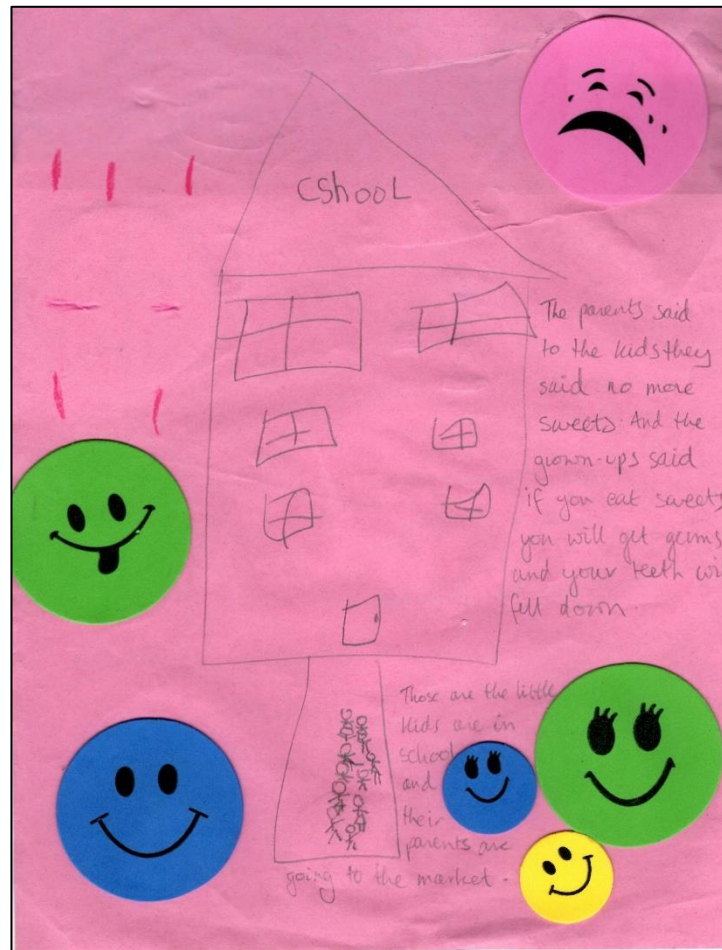


Figure 27 A drawing in pencil on a pink piece of paper.

*It shows the school and figures lining up to get in. Foam stickers of faces have been stuck on around the edges, and I have written the child's description around the drawing.*

After the child finished the drawing/collage, I asked her what it showed. I wrote down what she said (with her consent): "Those are the little kids, are in school and their parents are going to the market." This seems a relatively straightforward description of what is happening in the picture. However, sometimes the conversations started by the pictures did not seem to reflect what was happening in the picture, e.g., "The parents said to the kids, they said no more sweets. And the grown-ups said if you eat sweets you will get germs and your teeth will fall down." This gives us further insight into the child's understanding of adult-child relations: that adults have the knowledge and the responsibility to teach children to look after their bodies.

Stickers were also popular because they could be used on people!





*Figure 30 A child holding their hand to the camera showing a sticker on their palm.*

Image removed for  
confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 28 A child poses*

*They have a sticker on their face and they are gesturing towards it.*



*Figure 29 A selfie by me*

*It shows the smiley face stickers stuck to my shirt.*

### 1. a. Shopkins

Some of the stickers were of Shopkins, a brand of toys centred around hundreds of characters in the shapes of supermarket products, with small rubbery toys, videos, songs and an app (Moose Enterprise Pty Ltd, no date). I chose to include Shopkins because of the interest some of the pupils took in them, and the conversations we had about them. One such conversation happened when I was sitting at the art tables with some of the children:

One pupil has been drawing small pictures and is now cutting them out. I ask her what she's drawing, and she tells me "Shopkins." I haven't heard of these, so I ask her what they are. She tells me, "This is the popcorn one, this is an apple, this is a cookie," [Figures 31-34] and points to each one as she says it. "And they're called Shopkins are they?" The others at the table join in the conversation about Shopkins, surprised that I haven't heard of them. This was an interesting moment for me, as the children had the knowledge about this topic and were teaching me about it, reversing the usual dynamic of adults holding knowledge and teaching children.

Images removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

<i>Figure 31 Apple Blossom</i> <i>(Shopkin Toys, 2020a)</i>	<i>Figure 32 Cupcake Queen</i> <i>(Shopkin Toys, 2020b)</i>	<i>Figure 33 Kooky Cookie</i> <i>(Shopkin Toys, 2020c)</i>	<i>Figure 34 Poppy Corn</i> <i>(Shopkin Toys, 2020d)</i>
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Without realising it, I had positioned myself as an adult oblivious to the interests of the children. One website summarised by adult ignorance, stating:

At first glance parents might think Shopkins are simply little plastic grocery store shaped items with a cute face and creative names. Well, ask any toddler to preteen girl, they will tell you, Shopkins are so much more! (Shopkin Toys, 2020e)

On one hand I wanted to be led by children's interests and take them seriously. I had naively seen these characters with a "cute face" and thought them to be innocuous. On the other hand, the more I learned about Shopkins, the more

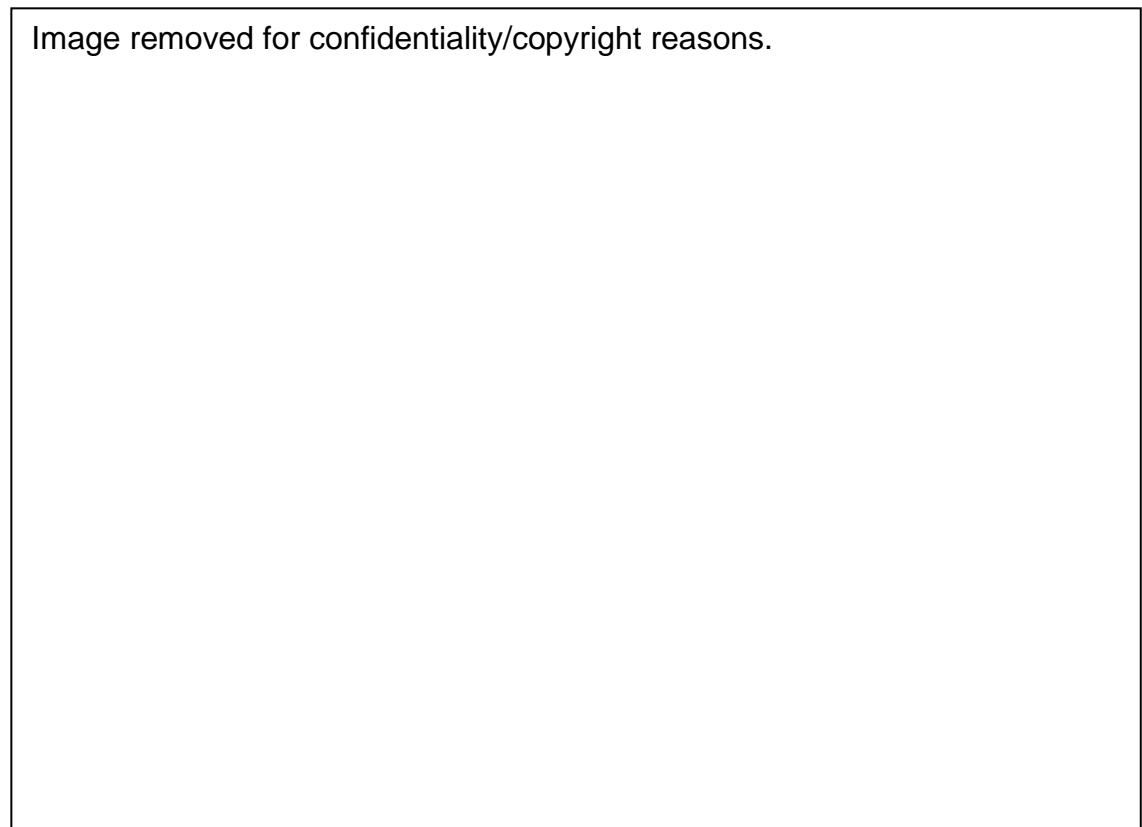
concerned I was by the way these supermarket items were heavily marketed towards “toddler to preteen girl[s],” a gendered aspect which is backed up by Nicoll and Nansen (2018, p.8), and Harrop, Jones, Zheng, Nowell, Boyd and Sasson (2018). This seems to reinforce the status quo that historically, and to this day, women bear the brunt of responsibility for household grocery shopping (Van Droogenbroeck & Van Hove, 2020). Furthermore, these small cheap toys, along with other branded franchises like Minions and emojis, are part of low-value branded prizes at fairgrounds (Trowell, 2019). The focus on collecting these toys in an endless cycle of consumption appears to be built into the Shopkins brand, which builds in a “very important Shopkins Rarity Level” used for trading with others and increasing the perceived value of the “rare” items (Shopkin Toys, 2020e). This association of Shopkins with prizes carries over into the (very small) body of educational and psychological literature which mentions Shopkins used as rewards for disabled children performing the “correct” expected behaviour. Staubitz, Lloyd & Reed (2020) describe using Shopkins as part of “self-control training” with children labelled as having emotional and behavioural disorders; Harrop et al. (2018) use Shopkins pictures as one of the visual stimuli in their array of “male, female or neutral” toys or interests, to track the preferences of girls with autism (p. 3453); Tudor, Ibrahim, Bertschinger, Piasecka and Sukhodolsky (2016) describe a 9-year-old girl labelled with disruptive mood dysregulation disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder receiving Shopkins as prizes for engaging with cognitive behaviour therapy and completing anger management practice logs (p. 466).

Needless to say, I felt uncomfortable with the idea that I was rewarding children for participating in a way that felt like a bribe. Instead, I wanted to genuinely engage with children’s interests. My approach was perhaps more similar to “Jane,” a teacher mentioned by Lee (2017). Jane used Shopkins to engage a child (who loved the toys) in a creative writing task about two of the characters. In this way, she showed genuine interest in the toys’ characters and in the child’s ideas about those characters. Similarly, I tried to engage with children on their own terms. In the end, they did not really want to discuss Shopkins with me, preferring instead to take the stickers and use them with their friends, rather than as part of any of my “data.” This demonstrates an important methodological point: the line between “familiarisation” and “data collection” was

blurred. Furthermore, the fact that some of the children felt able to take away the resources and not participate in the study at that point showed that they understood they did not have to participate and were able to, in adult terms, withdraw their consent to take part.

## *2. Photos*

The children could use an iPad with a protective case designed to make it easier for children to hold (Figure 35).



*Figure 35 iPad case*

*(Casemonkey.co.uk, no date)*

I asked the children to take photos of different areas of the school and then tell me about them. Common visual methods with children include photography, sometimes used as a starting point to discussions (MacDonald, 2012), and because they are “fun” and can “enlighten” adults on children’s perspectives (Cook & Hess, 2007). As Ergler, Kearns, Witten & Porter (2016, p. 130) discuss, using digital technologies with students has implications for both the understanding of how children use such technologies in classroom spaces and

also how these digital technologies shape the embodied research processes for both the researcher and the children.



### 3. Model rooms



Figure 36 Model cloakroom

*It has a pink carpet, shoes and coat pegs, with stickers added by children.*



Figure 37 Model classroom

*It has pictures of a whiteboard and teacher, children watching a lesson, a decorated classroom and children dancing. Children have stuck many stickers over the floor and some on the wall.*

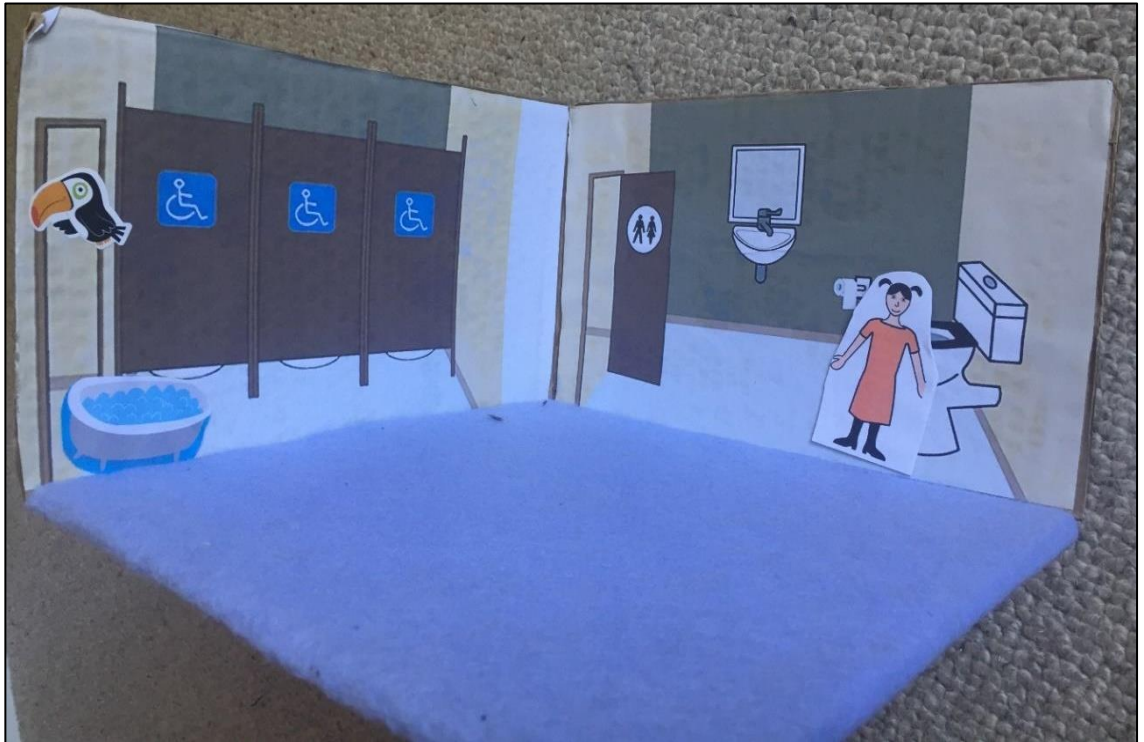


Figure 38 Model toilet room

*It shows three cubicles with wheelchair symbols on, and a larger toilet with a male/female sign on the door. Children have placed in a figure in a red dress with pale skin and brown hair in bunches.*





*Figure 39 Model room*

*It is decorated on the outside with a picture of an accessible toilet and a picture of a house, and stickers.*

As discussed in Chapter 6, I was interested in finding out about children's experiences of their school toilets – however, they were not keen to talk about them or take photos of them. This reluctance of children to talk about toilet spaces led me to the “model rooms” method. I created small models of different school areas (classroom, toilet, dining room, cloakroom) in order to allow children to express themselves through play, and illustrated them with images from “easy on the i”, “the information design service within the Learning Disability Service at Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust . . . . [who] specialise in producing easy to understand information” (Learning Disability Service, no date, not paginated). I made sure to include toilet-related pictures, including a person defecating and urinating, and images of various toilet rooms (Figures 40-42) hoping that this would go some way to breaking the

taboo around “toilet talk” and allow children to express what they really think about their toilets in relation to other school spaces.



Figure 40 “Having a poo”

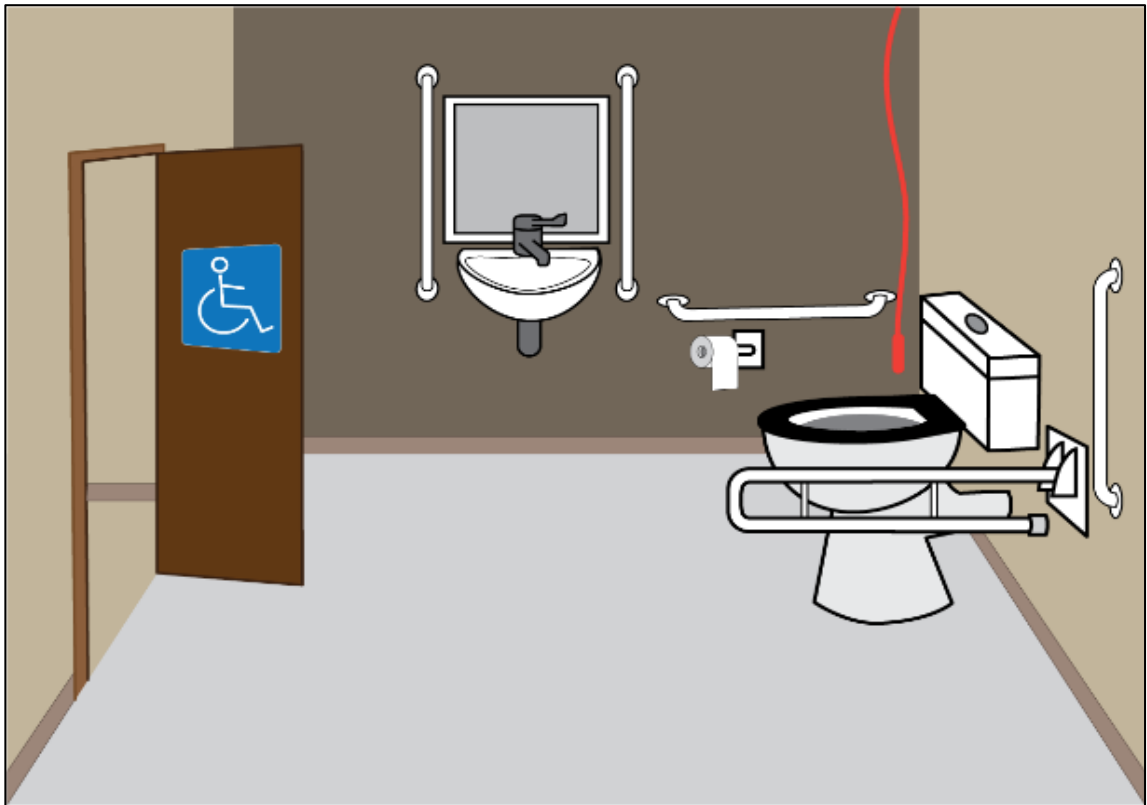
*(A person with medium skin tone, short black hair and a neutral facial expression is sitting on a toilet with trousers pulled down and is pooing (Easy on the i, no date-a).*



Figure 41 "Difficult urinating"

(A person with medium-dark skin tone, short black hair and a frown is standing in front of the toilet. The person is urinating small droplets (Easy on the I, no date-b)

I created model rooms out of boxes. I tried to make some of the model rooms look similar to particular areas of the classroom (Figures 43-48), to encourage play and discussion giving some insight into children's ideas about their classroom environment. I also included paper figures of people and objects. Sometimes children played with them, sometimes they stuck them down onto paper.



*Figure 42 Accessible toilet.*

*A large toilet cubicle with grab rails, a red emergency cord and a blue wheelchair symbol on the door (Easy on the i, no date-c).*

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

Figure 44 The real reading corner.

*It has green carpet tiles, cushions on the floor, seating, and lots of books.*



Figure 43 My model room of the reading corner

*Like the real reading corner, it has green floor tiles, a yellow “cushion” and blue seating. A child has added a boy and a dog on the seating, and various stickers on the “walls”. [Image edited for confidentiality reasons]*



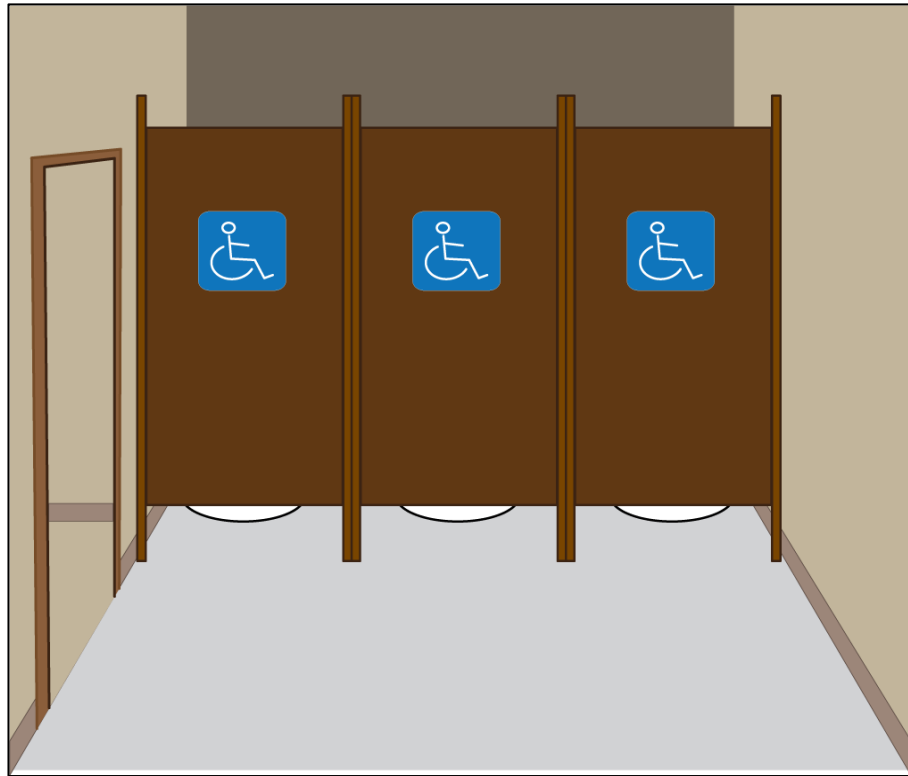


Figure 46 “Accessible toilet cubicles”

A room with three toilet cubicles, all closed. Each has a blue sign with a symbol of a stick figure in a wheelchair (Easy on the i, no date-d)

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

Figure 45 Cloakroom corner of the classroom

It has coats and bags on pegs, shoes under a white bench, a display of children’s art above, folders of work in a rack on the wall to the left and a fire extinguisher, and red carpet.



*Figure 47 Model cloakroom.*

*It has a strip of "pegs" for coats and a white "bench" with pictures of shoes underneath, and a pink "carpet". Children have added lots of colourful stickers to the "wall."*



Figure 48 A model room covered in images and stickers, with cut-outs of people.

*This child only chose images of the medium skin-tone boy to play with.*

Many of the children were enthusiastic about the model rooms, and were very excited to take part when I brought them out each week. Some of my findings from the “model rooms” and “Easy on the i” pictures can be found in my chapter on containment, leaks and flows.

#### *4. Paper people*

One method of data collection I used was to give children blank paper figures of people and let them use these however they wanted. Some children stuck the figures down on paper, most used coloured pencils or pens to 9

colour the paper people, and many stuck stickers and googly eyes on. Once they decided they had finished their paper person, I asked them to tell me about them.



*Figure 49 Naomi's paper person*

Naomi chose to stick the paper person onto a pink piece of A4 paper, and colour the face pink, the body yellow, the arms green and brown, and the feet pink. The person has two eyes and a smiling mouth. On the right, next to the person's head, Naomi has drawn a pink house with a triangular roof. Naomi told me that this drawing is of her mum and her house. When she handed it to me to look at, I asked her what her mum is like. She suddenly said, "Oh!" as if she had forgotten something. She took it back from me and added pink lines above her mum's head.

Me: "Is that her hair?"

Naomi: "No"

Me: "What is it?"

Naomi: "Her wig."

I must admit that from my perspective as a White woman, I felt unsure about how to continue having this discussion with Naomi, who is Black. On the one hand, I was aware of the importance of speaking openly with Black girls about beauty standards and listening to their perspectives on a contentious issue in black feminism, what has been described as a:

game of tug-of-war that Black women play with their hair from childhood to adulthood: to relax or "press it;" to wear it straightened or natural; to cut or to "grow it long;" to braid or wear it "out;" to "wrap it," roll it, or plaid it; to put a weave in it or put a wig over it; to twist, braid, or lock it; to color, highlight, or not to color at all. (Greene, 2011, pp. 405-6)

Aware as I was of this "tug-of-war", and of my own relative ignorance around the depth of political meaning around black women and girls' hair, I did not want to push the subject. I felt that as a white woman in a relatively powerful position, I should not contribute further to the sense that Black hair is a "spectacle" (Grayson, 1995) to white people. However, this moment usefully illustrates several points. Firstly, it shows the usefulness of using pictures as starting points for a conversation in which children's own priorities are foregrounded. I purposely gave children blank paper people (in fact, I expected that they would mostly represent themselves), then posed an open question ("What is your mum like?"). Had I not asked this question, it is possible that my interpretation of the picture would be entirely different. For example, the different colours of the person's arms, legs and head could be unhelpfully explained as "race-neutral", a neo-liberal perspective from a white researcher who has the privilege not to always be defined by my race. However, our short exchange opened an avenue of discussion around race and gender and their link to the body. A wig is a perfect example of something which is both inherently embodied (only taking on its social and cultural purpose and meaning when it is worn) but also of something that one might describe as separate from the body. It is a clear example of a person making a choice to alter their physical body with complex social and cultural nuances.



*Figure 50 Danna's paper person*

Danna's paper person (Figure 50) is also on a pink A4 background. She stuck lots of different face stickers all over the person's body and on the pink paper, faces in red, blue, yellow, pink and green, all smiling and some winking or with their tongue sticking out. She chose a larger red smiling face with eyelashes for the person's face and a large red winking face in the top right corner. To the right of the person, next to their legs, is an irregular yellow outline, inside of which she has drawn parallel straight lines in blue, pink, yellow, orange, green and red. When she finished her paper person, I ask her who it is, and she also tells me it is her mum. I ask what she has drawn next to her mum, and she says, "house."

Naomi is not labelled by her school as having SEND or EAL, whereas Danna is labelled as being "mute/low language." I did not give this information at the start of describing her paper person or the discussion because I tried to prioritise the information that children themselves felt was important. None of the children used any impairment labels or categories to describe themselves, whereas a few referred to their gender, race, nationality or religion. Yet it feels impossible

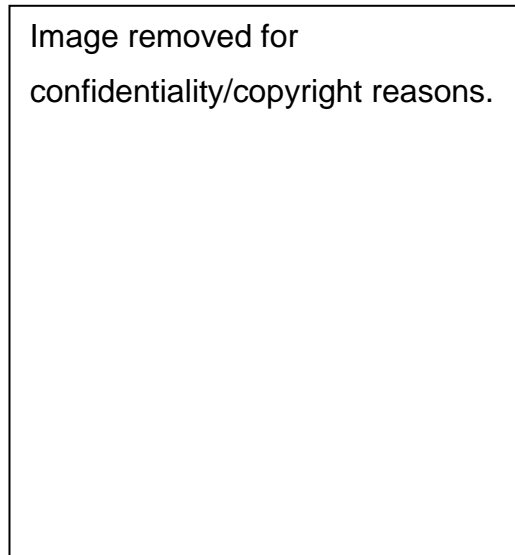
to talk about Naomi's and Danna's experience of school without talking about the labels they are given and the resulting effects. In the first week at the school, I was given a list of the children who the teachers hoped I would be mostly working with. This included children who receive PPG and children labelled as "mute/low level language", including Danna. Additionally, on my first day in the classroom with Danna, her teacher informed me, in front of the rest of the class, that I "won't get much out of her." I understood this as meaning that Danna might not talk much. I found this statement troubling because it suggested that a child not talking had less to give than others who talked more, whereas in fact, I believe that I had a meaningful encounter with every child I interacted with, including those who did not speak. Furthermore, this overlooks the possibility of children's agency in withholding access to their worlds (Davis et al., 2008 p.226).

#### *5. Sammy the monkey*

I planned to find a book about children going to school to read with the children and discuss with them. I hoped that this would be a good way to introduce ideas about school more generally, to talk about the experiences of the character(s) in the book and compare those experiences to the children's own experiences. However, I struggled to find an appropriate book which contained characters that were similar to many of the children (in age, gender, ethnicity etc). I found *Schooltime for Sammy* (Gibbs, 2017), a children's book about an anthropomorphised monkey that goes to school which seemed potentially appropriate because, not being human, I hoped it might be more gender- and race-neutral. However, I soon realised that the content of the book was very normative, comparing Sammy's "naughty" behaviour with the correct behaviour at school. This echoes other children's books which, for example, encourage children to "use their inside voice" - in other words, teaching children through fictional stories the "correct" way to behave. I did not want to use such literature for two reasons: firstly, I did not think it was ethical to promote the kinds of normative behaviours that disproportionately affect disabled children and children of colour. Secondly, I wanted children to feel able to tell me what they really thought about school, and not feel that they had to repeat the party line. I therefore abandoned the book but used a toy monkey to engage children in play. This helped children think creatively about space from a different



perspective, by playing with, and talking about, Sammy's use of space, e.g., "he's hiding inside the tunnel" or "he's riding a bike" (below).



*Figure 51 Children playing with Sammy the monkey on a bicycle*

#### 3.5.4. "Listening to children"

Much of the literature suggests that methodologies in childhood research focus too much on adults observing children, and not enough on "listening to children's voices." Ergler, Kearns, Witten & Porter (2016), for example, argue that research is often "still based on adult observations of child interactions . . . . This point is salutary and reveals the youthful state of this type of children's geography in that we have yet to find ways to fully bring children's voices into research" (p. 136). Apart from the metaphor of "listening to children's voices" being potentially ableist and audist (Bauman 2004), and the theoretical complexities of reflexive research, it suggests that researchers might solve the technical challenge of how to "listen" to children in other ways than the oral/auditory route. McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain (2018) have argued that visual methods can show what participants are choosing or aiming to present about themselves and their lives. However, researchers must continue to be reflexive and not assume that visual data are easier to analyse than other kinds, or that they hold the key to some "true meaning". Any participant in research, adult or child, may present themselves in a multitude of ways, none of which can straightforwardly be seen as the "truth", but rather rely on a particular epistemological perspective.



Furthermore, there remains an ethical and methodological dilemma when “listening to children”: I, an adult, have the responsibility to do the research and present the findings; I receive the funding to do so; it is my name on the cover of the PhD thesis and on the title page of journal articles. Like any social researcher, I cannot just present my data and let it do the talking.

In some senses, the stories are written in collaboration with the families [of the children in the study]; they would never have been written without them. In a practical sense, they are written by me. It is my fingers that tap at the keyboard and re-tell, re-cast and re-present whatever it is that we happened to do together that day. I do not tell stories in the “voices” of children or their families because I cannot disguise my hand and ethically do not wish to do so. (Smith, 2016, pp. 183-4)

Some studies have had disabled children as co-researchers (Liddiard, Runswick-Cole, Goodley, Whitney, Vogelmann & Watts, 2019). In many ways, I think of the children in this study as co-researchers: we discovered things together. However, it would be disingenuous to pretend that these children set the research agenda or had control over the project. My reason for choosing not to have children as co-researchers came from ethical and practical reservations. On the ethical side, I recognised that co-researchers would have to contribute work to the project and asking children to do work for me as an adult (with or without recompense) felt uncomfortable. Furthermore, there is the gulf between the academic demands of undertaking a PhD project in my “adult world” and the “children’s world” which I felt would be better addressed by being with children on their own terms, rather than expecting them to meet me halfway.

An on-going concern in education and childhood studies has been listening to the “voices” of children (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014). I was self-conscious of my purpose in the class as a PhD student: to collect data. Of course, my own actions and reflections are also data, but I felt a self-imposed pressure to collect more traditional forms of data, i.e., words from children themselves, rather than other interactions. There was also a selfish element to my instinct towards collecting verbal data: I was aware that a child speaking to me could be easily recorded by me writing it down, whereas I did not feel so confident recording non-verbal interactions. This put me in a dilemma: on the one hand, I was very concerned with “listening to the voices” of children as active subjects in their

lives and not simply observing them as passive objects of study. On the other hand, I was very aware of the limitations of expecting (all) children to be eloquent, self-reflective participants, and that in fact such expectations would be likely to disadvantage those whose voices are less heard: children with impairment labels; those who do not speak English as a first language; and those who do not have the self-confidence to speak up. I realised early on the irony of much childhood studies literature referring to children's "voices" – itself an ableist assumption that everyone expresses their opinions and feelings primarily through spoken language. This struck me especially when adults pointed out to me a number of children across the Reception year who they labelled "mute" or "selectively mute." This was often given to me as a warning that I might not "get much out" of them – with the assumption that their silence would mean I would have difficulty interacting with them or collecting data with/from them. It suggests that speech is more important than other forms of interaction. However, to take an embodied perspective, I believe that there was meaning in other bodily interactions, for example a child sitting on my lap. It also assumed that I, as a researcher, would be relying on children talking to me, and that I needed to be "warned" in advance of a child who would not do this. I discuss this issue further in my chapter on containment, leaks and flows.

This background of concern with collecting verbal data goes some way to explaining my interactions one morning early in the study:

I enter the classroom at about 9.30 am and put my coat and bag in the adults' cupboard, which also contains various pens, snacks and miscellaneous other things that adults do not want the children to touch. The pupils are having a free-play session, where they can take part in any activity they like within the classroom. Two pupils near that adults' cupboard are building a structure out of cardboard boxes and tubes. They invite me over to have a look at it, and I ask them what it is. One of the pupils tells me it's a battleship which has a bunkbed at the top, with a bed for each of them. When I asked this pupil why they had the bottom bunk, they seemed uncomfortable and didn't have an answer. Because they seemed uncomfortable, after I waited to see if they had had an answer and they didn't seem to respond, I offered my interpretation, "You just like the bottom one, do you?" They nodded and went back to building their battleship. [Adapted from my fieldnotes.]

They spoke to me without any prompting from me other than a smile and look of interest. I can therefore assume that they told me what was important to them at that moment: that they were working together to create a battleship in which

they imagined themselves to be. Part of their imagining of being on a battleship was evidently the sleeping arrangements, which they shared with me. There were a number of ways I could have responded to this, for example asking to join their play and therefore enter their imaginary world. However, rather than trying to enter their world through play, I responded to their statements with a further question. When I asked them why one child had the top bunk and one the bottom bunk in their imagined battleship world, they did not have an answer for me. Perhaps they did not understand the question, or perhaps they did not want to tell me, or perhaps they did not have a particular reason for choosing one bed over the other. Despite my intention that this was a child-focused question (remembering my own childhood view of the top bunk being superior to the bottom bunk), it not only elicited no further information from the children but seemed to shut down the conversation. I wondered if my question seemed too direct and therefore tried to adjust future questions accordingly. Perhaps the children picked up on my desire to find a neat soundbite rather than simple engaging with conversation more naturally.

My interactions with the children building the battleship contrasted with Farhat's and my conversation the same morning. Three pupils were drawing at the same table, and I sat down and starting my own drawing:

Farhat says to me, "Look at my drawing!"

I look at it and smile, tell her I like it and ask her about it.

Farhat tells me she has drawn some flowers, pointing to the differently coloured petals. Under these flowers she had drawn the ground. She tells me she will now add the sky, and takes a blue felt-tip pen to draw horizontal lines all the way across the top of the paper. Then she asks me to pass the yellow felt-tip pen, telling me she wants to draw the sun. At the top left corner of the paper, under the blue sky, she draws a circle with sun beams coming of it. Then she looks at me, smiles, and says "I'm going to draw another sun!" She then draws a second sun on the right-hand side of the page, slightly lower down than the first. She tells me that this sun "is going to sleep."

"Oh, it's going to sleep," I reply, "And what's the other one doing?"

Farhat tells me the first sun is making the plants grow, pointing to them again, and repeats that the other sun is going down to sleep.

I ask her what the pink outlines are, floating next to the flowers.

"Love hearts!" she says, "I love drawing love hearts!"

“Me too!” pipes up Bisma, sitting next to her.

“Can you draw a nice one for me?” Farhat asks me.

“You want me to draw a heart?” I confirm.

Farhat says yes, so I take the paper and draw a heart about the same size as hers. I return the drawing and she seems pleased and starts to fill in the different heart outlines with dots. (Adapted from my fieldnotes)

She was talkative and happy to give me “reasons” for the things she was drawing. Although I felt more comfortable in this scenario, feeling like I had “more to work with”, I was also aware that my comfort stemmed from Farhat conversing with me in a way that was “typical.” While her openness suggested her willingness to talk to me, I did not want to rely on only listening to the more talkative children. However, while my conversation with the Farhat felt quite different to that with the children building the battleship, there were also similarities in the way both shared their imaginary worlds with me: the children placing themselves inside a battleship, and Farhat telling me about the two suns in her drawing. This mixture of real and make-believe continued throughout the data collection, with some children freely mixing up imaginary and real worlds. Farhat also requested that I help her to co-create art, by explicitly asking me to draw hearts on her drawing. This gave me the confidence to give children the option of co-creating art with me in later interactions, which helped to prompt conversations and also seemed to give some children the confidence to participate. However, I also wanted to make sure that children did not feel they had to follow my lead exactly, or that my version of a drawing or photograph was inherently better than theirs. I did this by adapting to the child’s needs: demonstrating for children who seemed less sure, helping with technical or practical problems (such as difficulty cutting out) and by encouraging and positively commenting on what they were doing.

Following the principle from disabled children’s childhood studies that we should base research on personal accounts (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2013 & 2014), I wanted to give this example in Isla’s own voice. However, as I described in my methodology, “listening to children’s voices” takes many forms, and we have to be especially mindful of cultural and social assemblages which prioritise certain forms of communicating. I was also aware of two labels given to Isla, “SEN” and “EAL”, both of which ascribed upon her adult ideas of her ability to

communicate, and made her more liable to surveillance from adults, to which I did not necessarily want to contribute. Overall, Isla did not seem interested in engaging with the various research activities, but as shown in the description above, she sometimes did engage with me, sometimes talking, sometimes just eye contact or other kinds of interactions, and a few rare times taking photographs. She generally preferred to play on her own, but sometimes also played with other children, and seemed happy to have photographs taken. She often looked at books, so I also tried to engage with her in that way, but again she preferred being on her own. I reflected on whether to include Isla's story. Did I have her consent (or assent)? Would my research with her be yet another form of surveillance to which she was subjected? I decided in the end that, just with the other children, I could not expect her to be an "ideal research subject", just as I could not expect myself to be an "ideal researcher." Furthermore, my ethical obligations, as outlined in the ethics section, are driven by a concern with listening to groups of people whose views are often overlooked and making sure their stories are told. Finally, I was firmly rooting my classroom observations in assemblage theory and the social model: understanding how the innumerable assemblages in and around the classroom work to include or exclude. To exclude Isla because I could not be sure that she understood the purpose of my research would be, I decided, a disservice to both her and the wider community. We were two people who communicated and interacted in the same space, and I will do my best to tell her story.

This responsibility towards the children in my study comes about because of the power I hold as an adult in society. Despite recognising that "child" and "adult" are contested, socially constructed categories, this does not mean we can ignore the social importance of these categories. Rather, we should consider how these social constructions affect all aspects of children's and adults' lives, including how they colour the research process. For example, Thorne (1993) addresses two of the social beliefs around childhood that adults have, stating that:

to learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are "like," both because, as former children, adults have been there, and because, as adults, they regard children as less complete versions of themselves. When adults seek to

learn about and from children, the challenge is to take the closely familiar and to render it strange. (p.12)

In its good practice guidance, Ireland's National Disability Authority (NDA) recommends that researchers have qualifications and experiences working with disabled children and the "ability to communicate with the specific group of participating children" as well as "knowledge of impairments and their effects on 'development'" (Whyte, 2006, p. 15). I feel that this reflects a normative and potentially pathologising view of disabled children and also a narrow view of researchers. Firstly, I am not convinced that, for example, a qualification as a teaching assistant necessarily means a person will be better at communicating and researching with disabled children. The SEND system routinely relies on pathologising labels that focus on impairments rather than removing disabling barriers or understanding the complexities of classroom assemblages. This deficit model, for example, might teach that an autistic child finds it hard to make eye contact, but rather than being a neutral human difference or preference it is viewed as something to be corrected (as well as relying on generalisations and ignoring the many differences between autistic people, many of whom do make eye contact). Training around "disability awareness", especially using simulation models, has been criticised as possibly doing more harm than good in a medical/individual model framework (Burgstahler & Doe, 2004).

This also assumes that the most relevant "experience" a researcher might have would be "working with" disabled children. This echoes the professionals whom UPIAS identified as positioning themselves as experts in disabled people's lives. Based on previous discussions about research about disabled people, I want to avoid a return to the oppressive study *of* disabled people (and specifically their bodies) by "experts" (Hunt, Davis, Finkelstein & Finkelstein, 1975, p. 18 in original). Furthermore, why would someone with experience working with non-disabled children be less suitable than someone who has experience with disabled children? Disabled children are not a straightforwardly defined category of children, both because experiences of disability are so heterogeneous, and because the definition of impairment and of disability is so culturally, socially and historically specific and difficult to define. Would experience working with autistic 5-year-olds qualify you (in the NDA's eyes) to

work with adolescents with a mobility impairment? What is more, a researcher should not assume that a child's experience of disability is the defining or most important factor in their life, when numerous other categories such as socio-economic background/class, gender, language, nationality and race are also salient. If your experience is working with disabled Christian Gambian children, are you qualified to do research with disabled Hindu British children? I suspect that cultural and social understandings would be just as important.

I contend that a theoretical understanding of disabled childhood (based on empirical information from disabled people themselves) and "prior understanding of this diverse and politically complex community" (Sullivan 2009, p. 79), coupled with a flexible, empathic and non-prejudiced approach, can go a long way. The expectation of "work" being the best experience also ignores the idea that an adult researcher might be disabled themselves and have insight into participant children's lives based on their own educational background and experiences growing up. One might argue, for example, that parents of disabled children bring a particular insight to disabled children's childhood studies, e.g., Runswick-Cole, 2013 and Kittay, 2009. Finally, perhaps most importantly, researchers need to remember that the binaries of adult/child, dis/abled, and the boundaries between them, are fluid, porous and socially constructed. There is not one correct way to do research with (disabled) children. There are, however, lots of ways to help make the process as inclusive as possible to as wide a range of participants as possible.

Communication in the research process was paramount. The NDA's suggestion that researchers are able to communicate with the "specific group" of children taking part is hopefully an obvious one: I would hope that any researcher would realise that they needed the ability to communicate with their participants. However, the methods of communication could be many and varied. For example, some children took my hand and pulled me to a particular area of the classroom, or to show me a book or toy. This clearly communicated to me that this was noteworthy in some way. Of course, I must be careful that I do not impose my own meaning on this - a child showing me a toy might mean "I like this", or "I thought you would like this" etc. But this is the same for spoken or written language: researchers have an ethical obligation not to misconstrue people's opinions, and to be honest when there is ambiguity. Yet there appears

to be great concern in relation to disabled children's ways of communicating. For example, at Harbour View, a group of children with SEND in Reception were targeted for extra language support, including those with a label of "selective mutism."

This concern is reflected in the literature. Boggis (2011) for example offers insightful reflections on the ways that adults underestimate "inarticulate" children's ability to communicate with researchers. However, despite the careful consideration of the socially constructed idea of "disability", the term "inarticulate" is not clearly defined nor challenged. The paper is based on a study of children who used Alternative and Augmentative Communication aids rather than spoken language, so we might infer that "inarticulate" in this case refers to children who do not use oral, verbal communication. This seems to rely on an idea of "articulacy" meaning a good level of English, implicitly valuing a particular mode of communicating, and does not consider that communicating is a two-way street: if I do not understand someone, I have some responsibility as the receiver of the message to do something about that. Yet research has highlighted the ways in which teachers and other professionals speak about (some) disabled children - especially those who mostly communicate non-verbally. Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley (2008), for example, describe teachers in a special school talking about the pupils, saying, "these children don't think like us, it's impossible to know what they are thinking." The teachers "seemed concerned that [the researchers] understood that the children's impairments made them 'not like us' [non-disabled people]" (p. 221). Boggis (2011) found similar attitudes, with "staff [who] underestimated the young person's ability to actively participate in the research, emphasising that she was uncommunicative and hard to engage with" ("Communication", para. 3.). Perhaps this is why "very profoundly disabled children are excluded as participants from almost all research" - because researchers do not know how to "hear" what they are "saying" (Roberts, 2017, p. 271).

Perhaps controversially within disability studies, I do believe there are times when knowing about a person's impairment, or more specifically *impairment effects* (Thomas, 1999), can be useful when approaching communication with them. For example, in a more "conventional" study with adult participants, a participant might say that they are hard-of-hearing. This would prompt me to



make sure that the room is well-lit, and my lips are clearly visible (to allow for lipreading) and that background noise is minimised. (In fact, I don't need to know the impairment label at all if I know what conditions would be helpful to them – however, the impairment label might be a shortcut rather than listing “access needs” or “reasonable adjustments”). Of course, I would endeavour to create those conditions in any case. However, a reminder of the barriers facing some people can help keep a researcher mindful of minimising those barriers as much as possible. It also takes the burden off the disabled participant if the researcher is aware of their impairment effects and can take steps to proactively remove certain barriers. However, there are some important caveats here: firstly, the participant themselves should be in complete control over whether, when and how to disclose their impairment. Secondly, it is not necessary to have a medical knowledge of the person's impairment. For example, it would be inappropriate to ask our fictional deaf participant if they were born with or acquired their impairment, or whether it was sensori-neural or whether they plan to get a cochlear implant.

I constantly revised my methods in response to children's preferences. Generally, I relied on non-verbal communication to understand whether children wanted to use the methods I offered. For example, if a child turned or walked away from, or seemed reluctant to take part in, a particular activity I would try to indicate that they were allowed to refuse but reassure them that they could re-join later if they wanted. I also offered options of different methods and based on the (un)popularity of different methods I adapted them. For example, I saw that certain children enjoyed using stickers on the drawings, so I incorporated these. I also introduced the use of “paper people”, like Danby, Ewing and Thorpe's (2010) sticker task, which provided a more concrete way to introduce the theme of people and for adults and children to discuss this theme. The most popular method (measured by the number of children who wanted to take part) was taking photos. Generally, children would approach me (or the child who already held the tablet) to ask to take part. For this reason, I focused more on photography later. However, I was also cognisant of the need to include shyer children by offering them the option to take part directly, rather than expecting them to approach me. Significantly, I was also bound by practical limitations such as time and space. Accessing participants through their school meant I

could spend time with them only during their unstructured time, not lessons, and sometimes we were not able to find an appropriate space, for example somewhere quiet.

#### 3.5.5. Data analysis

I used both themes that came out of the literature review and others that emerged to undertake thematic analysis, “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke explain that:

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic (p. 79).

In this way the process was flexible, iterative and continually informed further analysis. This also informed further conversations and activities with children. However, it is important to be honest how messy and incomplete this process was. Braun and Clarke argue that researchers often do not adequately explain how the analysis happens, and they trouble the use of the term “emerge” to describe themes coming from data. They argue that this overlooks the fact that themes do not simply emerge from the data but through the mind (and, I would argue, the rest of the body) of the researcher (p.80). Much of my analysis followed might better be described as being with, sitting with, interacting with my data. My own embodied self, in assemblages with both physical and virtual data. Certain incidents or photographs jumped out at me or stuck themselves into my mind and body. Perhaps an idea in something I read suddenly jumped into my head when I revisited a particular photograph and I felt butterflies in my stomach. Other times, I revisited data and felt frustration, annoyance, or nothing much at all. In short, lots of the analysis was intangible and unrecordable - quite the opposite of what rigorous academia expects, perhaps. And yet, I did not simply pick data that I liked or found interesting (although of course there were data that I liked more or found more interesting). Instead, I tried to pay attention to how assemblages around the data sifted certain themes to the top again and again. Like Kioko and Makoelle (2014) I “entwined thematic analysis and . . . Deleuze and Guattari” (p.108) by paying heed to lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that emerged seemingly of their own accord. This is not MY

analysis. It is more mine than anyone else's, but it did not happen in me: it happened around, through, above and below me, in the interactions and assemblages that I passed through, co-created and experienced. As explained in my literature review, leaks create possibilities (Kushinski, 2019).

### 3.6. Conclusion

In this section, I have outlined my unique methodological approach, which is embedded in disability studies, and given an overview of the visual and creative methods used, which were designed to understand children's lives in their own ways. An original contribution that this methodology offers is including children with or without a label of impairment/SEND/disability (a summary of my contributions to knowledge appears at the end of this section).

I continually reflected on the methods and approach I used when observing, recording and analysing classroom assemblages. I always looked for connections and leaky boundaries between different aspects of assemblages, especially when it appeared to me that there was a "fit" or "misfit." This formed part of my DCCS-influenced approach to assemblage theory (see the end of this section). Naturally, these were from my subjective perspective. I do not mean this to suggest that there was an objective truth to which I only had partial access, but rather that I was a part of many, ever-changing assemblages and therefore inseparable from them, and that each person's subjective, embodied experience is their truth. Each piece of a child's truth that I encountered and recorded was a different thread, some longer or shorter, rougher or smoother, darker or lighter. Even before I had collected them all in one place, I started to think about my knitting pattern – how was the final product going to look? What stitches would I use? What size needles would I need?

At this point it is helpful to (partially) answer some of these questions, so that you can better see the plan of what is to come. The following chapters will explore some of the key findings from my analysis. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I discuss how both physical classroom space and educational expectations of children rely on ideas of verticality. Adults occupy a "high up" position, being both taller and having more power. In turn, children occupy a lower down position, and are expected to aim upwards in physical and mental development. Children nevertheless resist this power dynamic in various ways including through photography. Thus, another of my original contributions to knowledge is using photography both as a method and as a way of supporting children's resistance to power in the classroom. In Chapter 4 I also discuss some of the ways classroom displays are used to send certain messages about

development, and I also outline a further form of resistance: using the floor space to lie down. In Chapter 5, I introduce the idea of crip epistemic insight, focusing particularly on Deaf epistemic insight, and consider some of the ways this perspective can illuminate ideas about embodiment in the classroom. In the final part of my data analysis, Chapter 6, I explore the ways that children's bodies are expected to be in the "right place at the right time", with a focus on toilets.

It is worth at this point briefly explaining the three contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes, in order to better understand their place in the preceding and following chapters:

**1. Having participants with or without a label of SEND.**

As explained in sections 1.2. and 3.5.1., children could take part in the study regardless of their impairment/SEND/disability label or if they had no such label. As I explored in section 3.5.1., part of the reason for this was to allow children's own identities to take priority over adults' labels for them. Furthermore, this comes from an epistemological and theoretical understanding of (dis)ability, embedded in some of the key questions in research on disabled childhoods/childhood disability. This approach gives greater insight into how assemblages have the capacity to enable and disable different bodies at different times.

**2. Using photography with 5–7-year-olds as both method and a form of embodied resistance.**

In section 3.5.3 I explored some of the ways photography can be used as a method for understanding children's perspectives through their own eyes, both on their own and as part of a mosaic (Moss & Clark, 2017). However, as I go on to explore in 4.5, children can also use photography as a way of taking back power, resisting the normative expectations of adults who themselves use photographs in a potentially oppressive way, both in displaying photographs and taking them. In this way, my method of giving children an iPad was actively contributing to children's embodied resistance in the classroom.

**3. Combining theoretical perspectives to produce new insights**

Throughout each part of this research, from the literature review to data collection to data analysis, I have approached from a DCCS-influenced-

assemblage-theory perspective. As will become clear in the following chapters, this approach has allowed me to approach the mundane (a primary school classroom) and develop new insights into how children experience, create, and move through space.

With these in mind, my knitting already has a shape: I have my pattern, I've chosen my yarn, and I have the right needles. This is where things get interesting: I have to carefully follow the plan, thinking about each stitch as I go. As I get more confident, you will see some fancy stitches, and ideas will grow stitch by stitch, line by line, at a surprising pace.

## Chapter 4: Verticality

*Note: An earlier draft of this chapter has been published as a conference proceeding (Terrell, 2020). It is included as Appendix 8.*

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on one theme that emerged from my data: the way children and adults experienced vertical space in the classroom. I begin the chapter by outlining some of the cultural and policy background of the Early Years environment and its understanding of child development as a vertical process (Engeström, 1996). This background then lays down the foundation for understanding some of the specific ways in which adults surveill children in the classroom, using both literal verticality (their height over children) and metaphorical verticality (their understanding of child development as a vertical process). I consider how adults use vertical space to try to exert power over individual children and classroom *assemblages* (a term I have already discussed in detail in the literature review and methodology). I particularly focus on the way adults use vertical space, building on Readdick & Bartlett's (1994) concept of the "vertical learning environment"). I explore how adults use this vertical space to display information (including photographs) about children labelled with SEND, and what this says about agency and representation in the classroom. These representations come together to reinforce ideas of particular ways of being and becoming an adult (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011) which do not allow for a "normality of doing things differently" (Hansen & Philo, 2007). Therefore, children who do things "differently" are especially vulnerable to bodily surveillance in the classroom.

However, with surveillance comes resistance, and I end this chapter by considering how children resist certain expectations through their use of vertical space in ways that adults might not expect or intend. This important finding shows how children have insight into their own experiences and the agency to use their surroundings in ways counter to existing power dynamics. I also consider how children can reclaim their embodied experience through using photography to tell their own stories. This makes an important contribution to knowledge, demonstrating how photography can be used not only as a method of inquiry but as a way for adults to support children's embodied resistance.

This directly challenges the status quo of the camera in the classroom used by adults looking down (literally and metaphorically) on children. In these two important ways – using space in their own ways and taking back power through photography – children resist power structures and reclaim their bodies. This idea continues through the later chapters of the thesis, where children resist attempts to control their bodies from adults and wider power structures.



#### 4.2. Verticality as metaphor: development, power and surveillance

Metaphors, positive or negative, are hugely influential: they shape our understanding of the world we live in, and specifically our ways of knowing bodies that are “different” (Markotic, 2001). Child-adult power relationships in the classroom are strongly influenced by a pervasive, traditional idea of “development” in which a child is always progressing, metaphorically forwards and upwards on an inexorable climb upwards to adulthood. The concern with children’s development in terms of “cognitive abilities, involvement in socially valued economic activities, etc.” has been termed “vertical” development (Cole & Gajdamashko, 2009). Engeström (1996) states:

Traditional developmental theories are about progress, about **climbing upward** on some developmental ladders. In some theories, the ladders are very well known and fixed; in others they are more locally constructed and culturally contingent. But **developmental movement happens along a vertical dimension, from immaturity and incompetence toward maturity and competency**. (Section “The third challenge”, para. 1, emphasis added)

The emphasis and focus on vertical developmental movement, argues Engeström, creates boundaries and borders rather than “opening up” to endless possibilities. This poses a challenge to classic developmental theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, who fail to account for the horizontal movement of crossing boundaries and the liminal spaces between them.

This normative understanding of development reinforces ideas of particular ways of becoming an adult, in which children labelled with SEND, or otherwise seen to be developing atypically, are positioned as lacking because their minds and bodies are not “normal” (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011). The powerful myth of “normal” bodies has been reinscribed and exploited to serve the idea of the nation-state, in which the school system plays an important part in creating docile, productive bodies (Davis, 1995). In other words, schools aim to produce and reproduce bodies that develop normally, from child to adult with the productive “ordinary” bodies “demanded by the capitalist West” (Hansen & Philo, 2007, p. 502) – rather than non-“ordinary” bodies which “disrupt” the movement of “people, commodities and capital because they ‘waste’ more time and space than they should, maybe reducing profit margins” (pp. 498-9). This does not allow for a different kind of “normal”, a new “normality of doing things

differently” (pp. 501-503) in which children can find their own way of doing, being and becoming in a compassionate, supportive environment. Engeström (1996) suggests that we think outside of a developmental ladder, and instead consider the potential to cross boundaries, viewing development also as “horizontal movement across borders” (Introduction, para.1), opening outwards to myriad possibilities, rather than creating potentially stifling borders.

We can see here a clear connection with an understanding of all human bodies in space always in a process of relational becoming, as discussed in the literature review (Massey, 2005; Hall & Wilton, 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015). This becoming in itself is neither positive nor negative; however, when it crystallises it can have a negative effect when adults treat children as though they are nothing but potential adults (Tisdall, 2003). The emphasis on upwards development and the understanding of children only as becoming-adults are mutually reinforcing in the classroom. In the Early Years classroom, adults are positioned in a role of surveilling and recording this upwards development.

It has been noted that “verticality and social power are closely linked” (Niedeggen, Kerschreiter, Hirte & Weschke, 2017, p. 579). We think of God as “up” and the devil as “down” (Meier, Hauser, Robinson, Friesen & Schjeldahl, 2007), senior is higher while junior is lower (Reinders, 1997), and people consider their intellectual powers to be greater when they are viewing their environment from a higher position (Sun, Wang & Li, 2011). Embodied theories of cognition are concerned with the metaphorical connection of “up” with power; Schubert (2005), for example, posits the idea that “for humans, size matters a lot for negotiating power relations, especially during childhood and adolescence. Children learn that their taller parents are more powerful and that taller siblings or other taller children are able to coerce them physically” (p. 3). This vertical power dynamic has been noted in family systems, where a “universal association of statural superiority and parental dominance” exists, which leads to an “invariant use of elevation symbolism in the representation of social dominance as a generalization of this elementary facet of experience” (Schwartz, Tesser & Powell, 1982, in Schubert, 2005) and “children are surrounded by a world in which power is over and over again correlated with vertical positions, between people, in language, and in artifacts” (p.3). Furthermore, this vertical power difference between children and adults is also,

“oriented towards distant developmental and learning goals” (Nordström, 2011, p. 74) Overall, this leads to a clear picture of a world in which children and adults see physical height as metaphorical power.

Verticality is intimately tied to power relationships, and therefore to surveillance. When used in relation to surveillance, verticality can refer to the metaphorical relationship of “traditional” forms of surveillance in which those with more power surveill and control those with less (Nemorin, 2017). In that metaphor, those with power are higher up and those without are lower down. The school classroom is a classic example of a space of surveillance (Foucault, 1995 [1977]), where adults hold power and surveill children: “adult-child relations in school are vertically structured, with the adult in a dominant and the child in subordinated and dependent position” (Nordström, 2011, p. 74). Surveillance can become total through the weaker actors (those “lower down”) surveilling themselves and each other (horizontal surveillance), forgoing the need for vertical surveillance at all. As discussed in the literature review, recent literature in children’s studies takes an interest in power, surveillance and school spaces, considering how, in everyday school environments, surveillance is both enacted and resisted. This has included US-American boys of colour “standin’ tall” (itself linked to ideas of verticality and power) in the face of oppression and criminalisation (Basile, 2018); the incomplete surveillance in a Scottish primary school which allows for evasion and resistance (Gallagher, 2010); and troubling the idea of children’s “docile” bodies by viewing power relationships as constantly shifting and negotiated (Pike, 2010). There remains, however, a gap in the specific understandings of how both adults and children use their metaphorical and physical vertical positioning to their advantage.

However, it is also valuable to consider the physical, embodied, assemblage-in-space ways in which verticality, such as literal height differences, play a role in surveillance and resistance. After all, the image of the panopticon is a tall tower from which the powerful can observe the weak down below. This physical manifestation of a power relationship can be seen, for example, in the rich using tower blocks as a form of urban “vertical segregation” in an effort to escape the public space down below (O'Neill & Fogarty-Valenzuela, 2013). In this sense, the rich are metaphorically looking down upon the poor from their ivory towers while literally looking down at them from their concrete blocks (although high

rise blocks are more commonly associated with working class neighbourhoods in some countries [Reid, Lloyd & O'Brien, 2017]). This section will consider the ways in which vertical space is used by adults to surveill and assert power and control, but will also consider how children can equally use vertical space to their advantage by resisting the surveilling gaze of adults.

### 4.3. Verticality in the classroom

The Reception classrooms of Harbour View Primary School are typical of a British Early Years setting: the space is divided into distinct areas such as a reading corner and sand pit; in one corner there is an interactive whiteboard with speakers; and in another corner there is a cloakroom area for the children's coats. But as well as being divided in the horizontal plane, space is divided vertically too: at the lower levels there are activities on the floor, and child-sized desks and chairs set up for children to draw, paint and write. Above this, the walls have colourful displays demonstrating numbers, phonics and children's work; other noticeboards contain information for adults, such as lists of children with allergies or labels SEND. For those familiar with similar environments, none of this is particularly note-worthy. Yet when we begin to analyse these everyday early childhood spaces, we can begin to make the familiar unfamiliar and question assumptions about space, bodies, power and resistance in the classroom.

#### 4.3.1. "When I grow up...": Height as a marker of adulthood

Many of my observations on the use of vertical space in the classroom came from re-reading and re-analysing my field notes. One such entry reads:

I am sitting with [two pupils] as they make a car out of a large cardboard box and decorate it. They tell me they are best friends. One of them tells me that her mum has a baby in her belly. The other says that her mum was going to go into hospital to have a baby. [She says that she] used to be a baby but now [is] big . . . and holds her hand above her head to demonstrate this. [My fieldnotes]

In this snapshot of typical classroom life, Zara demonstrated her understanding of getting older and becoming an adult: that she would become taller than she was now. It is not unusual to talk about "growing up" as though upwards growth is the most important or relevant differentiation between children and adults. Children often refer to adults as "grown-ups" as though their key trait is having finished growing. (However, it is also important to note that children think of adulthood and childhood as having many different and varied meanings, including and understanding of children as having low social status, while reproducing normative understandings of childhood which reinforce this low status, e.g., Bacon & O'Riorden [2019].) It might seem banal to say that children are short and adults are tall. It is simply accepted that adults are taller than

children. Yet digging deeper into this apparent fact troubles two different assumptions. Firstly, the assumption that adults are taller than children is steeped in ideas about normal bodies: why is it “normal” for adults to be tall? Secondly, it brings up questions about the “embodiment of power by verticality” (Schubert, 2005, p.18): how, exactly, do embodied power relationships work in the classroom setting?

To begin to answer the first question, we can draw from disability studies and ideas about “normal” bodies. As already discussed, Davis (1995) discusses how schooling is used as a way of promoting “normal” children’s bodies which become productive adult bodies. More recently, Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2016) discuss how “impairment labels” work to reinscribe what is “normal”. By clearly defining the boundaries of what is “normal”, certain bodies are placed outside of that boundary. This then reinforces the “fact” of those bodies’ “abnormality”: they have been labelled, and therefore they are, abnormal. This in turn reinforces the idea that the bodies without “impairment labels” are “normal” and creates a false sense that these categories are natural or objectively factual. However, taking an embodied approach and applying assemblage theory can help us consider the ways in which the (non-natural) environment becomes ab/normalised along with bodies, working in a complex, ever-changing arrangement.

To give a more concrete example, I will now follow the suggestion of Hall and Wilton to use a critical geography approach to the “able-body.” Specifically, I will use my own experience of my embodied being-in-the-classroom to critically consider the ways in which my (“abled”, “normal”-height)<sup>6</sup> body is naturalised in a classroom environment. This has several advantages over an example using a disabled child, one of which is that we can understand disablism better when we understand how the world is created for non-disabled people but normalised and naturalised so as to make non-fitting bodies seem “abnormal.” Only recently did I begin to fully understand the extent to which the physical environment is designed for bodies like mine: the act of walking on a pavement,

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<sup>6</sup> Specifically in this context, I have not been labelled as, or identify with, having any impairment relating to mobility or height.

for example, always seemed like an easy, natural thing to do, to the point of not even thinking twice about it.

However, thinking about the apparent “naturalness” of the “able-body” walking reveals important complications. Butler (2015) points out that:

Human action depends on all sorts of supports--it is always supported action. We know from disability studies that the capacity to move depends upon instruments and surfaces that make movement possible, and that bodily movement is supported and facilitated by nonhuman objects and their particular capacity for agency. (p. 72)

Butler goes on to apply this specifically to the streets: “If we are on the streets, it is because we are bodies that require public forms of support to stand and move, and to live a life that matters” (p. 138). In short: I have the privilege of not having to think about pavement cracks (Chandler, 2010). From a social model position, pavement cracks are an environmental barrier that a person with an impairment might face. The solution, therefore, is to remove the barrier by fixing the pavement cracks. Taking an embodied assemblage approach, however, helps us to understand the nuances of the ways in which certain bodies have been normalised and therefore so have certain elements of the built environment. Yes, we should absolutely fix pavement cracks - but in doing so, we should “pay attention to the second and third pillars of the social model of disability: the attitudinal and organisational barriers to functional walking” (Lee, 2016, p. 21). For some people, falling can be very serious (p. 19) but there are also questions around why falls and trips are taboo, when some people don’t mind falling in certain environments. Could we consider a world in which trips and falls were mitigated against (through adequate social support, grab rails, and so on) but also a world in which the damage caused by falling was reduced? The emotional damage such as embarrassment could be reduced through changing attitudes and acceptance of bodies whose “normal” is doing things differently (Hansen & Philo, 2006); and physical injuries reduced through seeing the pavement not just as something to be walked upon but something with which people interact (see section 4.5.2 for more on this).

To return to this approach in the classroom, I will consider one of the first notes I made near the start of my fieldwork:

I enter the classroom at about 9.30 am and put my coat and bag in a tall cupboard, which also contains various other bags, stationary, snacks and miscellaneous other things that adults do not want the children to access. (adapted from field notes)

My first act in the class space reconfirmed my adult status: placing my personal belongings in a cupboard, thereby accessing a space which only adults could use. Although the cupboard was not locked, and the handle was low enough that (some) children could open the doors, items were placed on shelves higher than any of the children in the classroom could reach. This illustrates one way in which the physical environment has been designed to divide adults' spaces from children's spaces and to prevent children from crossing this divide. Adults using the cupboard would know that any items on the upper shelves were out of reach of the children. They could thereby create a physical separation and a space that is "adult only" by taking advantage of the physical height differences between children and adults, rather than using a barrier in the form of a door or wall, which might separate different parts of horizontal space. In some ways, my ability to access higher spaces illustrates the ways in which children and adults live in different worlds in the same space (Opie & Opie, 1991; Christensen & James, 2017). We might believe that adults and children occupy the same physical space, even if their cultural worlds are different; yet only adults have access to the space above about 4 feet. Thus, the classroom is bisected by an invisible, horizontal line that divides space that both adults and children can physically access, below, and space that only adults can physically access, above. This denies children access to things that could hurt them (such as sharp scissors) as part of the adult responsibility to protect the inherently "vulnerable" child. It also stops children accessing materials which are not currently part of the adult plan of the classroom: spare paper, old wall displays, seasonal decorations and old costumes.

Moreover, it is an example of the socially accepted power difference (and behaviour differences) between adults and children. Even though it was possible for some children to open the cupboard doors and to access items on the lower shelves I did not ever see a child do this, and the adults did not seem concerned enough about this to lock the cupboard door. This suggests that the children did not open the cupboard because they knew it was an adults' space, as they are used to adults controlling all aspects of their lives, including in



school settings, where systems and spaces are designed and created by adults (Tisdall, 2003). In other words, adults exploited both their physical and metaphorical height: the former, by using higher spaces to control what children had access to; and the latter, being safe in the knowledge that children knew the social rules and would not break them.

Occasionally a child might look into the cupboard or ask me what I was putting in or getting out, illustrating a certain level of curiosity about things that were out-of-bounds. However, they showed less curiosity than I had expected: I assumed that out-of-bounds areas might be more tempting precisely because they were out-of-bounds and therefore held a certain fascination. But the children seemed to show markedly less curiosity about the cupboard than they did about other areas of the classroom that they were allowed to enter, freely moving around the space making noise, exploring things by touch, creating and destroying structures, playing with sticky tape, cereal boxes, sand, water, and generally experiencing different areas of the (horizontal) class space.

I did not ask children about the cupboard and their apparent lack of curiosity about it, because I was concerned about the consequences of awakening their curiosity and implicitly inviting them to access this out-of-bounds space. This could firstly make me responsible for children accessing a space where there could be dangerous items (such as scissors); moreover a second consequence could be me disrupting the power dynamic and the established cultural norms of the classroom. In this way, my fear of disturbing the status quo made me complicit in reinscribing the power dynamics between adults and children, and reinforcing my status as an adult. This reasoning is thus: adults are tall, and therefore we put things for adults in high cupboards; only tall people can access the high cupboards; therefore, anyone accessing the high cupboards is an adult. Moreover, adults are allowed to do certain things and have power over children. I wondered to myself what would happen if I disrupted this. What if I flung open every cupboard door and let children access anything they wanted? What if all the cupboards were accessible to everybody: how would adults and children negotiate this situation? But the truth was, I knew that I was only allowed in that space because adults had allowed me there on the understanding that I, too, was an adult with the attendant responsibilities. This acceptance of my adulthood meant that, despite being a newcomer to the class,

I was given the privilege of moving in and out of adult and child spaces: both the locked space of the class (discussed earlier) and the adults' cupboard.

Yet I am acutely aware that this adult status was given to me, unquestioningly, because my body looks "typical" and because the classroom had been designed for bodies like me. Of course, this relies on an assumption of everyone in the room having a "typical" height and ability to open those cupboards, reach shelves, and put objects in or take them out. Would a wheelchair-using adult, for example, not be considered an adult if they could not reach the top of the cupboard? I suspect the answer would be no, nobody would argue that she was a child. Yet, Liesener and Mills (1999) showed that in a psychological experiment, people spoke to an adult in a wheelchair in a similar way to the way they spoke to a child - with a higher voice and using more words than when speaking with an adult not using a wheelchair. There is a long history of infantilisation of disabled people, including the infamous "does he take sugar?" (Wagner, 1991) - a question that many wheelchair users have heard, directed not to them directly, but over their head, to the person they are with (Sapey, Stewart & Donaldson, 2004; Hjelle & Vik, 2011; Cahill & Eggleston, 1995). The assumption in this question is that the wheelchair user cannot speak for themselves about their preferences (in this case whether to have sugar in their tea) and that the person they are with is qualified to speak on their behalf. This particular example of infantilisation has mostly been observed in wheelchair users, perhaps because of the wheelchair being a visible sign of disability. But this also plays into vertical power dynamics: the person offering tea and the companion of the wheelchair user are usually both standing and therefore have symbolic power over the wheelchair user. Cahill and Eggleston (1995) suggest that both wheelchair users and children "are sometimes treated as though absent and in the next moment as open persons with limited rights to public privacy" (p. 686) - going so far as to call this "nonperson" treatment.

#### 4.3.2. Height, autonomy and disabling assemblages

One group of people who have spoken about their experiences of "heightism" are those with restricted growth (RG)<sup>7</sup> (Shakespeare, Thompson & Wright,

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<sup>7</sup> People with RG may also use the term dwarfs (e.g., Pritchard, 2020, Sullivan Sanford, 2006), or people with dwarfism (Sullivan Sanford, 2006, p.31; Ellis, 2018).

2010). Although many people with RG consider themselves to be disabled, some have pointed out that their primary physical “otherness” is shorter than average stature and that they “do not appear to experience functional limitations, beyond the obvious issues of height and reach” (Shakespeare, Thompson & Wright, 2010, p. 19). It should be noted that Shakespeare, Thompson and Wright go on to discuss how many people with RG *do* experience “functional limitations” as a result of their “condition” (p. 25), but I focus on height here, as an “obvious issue” (p. 21) for people with RG. Sullivan Sanford (2006), for example, talks about one of the activities she can participate in after limb-lengthening surgeries: the “mundane” act of reaching higher shelves in public spaces (p. 39). Yet this example is interesting precisely because it seems so mundane. From a social model perspective, we can see high supermarket shelves as a physical barrier that people with a certain impairment (RG) cannot access what they need in a supermarket without assistance, and they are indicative of an attitudinal barrier (the designers of the supermarket shelves have not considered the people who cannot reach the higher shelves).

But of course, children also cannot reach the higher shelves without assistance, and most people would not argue that being short as *a child* is an impairment: it is, in fact, “normal”, whereas the height of people with RG can be considered an impairment because it is not “normal.” Therefore, I suggest that Sullivan Sanford’s (2006) experience of reaching a high supermarket shelf also tells us about the association of power and adulthood with height and the ways in which this is embodied in ever-changing assemblages. The modern “self-service” supermarket is a post-World War II development in Britain (Shaw, Curth & Alexander, 2004, p. 571). Before then, customers would get “counter-service” i.e., approach a counter and ask the worker for the desired items, whereas the new self-service meant the customer must “wander round a store hunting for goods” (*The Grocer*, 1949, in Shaw, Curth & Alexander, 2004, p. 573). Pre-WWII, then, a person with RG would not need to worry about reaching higher shelves because it was normal to require the assistance of a counter worker. In such a situation, we could understand the particular assemblage to disable people differently: the barrier of reaching high shelves did not exist for a customer with RG. They were therefore able to carry out their duty as a

housewife (grocery shoppers were nearly always housewives [du Gay, 2004, p. 155; Humphery, 1998]) and therefore fulfil their adult social role.

It has been argued that “the transition to self-service can be seen as mirroring one of the major characteristic features of modernity identified by social theorists—the break-down of traditional social arrangements and the increasing concentration on the autonomy of the self” (Trotter, 1992, in Humphery, 1998, p. 84). This autonomy is clearly suggested even in the term “self-service”, a state of affairs that “**enables** customers to **help themselves**” through the power of the neoliberal ideals of personal independence, autonomy, personal choice and freedom (du Gay, 2004, p. 152 [emphasis added]). Yet this comes with many problems. Higher shelves are inaccessible to many people, who must rely on a friend, stranger or worker to reach something for them. Shorter people are not inherently more vulnerable or in need of assistance, but are made more so by prevailing socio-historical norms. This in turn requires the person labelled “disabled” to request or demand “reasonable adjustments” in the words of the Equality Act (2010). This reinforces the idea that the “normal” world needs to be adjusted to fit the disabled person. While, I would argue, this is better than expecting a disabled person to change to fit into the world, it still does not go far enough in interrogating why the world is as it is, and the embodied consequences of the status quo. It also puts the burden on the disabled person to do the work of asking for reasonable adjustments. This places them in a position of vulnerability, being at the mercy of shops who may resist, delay or deny the requested adjustments. It reinforces the idea of the disabled person in need of support and assistance, despite the fact that 80 years ago it was normal for everyone to ask a shopkeeper to pass them products. (Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches for different people: one wheelchair user who shopped in a modern self-service supermarket would ask the shop assistants to pick out vegetables for her would ask them to make sure she got “a good one” [Cahill & Eggleston, 1995, p. 687]).

Whatever the setting, some disabled people remain under scrutiny however they try to negotiate vertical shopping spaces such as shelves, as the case of Jennifer Knapp Wilkinson shows. Knapp Wilkinson is a disabled person who discovered that strangers were mocking a photograph of her which had been taken without her permission and published on the Internet. In the photograph,

she is falling out of her mobility scooter as she reaches for groceries from a shelf in a supermarket. The photograph attracted many fatphobic comments based on the assumption that she used the mobility scooter out of laziness and associating laziness with obesity (Knapp Wilkinson, 2016). Another example tells of a disabled person who uses a “walker” when shopping who got onto his knees in order to look at items on the bottom shelf, not requiring or asking for assistance. Yet, a “guy came over and picked me up. He grabbed me and yanked me. I got kinda upset. I said, ‘I know you’re trying to help, but I just got down there’” (Cahill & Eggleston, 1995, p. 693). Both cases illustrate disabled people trying to negotiate spaces not designed for them, and strangers making assumptions about them. Cahill and Eggleston argue that “whenever others subject wheelchair users to nonperson treatment, infringement of privacy rights, or unsolicited and unwanted assistance, they place them in an identity that is incompatible with the virtual identity of competent public actor” (p. 696). I would argue that this “nonperson treatment” does not only apply to wheelchair users, as for example the personhood of people with learning difficulties is often called into question (Kittay, 2005). However, the point remains valid: disabled people are more likely than others to be positioned as dependent, despite the fact that everyone, disabled or not, lives a life dependent on others. This is brought to the fore when disability and consumer capitalism come together, the “autonomous”, non-disabled shopper has a kind of “regulated freedom” to encourage them to spend more in “the proper exercise of individual shopping liberty” (du Gay, 2004 p. 157). Just as the personhood of the non-autonomous shopper comes into question, children are positioned as non-autonomous and made to rely on adults in their world.

Surgery is a potential option to combat the “misfitting” (Garland-Thompson, 2011) assemblage of a short person in a world that expects adults to be tall. Hall (2002) argues that:

Seemingly unrelated technologies such as orthopedic shoes, cosmetic surgery, hearing aids, diet and exercise regimes, prosthetic limbs, anti-depressants, Viagra, and genital surgeries designed to *correct* intersexed bodies all seek to transform deviant bodies, bodies that threaten to blur and, thus, undermine organizing binaries of social life . . . into docile bodies (p. vii. [emphasis in original])

Hall thus places the desire for, and aim of, normality to neatly categorise “deviant” bodies into either one category or another: disabled or non-disabled; male or female; mentally unwell or mentally well. These various technologies are sometimes referred to as “shaping” people (Parens, 2006; Ouellette, 2010). Some surgeries or technologies relate to height. One such example is limb-lengthening surgery, which Shakespeare (1995) argues is a way of “fitting people into society, by any means necessary”, pointing out that Little People of America (an organisation of people with LG) is against the procedure (pp. 5-6). He points out that alternatives include “barrier removal [and] awareness raising”, just as an alternative to cochlear implants (a form of surgery sometimes offered to deaf people) could be “sign language teaching in schools” (p.6). Schalk (2013) also relates limb-lengthening to the pressure of normalisation, saying that it is part of:

the general societal pressure for people with disabilities to perform as much able-ness as possible, even when the strain and fatigue of such effort causes health problems, all represent aspects of the medical/social obligation to be as close to the norm as possible at any cost. (para. 21.)

Sullivan Sanford (2006), however, speaks of her own personal experience of limb-lengthening as not a straightforward rejection of her self-identity as a dwarf, which she feels has had a positive impact on her life. It is clear that these kinds of bodily interventions can be difficult and complex – personally, socially and ethically.

The complex ethics of this kind of surgery becomes more pronounced when it is offered to people who are judged “unable” to give or deny consent, such as children with learning difficulties. Some have argued that the main ethical concern is primarily about the power dynamics between a child and their parent(s), and the parents’ desire for control of their children’s bodies, that objectifies children and does not allow them to be seen as complete humans (Ouellette 2010). Kittay (2011) discusses the case of Ashley X, a six-year-old who is described as “profoundly intellectually limited as well as incapable of mobility, holding up her head, or doing anything at all for herself” (p. 611). Ashley’s parents fought to intervene medically to stop her entering early puberty and remain “forever small” to give her a better quality of life by making it easier to care for her (Kittay, 2011). As a parent of a different disabled person put it, “it

is difficult to care for a son who is legally blind, quadriplegic, non-verbal, autistic, profoundly intellectually disabled, six feet tall and 190 pounds. Heck, if you put it that way, it sounds impossible..." (Kittay, 2011, p. 619). The idea of caring for a six-foot-tall, 190lbs person is in contrast to Ashley X who has been described as having "mental development [which] had never advanced beyond that of an infant" (Gunther & Diekema, 2006, in Ouellette, 2010, p. 964). This seems to cut to the crux of the issue: the idea of a physically adult (literally "high") person with an infant's mind (metaphorically "low") is presented as an embodied contradiction.

#### 4.3.3. Adults talking over the heads of children: "she finds it so hard to count on"

Having established that the upper part of the classroom is a space used by adults in the form of cupboards and display boards, I now move on to consider how adults exploit their height to communicate directly to each other over the heads of pupils. I often saw adults talking to each other while ignoring the children between them. The teacher was leading a lesson adding number blocks together. She asked the children to choose two blocks which add up to eight (e.g., 5 blocks + 3 blocks = 8 blocks) then picks different children to demonstrate their answers.

The teacher asks Kali, who demonstrates using two blocks. The teacher asks her how she knows that her blocks equal eight. Kali points to Zara. "You copied Zara!" the teacher laughs. She asks Kali again how she knows that the blocks she picked add to eight. Kali counts all the blocks, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight." She has not used the "counting on" method in [which the child would recognise the block as 5 without counting the individual squares, so start counting at 5, then continue 6, 7, 8], but the teacher tells Kali, "You've done it your own way." The teacher then turns to a teaching assistant who is sitting with the children at the back of the group. "She finds it so hard to count on," she says. (adapted from field notes)

The teacher's concern with Kali's ability to "count on" connects to one of the ELGs in maths, specifically in relation to numbers, where children are expected to "add and subtract two single-digit numbers and count on or back to find the answer" using quantities and objects (DfE, 2017, p. 12). The teacher saying, "You've done it your own way," is in line with a suggested "positive relationship" by "show[ing] interest in how children solve problems and value their different solutions" (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 34)

I understood that these conversations were not intended for children to hear, as evidenced by the subject matter, tone and language used. For example, this incident:

It is now 10.20 and tidying time is ending, as pupils head towards the teaching corner. One teaching assistant is rounding up the pupils who are not on the mat in the corner yet. As the pupils settle down in the corner, two adults (a teacher sitting in a chair and a nursery nurse standing up) discuss HR [human resources] policies over the heads of the children. The teacher then starts story time (adapted from fieldnotes)

The language of HR policies belongs in the world of adults, who were directly addressing each other, not the children. While pupils are being told to behave in the correct way, both overtly through adults' instructions and also through the arrangements of time and space, adults used their position of power to their advantage by having a conversation over the heads of the pupils. This could be seen as a way of resisting the expectation of teachers to work long hours and ever-increasing workloads coupled with stagnating pay and an expectation of meeting unrealistic or unachievable targets despite these often being outside of teachers' control (NASUWT, 2018). In this situation, the two adults seemed to be having a "snatched" conversation in the liminal time between the end of one activity (tidying) and the start of another (story time). Yet they were still within earshot of the children - I could hear the conversation, and therefore I assumed it was possible that some other children heard it too.

Despite these utterances being directed between two adults, they could still form part of children's understanding of the world through "incidental learning" (Calderon & Greenberg, 2011). We can see this most obviously in relation to deaf children, whose "language, academic, cognitive, and social delays" can be explained by the "relative inaccessibility of incidental learning through overhearing the language of others" (Convertino, Borgna, Marschark & Durkin, 2014, p. 471). While this is uncritically couched in the language of child development, I believe this in fact expresses something in line with many disability studies ideas (such as the social model and psycho-emotional disablism): deaf children face barriers not because of their deafness per se, but because of barriers to language. Scholars in Deaf Studies have noted, however, that culturally Deaf communities do not define themselves in relation to a



majority hearing<sup>8</sup> culture, but rather in a positive understanding of belonging to a culture based on (among other things) a particular mode of communication, sign (Ladd & Woll, 2011, p. 5 [p. 162 in original]). However, it remains the case that a d/Deaf child in a mainstream school does not have access to this incidental learning. In acting as though the (hearing) children were not present, the adults inadvertently created a barrier for the deaf children present. Nordström (2011) argues that this kind of barrier to participation for some disabled children “will easily force the child into a subordinated position” (p. 75). This kind of situation has also been reported by adult wheelchair users, who regularly experience people talking over their heads and/or addressing the person they are with rather than them directly (Hjelle & Vic, 2010) (interestingly, the authors of this study referred to disabled people’s “climbing up and sliding down the participation ladder” - another verticality metaphor - perhaps ironic considering the inaccessibility of ladders for many wheelchair users). In this situation, I argue, the adults are in a position whereby they hold relative vertical power in the classroom, and the act of talking over the heads of children reinforces the connection between literal height and power. Moreover, it positions the children in the classroom as higher or lower down on the participation ladder: some children, by virtue of the barriers in place, are less able to access this particular adult use of space.

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term *hearing* to mean *not d/Deaf* (e.g., “a hearing person” is one who is not d/Deaf).

#### 4.4. Ahmed's "Learning Journey": Classroom displays and power dynamics

It has been asserted that "traditionally, the locus of child play and learning has been the horizontal surfaces of early childhood classrooms--tabletops, desks and floors. Vertical surfaces have been reserved for adult decoration and direction of child activity" (Readdick & Bartlett, 1994, p. 86). I found a clear example of this at Harbour View: display boards providing information intended for adults. The metaphorical understanding of development as a linear, upwards process was shown through a wall display in the classroom showing a series of photographs of a child using outdoor play equipment. It was titled "Ahmed's Learning Journey", borrowing a term used by the STA. Each photograph in Ahmed's learning journey had a caption written by an adult:

Table removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

The photographs are therefore explicitly linked to one or more of the seventeen ELGs, which show “the level of learning and development expected at the end of the EYFS” (STA, 2017). The four specifically referred to are described as follows:

#### Physical development

**Moving and handling:** children show good control and co-ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.

**Health and self-care:** children know the importance for good health of physical exercise, and a healthy diet, and talk about ways to keep healthy and safe. They manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently.

#### Personal, social and emotional development

**Self-confidence and self-awareness:** children are confident to try new activities, and say why they like some activities more than others. They are confident to speak in a familiar group, will talk about their ideas, and will choose the resources they need for their chosen activities. They say when they do or don't need help.

(DfE, 2017, p.11 [emphasis in original])

These types of photographs and (adult) comments on them are encouraged by the STA as evidence of children reaching said goals (STA, 2017). This clearly considers progress to be a linear, vertical process, with children metaphorically climbing towards a goal. There is also no acknowledgement that children's ability to achieve certain tasks (in this case, move through space in certain ways) is not an independent, individual skill, but is part of a complex, ever-changing assemblage involving multiple human and non-human actors (Feely, 2016; Stephens et al., 2015). This has particular significance for children with SEND labels: atypical co-ordination, balance, confidence and/or writing skills are considered not to be compatible with “growing up” normatively. Such children are placed, metaphorically, low down on the development ladder.

Furthermore, in the Harbour View classroom, the placement of this learning journey at adult eye-level elevates its importance: its vertical positioning at this height reminds adults of their role in surveilling the children and photographing them to record their progress. It is a constant reminder, from adults to adults,

that their vertical power over children is part of a higher power from the government, using its own various methods of surveillance to track the progress of schools on the basis of the progress of individual children. Yet despite this apparent obsession with child progress and development, and the minutiae and complexity of the associated bureaucracy, it has been argued that the neo-liberal concern with preparing children primarily for future employment is creating an “emerging compliant professional with an increasingly compliant pedagogy, which may not be commensurate to supporting child development” (Leydon, 2019). Instead, it appears to be part of a longer vertical chain of power, in which children are surveilled by practitioners and practitioners are surveilled by government. Clearly, then, the photographs depicting Ahmed’s learning journey are not simply an observation or celebration of Ahmed enjoying playing. Nor is this a value-free celebration of a child’s achievement. Rather, it is explicitly linked to government-mandated goals forced upon Early Years practitioners from above.

#### 4.4.1. Hasim: “I need to wear my helmet”

ELG guidelines say that adults should “provide positive images of all children including those with diverse physical characteristics, including disabilities” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 37) and “help children to learn positive attitudes and challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes, e.g., using puppets, Persona Dolls, stories and books showing black heroes or disabled kings or queens or families with same sex parents, having a visit from a male midwife or female fire fighter” (p. 38). Yet, the images of disabled children on the walls of the Harbour View classroom did not seem to follow this positive approach. One case that stood out to me was that of Hasim. I first saw Hasim’s face in a photograph on the door of a classroom cupboard at adult eye level. The photo had clearly been taken from above, as the angle of the camera looks down on him while he looks up into the lens, and perhaps he was taken off-guard, as he looks like he has been interrupted in play. In the photo is he wearing his school uniform and coat, perhaps in the playground, and he is wearing a protective foam helmet. It included a caption, saying “I need to wear my helmet at lunch, P.E, walking downstairs.” This sign was placed at adult eye-level, prioritising adults’ sightlines, suggesting that it was important to remind adults to check that Hasim

has his medical device. Again, adults were using vertical space to their advantage.

However, although the adult eye-gaze is prioritised, it could still be seen by children looking upwards. This suggests that it was not considered important to have this information be discreet or hidden from children. On one hand, I can understand this: after all, the other children saw Hasim wearing his helmet every day, so it was not something that could be kept private, like, for example, a diabetic child using insulin. Furthermore, the use of different types of protective or assistive clothing and accessories might be something that is unnecessarily taboo. Yet, as a first impression to a stranger, this information prioritises Hasim's difference to other children as he is the only one singled out. It may well have been important to expect, and remind, children to wear certain protection outside - for example shoes and coats, gloves when it is cold, a helmet when riding a bike or a plaster to cover a cut to stop it getting infected. Similarly, some children had hearing aids or glasses that they were expected to wear all the time, and mostly these were managed by the children themselves - for example, putting them back on if they had fallen off. An adult might remind children of any of these things or help them if they were having difficulty. Yet none of these were deemed similar enough to Hasim's helmet that they had their own sign. Adults had decided to mark Hasim's difference with this reminder with both a photograph and a sign.

It seemed especially strange to me that the sign was written in the first person from Hasim's perspective, despite clearly not having been written by him. It seemed as though the adults were paying lip-service to the idea that the child's voice is important. It sounds friendlier and more personal than "Hasim must wear his helmet" and gives the impression that this is a reminder from Hasim himself. This felt disingenuous and dishonest and a way of disguising the vertical power dynamic that was evident in the photograph. This was a photograph taken from an adult's perspective, with a sign written by an adult, placed in a position to communicate to adults. I did not get the chance to spend much time with Hasim for various practical reasons, and the few interactions I had with him suggested he was not interested in talking to me. For these reasons I do not have any insight into how Hasim felt about being represented in this way. It is possible he did not mind, or perhaps even liked the feeling of

being singled out. Maybe he did not even see or recognise his face. But it is also possible that he did not like it and/or nobody asked his opinion at all. Certainly, the history of representing disabled children, especially through images, has been to elicit pity for the purposes of charity (Longmore & Kudlick, 2015). I do not suggest that adults at Harbour View intended to create an image of pity or condescension, but I did feel that it did nothing to challenge the idea of disabled children's helplessness and need of adult help. The implicit audience is adults being reminded to keep a specific disabled child safe. In this context the first-person text seems disingenuous by using the voice of the child.

#### 4.4.2. The ever-present iPad

I have discussed the ways in which photographs are displayed in the classroom, including photographs showing children's learning journeys, as well as photographs of children labelled with SEN. I now want to consider not just the displaying of these photographs but the act of taking them, and the ways in which classroom assemblages and embodied power relationships enter this. Usually, these tablets were part of an assemblage in which adults held a tablet computer looking down on a child. This moment was then "caught on camera", in a sense crystallising a moment in time. This child-adult-camera assemblage played on my mind a lot. Tablet computers became a clear tool of surveillance, and I had reservations and questions about this. Education practitioners often take photos on tablet computers to demonstrate and track children's educational "progress" and "development", in ways that are often unscrutinised (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011). In children's worlds, therefore, tablets are tools of surveillance, especially for pupils labelled with SEND.

I realised that this tool had come to the forefront of my mind not because it was worse than other forms of surveillance, but because it was more visible and more iconic. By this I mean that the idea or image of taking photographs is powerful. When we think of surveillance we might think of CCTV or the ever-seeing eye of big brother. But the visibility of photographing children in the classroom is also in some ways less insidious through its very visibility: at least adults are open about it happening and children can see it and therefore resist it. There are other forms of surveillance which are more hidden. CCTV, for example, fades into the background: it is everywhere and therefore becomes

normalised, unnoteworthy and invisible. It is also unconnected to any one person: there is no-one behind the camera and it films indiscriminately, capturing everything in its field of view. In the Early Years classroom, however, the moments recorded are chosen by adults. They decide who and what is significant enough to photograph. In doing so, they reinforce certain things as being noteworthy. This means children are not continuously photographed, but it is always possible. Thus, it is an ever-present danger that some children were clearly aware of and adapted their behaviour accordingly.

It is perhaps telling that we talk about *taking* a photograph: although we are creating something new, we are also taking something away. My own discomfort in having a photograph taken stems partly from my concern that it now exists in a way that is out of my control and, in the age of digital photography, can be published online with a few clicks. For today's young children, more data is collected from birth onwards, than ever before, and they are being "datafied" in many aspects of their lives, such as "information that is given away when children use essential public services such as schools and GPs" - in other words, trusted adults (Children's Commissioner, 2018, p. 3). However, to say the data "is collected" avoids stating clearly who is doing the collecting. Of course, the answer is adults: whether by schools, families, hospitals, councils or Google, it is nearly always adults collecting data from children. It is crucial to note that it is broadly accepted that we do not need to ask permission from children to do this - permission is sought from parents, who are more likely to consent when coming from a trusted organisation such as a school (Children's Commissioner, 2018, p. 8).

Despite some evident concern in the literature about the use and misuse of children's photographic data, it is positioned in official documents as a concern about how these data might be used in the future. The Children's Commissioner (2018) asks, "could data about a child's language development and early educational performance at age four play some role in their university application outcomes?" (pp. 4-5). This still thinks about children as potential adults: the concern appears to be that data collected now could affect children's future educational prospects. This overlooks how it might affect children now and the rights of children as children, not as potential adults.

In a time in which fear around the misuse of children's data is abound, we teach children that adults are allowed to take photographs of them without gaining consent first. To be clear, I am sure the vast majority of photographs by adults of children are taken with the best of intentions, to capture a moment, important or mundane in a child's life. Nor am I saying that children are at fault for not saying "no" to adults. Nevertheless, part of "listening to children's voices" must include actively asking questions and, even if we do not like the answer, acting on it and taking it seriously. For children to truly learn how to say "no", adults need to let them say no and respect that in all situations. If we tell children that adults can do what they want, we set a dangerous precedent.



#### 4.5. Resistance

Despite children's relative lack of power, there were ways in which they could disrupt and resist the vertical adult-child power dynamic, intentionally or otherwise, by exploiting their own "lower down" position. In this section I will first consider children's use of photography, then children's use of the lower-down space of the classroom floor.

##### 4.5.1. Taking photos as taking back power

Without realising it, I upset the power dynamic of the classroom by giving children the opportunity to use tablet computers. Children exploited their vertical position in the classroom by resisting surveillance through literally turning the gaze of the camera upwards towards adults. Izobel, for example, took a striking photo in which an adult holds a tablet computer and looms over Izobel, photographing her. Like other children with SEND labels, Izobel was under greater surveillance by adults in the classroom because of her position "low down" on the metaphorical developmental ladder. She was labelled as having "low language." This label, more than being "just" words, had material effects on Izobel (Mallett & Slater, 2014). It positioned her as lacking in both verbal and social skills and therefore as an object that requires intervention from professionals (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010).

On one occasion, Izobel and I were playing and talking with each other. A practitioner suddenly interrupted to record evidence of Izobel meeting a communication goal (in other words, having a chat with me). (Incidentally, the adult could simply have observed from a distance and recorded this moment in writing, and this would still be considered adequate for the purposes of the EYFSP according to STA [2017, p. 12]). I have no doubt that this adult was acting in good faith, and there is nothing wrong with celebrating the daily activities of children expressing themselves. However, the backdrop of normative development "goals", enforced through statutory powers, made the moment quite hollow for me. It was a stark reminder of governmental pressures on schools and the resulting non-consensual, potentially damaging surveillance on children. Yet Izobel's small act of resistance, turning the camera upwards to face the adult and the camera, showed her potential for agency in a position of relative powerlessness. Izobel and other children took technology usually used

by adults for surveillance of children and creatively subverted its use, literally turning the gaze upwards onto adults.

#### 4.5.2. What's a floor for?

In the school setting, I observed that children with SEND labels were under a greater amount of surveillance than other children: for example, they were more likely to be told by an adult to adapt their behaviour such as sitting “properly.” This was exacerbated when children preferred “non-normative” ways of behaving. This was discouraged by some adults, although others did not interfere. When adults discouraged such behaviour, I observed that sometimes a reason was given: for example, fiddling was discouraged because it meant children were “not listening.” This did not consider the fact that some people find it easier to listen when they are fiddling. However, at other times, non-conforming behaviour was discouraged without a clear reason given. In some cases, it appeared that the teaching assistant was concerned with all the children behaving in the same way, i.e., sitting on the floor with their legs crossed. Deviation from this was seen as inappropriate even though, as far as I could tell, the child was just as engaged (or unengaged) in the lesson whether sitting or lying down.

Hajrah, a child with a label of SEND, liked to lie on the floor. Adults considered this behaviour undesirable, and tried to encourage her to sit cross-legged on the floor with the other children when the teacher was reading a story to the whole class. This was connected to a personalised timetable, which laid out how adults should communicate and interact with Hajrah to help her to reach certain goals. One of her goals was to sit cross-legged with the rest of the class. Yet it was unclear why this was important, other than to encourage normative behaviour. Hajrah's resistance took the form of getting as close to the ground as she could, physically; symbolically she was rejecting the “proper” way of sitting, with its uprightness and its association with more “grown-up” behaviour.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

There is limited literature on children's experiences of floor spaces in early education. Katsiada and Roufidou (2018) argue that despite interest in how children interact with their physical environment, "there is, however, an element of the indoors space that remains under researched, the floor space and how this is used by very young children" (p.1513) with, they argue, most studies interesting in people and playthings rather than the floor itself (p. 1515). Yet the importance of this space and children's use of it jumped out to me as an important element of their experiences, not something to be overlooked.

Other disabled people have talked about the taboo of lying down in public: Sullivan Sanford (2006), for example, describes her experience of "trying to

inconspicuously lie on the floormat" (p. 40), while Crow (2017) feels "censored" as she seeks hidden spaces to lie down in public (p. 42). We might question why these two people feel that they have to be inconspicuous and hidden; perhaps we can imagine, and even try to create, a world where people's ways of "doing things differently" are normal (Hansen & Philo, 2007) but not homogenous, and where Hajrah can lie down if she wants to; where, in Crow's (2017) words, her lying down "opens up possibilities for celebrating the rebel body and finding a more curious way of living" (p.47, see also Engeström, 1996). We should consider a world in which a disabled child's choice to embrace low-down space is not discouraged in the name of creating upright, upstanding (or upsitting) citizens.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has considered some of my findings in relation to the literal and metaphorical vertical differences between adults and children, and how these are created, reinforced or resisted in the classroom. The backdrop of all adult-child power dynamics in the classroom is a concern with children's becoming (Smith, 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015); specifically, becoming adults by climbing the typical, metaphorical ladder of development in the right order at the right time. This is underpinned by an understanding that children are more in a state of becoming than adults - that their existence is only understood in relation to their future potential as becoming-adults. This relies on ideas of normal adulthood: literal height and metaphorical cognitive development. This in turn positions adults as literally and metaphorically higher up than children, in a more powerful position of surveillance. In the classroom this reveals itself through the design of the physical space: the upper half of the classroom is used by adults for adult-focused needs. Notably, classroom displays include images of children that reinforce their upwards progression (learning journeys and goals), and to reinforce ideas of disabled children requiring support and being dependent. A ubiquitous use of surveillance is the ever-present iPad, used to record examples of meeting learning goals and especially focused on children with labels of SEND. Yet, through the simple act of giving children the opportunity to take photographs of their own, some of the children in this study clearly communicated their perspective as the lower-down, less powerful part of an assemblage. This demonstration of agency shows how the becoming of bodies and spaces can be affected by all participants. Similarly, the act of remaining on the floor in defiance of adults' expectations took advantage of the low-down space of children. Crow (2017) says that when she lies down, she has "so much body; it unfolds and unravels on the horizontal plane, taking up more than its share of space" (p. 44). Hajrah, rather than trying to become more adult-like, unashamedly took up horizontal space, experiencing her body and space here and now.

## Chapter 5: Crip epistemic insight and embodiment

### 5.1. Introduction

The rules imposed by adults to control children's bodies in the Early Years classroom at Harbour View are numerous: no shouting; no running down corridors; no fiddling; keep "safe hands and feet" and "tidy bodies." This chapter focuses on the ways in which adults surveill children's bodies in and around the classroom. It particularly focuses on the kinds of bodily practices that are encouraged, or discouraged, in teaching and learning. Firstly, I introduce the idea of crip epistemic insight (Sanchez, 2015), particularly from Deaf studies. I use ideas from the study of signed languages, specifically using iconicity as a starting point to understanding how all forms of communication can help illuminate elements of embodied cognition in the classroom. I start to explore how such crip epistemic insight might help us to better understand and analyse the controlling of children's bodies which particularly affects disabled children. I then revisit the importance of the ELGs in the classroom, building upon the discussion in the previous chapter of verticality and development, and consider how the ever-present background of the ELGs encourages adult surveillance of children's embodied practices. Then, I introduce the ways in which certain embodied practices are expected and encouraged as a form of "embodied learning" or "embodied cognition", such as counting on the fingers in maths lessons. I discuss the ways in which embodied learning has the potential to support children's learning and understanding abstract ideas in various diverse ways of "doing things differently." However, there are times when adults encourage certain forms of embodied learning and discourage others without clear reasons why. I consider the examples of finger-counting and Numicon. Finally, I end this chapter by considering how we might reframe accessibility as embodied inclusion, reconsidering the classroom from a cripistemology perspective.

## 5.2. Crip epistemic insight, d/Deafness and embodiment

Near the end of the last chapter (4.5.2) I discussed a disability studies approach to (re)consider how people use floors. This perspective might usefully be considered part of “crip epistemic insight” (Sanchez, 2015, p.3). In this chapter, I more explicitly pick up this idea, especially in the form of Deaf epistemology (Sanchez, 2015, p.3) as a starting point to discuss my findings in the field. Deaf epistemology has previously been described as the knowledge of the world that Deaf people gain from living in a world that relies on sound and hearing, with a focus on visual aspects (Hauser, O’Hearn, McKee, Steider & Thew, 2010). It is closely linked to the idea of Deafhood, the complex and nuanced ways that Deaf people understand themselves and their cultures (Ladd, 2002). This process, she says, is “one incarnation of crip epistemic insight” (p. 3), an approach which can open up “more creative conversations” (p. 92). Crip epistemic insight is rooted in crip epistemology: *cripistemology* – the way of knowing and being centring disabled experiences (Johnson & McRuer, 2014). These ways of knowing and being are not automatically liberating, though: they are too often linked to the neoliberal economies of late capitalism which do not allow for different ways of imagining the world (Johnson & McRuer, p. 128).

Sanchez aims to “deafen” – meaning not losing hearing but rather gaining d/Deaf insight. This goes against the typical view that assumes that deafness is an impairment in the form of the lack of one of the senses and that the primary experience of deafness is not hearing. The former assumption has been challenged by d/Deaf academics, who argue that the straightforward understanding of d/Deaf people as disabled is more complex than it may at first seem (Lane, 2002). For instance, it has been argued that rather than having hearing loss, d/Deaf people have *deaf gain*, a way of being in the world that has valuable contributions to make to society (Bauman & Murray, 2014). Of course, we should not view d/Deaf ways of being as having value solely because they contribute to the hearing world. Instead, we can consider d/Deaf epistemology in the same way we might consider queer, feminist and race studies:

Although the obvious point of focus for Queer Studies is gay and lesbian people, the deeper purpose of Queer Studies is to challenge the efficacy of such labels to begin with. It questions why society should allocate resources and grant privileges according to sexual orientation. In this respect, its approach, which tends to be highly interdisciplinary, mirrors

that of Postcolonial Studies, feminism, and race studies.” (Buchanan, 2018, para. 1).

Therefore, while academic disciplines consider the lives of LGBTQ people, women and non-white people in their innumerable variety and complexity, they also question the wider social and cultural milieus in which these groups of people find themselves with fewer resources and privileges. As such, just as explained in the previous chapter, Deaf epistemology can and should be used not just in Deaf and disability studies but as a way to approach various issues around embodiment in schools.

Sanchez’s approach takes two important stances: she argues that Deaf epistemic insight can be used to analyse literature (e.g., American modernism) and other social and cultural products seemingly unrelated to Deaf culture, language and society. Secondly, she argues that rather than signed languages being primarily visual in nature, they might fruitfully be described as “embodied” - unlike languages that can be written down, signed languages cannot be physically separated from the person producing the signed utterance (see also Terrell, 2016). Thus, by using Deaf epistemology we might begin to address the history of hearing people researching d/Deaf people’s experiences from their perspective (McCleary, 2003), and instead begin to use Deafhood and Deaf epistemic insight to view the majority hearing world. This is not to say that one episteme is better than the other, but rather to address inequalities that see hearing perspectives as neutral, impartial, complete and unbiased.

#### 5.2.1. Signed languages: Classifiers and iconicity

An important part of the Deaf episteme is sign language (Ladd, 2002). Signed languages are full, complex languages and not “merely” gestures; nevertheless, there is a complex, nuanced connection between gesture and sign (Fenlon, Cormier, & Brentari, 2017) that might provide insights into how both hearing and d/Deaf people conceptualise the world through their bodies. Marshall and Morgan (2014) discuss *entity classifiers*, a type of sign which gives information about how an object moves in space and/or how its position relates to others.



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Figure 52 PEN signed two ways.

Using classifier for holding (a pen) with classifier for flat objects (paper) (left), Long thin object on a flat object (right). Adapted from "Example of use of classifiers in BSL in the sentence, 'The pen is on the paper'" (Chatzidamianos, McCarthy, Du Feu, Rosselló & McKenna, 2018, p. 2)

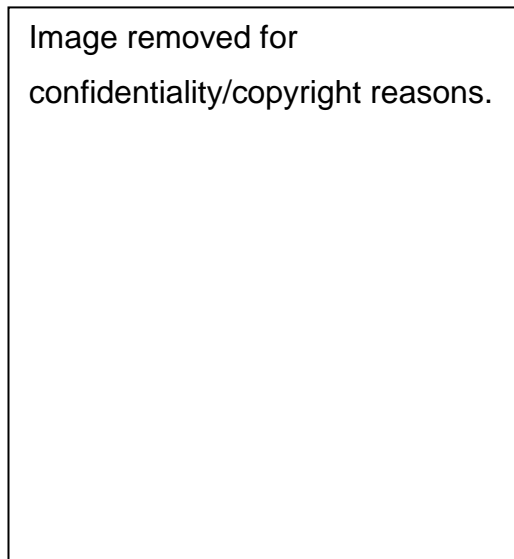
For example, in British Sign Language (BSL), *pen* can be signed by showing how a pen is held (as in *pen-writing-on-paper*, Figure 52, left) or using a forefinger to show how it lies on a flat object such as a piece of paper (Figure 52, right). In these cases, the same pen is talked about, but in different contexts and using different classifiers relating the physical properties of the object.

Marshall and Morgan (2014) found that when learning BSL, hearing adults

bring their visuo-spatial knowledge and gestural abilities to the tasks of understanding and producing [linguistic] constructions that contain entity classifiers. [This] might shed light on how gesture became (and, indeed, becomes) conventionalized during the genesis of sign languages." (p. 61)

In other words, the way people use classifiers might help us to understand how gestures link to sign language. To give an example, adults who do not know any sign language, when asked to gesture in a way that indicates drink, sometimes curve their hand into a C shape as though holding a cup, and lift/tilt it towards their lips as though drinking from the imaginary cup. This is similar to the BSL sign *drink*.

However, it is rare that people with no BSL knowledge exactly produce the



correct BSL sign in this situation. It is clear therefore that despite certain

*Figure 53 "drink" in British Sign Language*

*(National Deaf Children's Society, 2014) [still from video]*

handshapes and gestures coming “naturally” to people with no experience of sign language, the development of full sign languages builds upon these gestures significantly to make them part of the language (Thompson, Vinson, Woll, & Vigliocco, 2012; Vinson, Cormier, Denmark, Schembri & Vigliocco 2008).

The importance of this to understanding the world more widely, for both d/Deaf and hearing people, is through *iconicity*, meaning resemblance between linguistic properties of a word, sign or gesture and the referent (the thing it refers to) (Perniss & Vigliocco, 2014). It used to be believed that signed languages were, by their nature, more iconic than spoken languages. For example, the signs *push* and *hat* display high levels of iconicity: *push* shows the act of pushing something away; *hat* shows a hat being put on the head (Perniss & Vigliocco, 2014, p. 4.).

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confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 54 PUSH in BSL*

Image removed for  
confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 55 HAT in BSL*

Although iconicity may seem more evident in signed languages, “iconicity is fundamental to all languages (signed and spoken) and that it serves to bridge the gap between linguistic form and human experience” (Thompson et al, 2012). I argue that using this element of the Deaf episteme as a form of crip epistemic insight can help us understand both d/Deaf and hearing embodiment in a different orientation. I will return to these ideas about the Deaf episteme, gesture and iconicity later in the chapter. However, I will first revisit the statutory framework that serves as a background to all teaching in the Early Years classroom, with a particular focus on the ELGs.

### 5.3. “They’re filling and pouring but they’re mute”: Surveillance and the Early Learning Goals

The literature review covered some of the key theories around surveillance and childhood. It particularly showed the interest in the institutions of schools as sites of state-mandated regulation of bodies (Foucault, 1995 [1977]). In the Early Years classroom, this surveillance is enabled and enacted through the physical environment and policies (Burke & Duncan, 2015). Despite surveillance commonly assumed to be an all-seeing eye, Gallagher (2010) has argued that surveillance is enacted through sound and listening, and that it is discontinuous and open to resistance. My observations show normalised it is at Harbour View, as at other primary schools, for teachers and other adults to observe children in order to assess their development in relation to normative standards. This supports Crawford’s (2017) argument that teachers are forced into becoming “instruments of surveillance” (p. 197). Specifically, Early Years teachers are responsible for assessing children against the ELGs, with their performance in turn surveilled by statutory bodies such as Ofsted (Perryman, et al., 2018). The assessment of children by teachers therefore must be recorded, for example by photographs and written notes, in order to keep records of children’s progress and to label them as: emerging (not reaching the goal); reaching the goal; or exceeding it.

In the previous chapter on verticality and development, I laid out how “the hegemony of normalcy creates compliant and disciplined bodies . . . which meet the needs of a bureaucratic, corporate state” (Davis, 2002, in Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle, 2011, p. 2131). I pick up on this theme again here, as it is clear that the ELGs and associated guidance rely on the idea of a normal (or “typical”) child moving towards an independent, productive life. *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* (“Development Matters”) is “non-statutory guidance material supports practitioners in implementing the statutory requirements of the EYFS” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p.1)<sup>9</sup>. This document explicitly links development to gaining “essential skills and knowledge for children to participate successfully in society” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p.4).

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<sup>9</sup> A new edition of *Development Matters* was published in September 2020 and revised July 2021 (see Grenier, J. [2021.] *Development Matters*. London: Department for Education). However, this research is based on the earlier 2012 edition.

Firstly, this suggests that children who do not reach certain goals in the expected time periods, or ever, are less part of society, with obvious implications for disabled children. Secondly, it does not acknowledge the fact that the words “successful participation”, despite an attempt at neutrality, are liable to be understood as meaning contributing to the system of late capitalism which values people on their ability to contribute to the economy through employment and independence (Tisdall, 2003, p. 20; du Gay, 2004; Finkelstein, 2001), and through certain kinds of social and cultural capital (Scott-Hill, 2003).

It should be noted that, though, that *Development Matters* nods towards ideas that are compatible with ideas from both disability studies and assemblage theory. The authors Moylett and Stewart (2012) add a disclaimer as a footnote on most pages:

Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists. The age/stage bands overlap because these are not fixed age boundaries but suggest a typical range of development.

They also are clear that “the framework covers the education and care of all children in Early Years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities” (p. 2). They also use the term “enabling environments” throughout the document, highlighting how adults can support children, for example by changing the physical environment of the classroom or providing particular activities or resources. This is an interesting choice of words, reflecting (intentionally or not) the title *Disabling barriers – Enabling environments* (Swain, Finkelstein, et al., 1993; Swain, French, et al., 2004). The first edition “became, arguably, the most widely used reader in disability studies” in the UK (Swain, French, et al., 2004, p. 1). While it does not focus only on education, the volume contains chapters which highlight the role of education in disabling or enabling disabled children. As the name suggests, much of the work of Swain et al is rooted in the social model, which understands disability to be the result of disabling barriers. Use of the phrase “enabling environments” in *Development matters* may be a welcome departure from understanding children’s experiences as coming solely from their impairment. However, the rest of the document tends to take a normalising view of child development, rather than understanding the complexities of embodied assemblages.

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*Figure 56 assessment cycle.*

*Around a central circle labelled as "The Child" are the three arrows showing three successive steps. The first states "Start here. Observation. Look, listen and note. Describing." The second says, "Assessment. Analysing observations and deciding what they tell us about children." The third says, "Planning. What next? Experiences and opportunities, learning environment, resources, routines, practitioners' role." (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p.3)*

Early Years practitioners are expected to take part in on-going formative assessment which aims to support children's learning. Adults are guided by the process illustrated above, which begins with observing and describing the child, moves onto analysing these observations in order to assess the child, which in turn informs the planning of how practitioners can support children's learning. The cycle then begins again when the adults continue to observe and assess children who should now be in an improved learning environment. I saw this cycle in practice several times in the Harbour View primary classroom. One instance was during a maths lesson. The class was divided into two smaller groups, with the teacher working with one group. The teacher asked a teaching assistant to work with another group in a different space. The teacher says to the teaching assistant:

‘They’re filling and pouring in the water area, which is great, but they’re zip.’ As she says ‘zip’, she mimes zipping her mouth shut with her hand. ‘Mute,’ she clarifies. She indicates that she would like the teaching assistant to work with the children on talking about the ‘filling and pouring’ that they are doing. (Adapted from fieldnotes.)

This appears to be in relation to part of an ELG in relation to “Mathematics: Shape, space and measure.” It is suggested that typically, a child might, by the end of the EYFS, “use everyday language to talk about size, weight, **capacity**, position, distance, time and money to compare quantities and objects and to solve problems” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 36 [emphasis added]). Here, the teacher was clearly telling a teaching assistant that the school needed further evidence that the children in the maths lesson could use everyday language to describe capacity when filling and emptying containers in the water area.

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confidentiality/copyright reasons.



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*Figure 57 Photo of covered water play area and sink area.*

*(Photo by me)*

A “typical” child of 16-26 months (1 year 4 months to 2 years 2 months) “enjoys filling and emptying containers”, and the *Development Matters* guidelines suggest that adults can enable pupils of this age to reach the ELG by “talk[ing] to children, as they play with water or sand, to encourage them to think about when something is full, empty or holds more” and by providing “different sizes and shapes of containers in water play, so that children can experiment with quantities and measures” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 35). For children of 22-36 months (1 year 10 months to 3 years), it is suggested that adults could create an “enabling environment” by varying “the volume and capacity equipment in the sand, water and other play areas to maintain interest” (p. 35). At 30-50

months (2 years 6 months to 4 years 2 months), a child is expected to show “an interest in shape and space”, supported by adults who “provide rich and varied opportunities for comparing length, weight, capacity and time” (p. 36). Finally, by 40-60+ (3 years 4 months to 5 years), a typical child, “orders two items by weight or capacity”. Adults, it is suggested, can support this learning by having “areas where children can . . . weigh and measure,” and by planning “opportunities for children to describe and compare shapes, measures and distance” (p. 36). Although *Development Matters* states that the ELGs simply show a typical range of development rather than an aim, use of the word *goal* suggests otherwise. Rather than genuinely supporting children to explore the world around them, this guidance typifies not only what is normal in terms of learning, but even in interests, through words such as “enjoys” and “show an interest.” Certainly, in the Harbour View classroom, the desire to record children talking about shape, space and measure seems to come from a pressure to demonstrate their development, specifically that they not only enjoy and are interested in certain activities, but that they talk about them in a particular way: that they are not “mute.” This is one example of how adults expected children to demonstrate their internal learning processes, valuing the appearance of children learning over the learning itself, as I go on to discuss in the following section.

#### 5.3.1. External bodily practices representing “readiness to learn”: thinking fingers

A common theme in the Harbour View Reception classroom was adults surveilling children’s bodies in order to assess their internal cognitive processes. One example of this was “thinking fingers.” I observed in a maths lesson:

One answer that a pupil gives prompts the teacher to exclaim, “I want to cry happy tears!”

The teacher then encourages the children to think about the next task using their “thinking fingers.”

She demonstrates this, putting her hand to the side of her head and her forefinger on her temple in imitation of being deep in thought. The children seem familiar with this, and they all copy her. (adapted from field notes)

This example opens with the teacher (intentionally or not) making the connection between internal thoughts and feelings (happiness) and outward

bodily responses (crying). Interestingly, though, she did not actually cry, which would have been a visible sign of emotion, but rather stated that she wanted to. It is also made clear to the children that the “right” answer is the one which produces the response of “happy tears” – the teacher makes a connection between the children’s performance and her emotional state. She then goes on to reinforce the connection between visible bodily actions and internal cognitive processes by asking the children to use their “thinking” fingers. Perhaps with the aim of making the teacher “want to cry happy tears” again, the children comply, clearly having used this gesture before.

The “thinking fingers” gesture is similar to the sign *think* in many sign languages (see table). Again, to be clear, signed languages are not simply gestures, but are full, grammatical languages. However, as I have discussed, certain signs with high levels of iconicity exist, which can give us an insight into the way people understand certain ideas.

<div> <p>Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.</p> </div>	<div> <p>Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.</p> </div>
<div> <p>Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.</p> </div>	<div> <p><i>Figure 58 Examples of the sign “think”</i>  <i>Clockwise from top left: Indo-Pakistani Sign Language, British Sign Language and Chinese Sign Language - all showing pointing to the head. All images from European Sign Language Centre (2018)</i></p> </div>

While the author of a work might be “dead” according to Barthes (1967), able to be separated from their work, as previously discussed, sign language is not: it is inherently embodied. All these signs for *think* indicate a process happening inside the head – a clear reflection of where we imagine thinking to happen. While we cannot prove to another person what we are thinking, we can indicate it by what our bodies are doing – whether in language (as in sign language), body “language”, or intentional gestures, such as the “thinking fingers.”

Children at Harbour View were also expected to control their bodies in a way which communicated to adults that they were ready to learn. One of these ways was, during a teaching session, for children to sit, crossed-legged and, in line with one of the school’s rules, keeping their hands and feet “safe.” The explanation for this rule was to make sure that people did not hurt themselves or other people. However, the rule seemed often to be invoked in a different sense: asking the children to have “tidy bodies” rather than avoiding hurt. In

practice, this meant a child should be a self-contained unit: not touching other people or things. On the other hand, the teachers expected physical contact in the form of “bums on the floor” - children not wriggling or sitting up on their feet, for example. Teachers took this as evidence that children were ready to learn: sometimes a teacher would wait until there was (relative) observance of these rules before starting a lesson.

The problem with these approaches, of course, is that it asks children to control their bodies for the purposes of fitting in to expected social norms. Greenstein (2016) has explored this in detail, lamenting how her previous role as a speech and language therapist involved “supporting” children to understand and submit to adults’ expectations of them. This does not take into account the many complex ways in which people learn and demonstrate their learning – which might in fact be two different things. Like with Hajrah in the chapter on verticality, who preferred to lie on the floor rather than sit, it seems that adults in the classroom were concerned with the outward appearance of what children did with/through their bodies rather than recognising that learning happens in various myriad ways. Even when learning is recognised as happening not entirely inside the brain, disabled children’s “ways of doing things differently” are still discouraged compared to acceptable ways of using the body in learning. I will go on to consider this in the next section.

#### 5.4. Embodied cognition

The literature review covered some of the ways in which education (and wider social understandings of the world) rely on the Cartesian idea of mind/body dualism. Yet this dualism has been challenged in many areas, including the philosophical field of embodied cognition. Wilson and Foglia (2017) say that cognition is embodied “when aspects of the agent's **body beyond the brain** play a significant causal or physically constitutive role in cognitive processing” (introduction [emphasis added]). They add that “sometimes the nature of the dependence of cognition on the body is quite unexpected, and suggests new ways of conceptualizing and exploring the mechanics of cognitive processing” (Introduction). In other words, conventional wisdom would have us believe that cognitive processes happen primarily, or even only, in the brain; yet actually, the body beyond the brain plays a significant role in cognitive processes. Learning happens within and throughout the body. While the focus of this thesis is not cognitive processing per se, the relevance of these theories in the classroom is clear as they challenge traditional views of the mind as residing (only) in the brain. Although much work on embodied cognition focuses solely or mostly on the body as a discrete, bounded entity, the connected but contrasting idea of *extended cognition* “is the claim that cognitive systems themselves extend beyond the boundary of the individual organism” (section 1). Wilson and Foglia reference Clark and Chalmers (1998) who argue that our experience of the world involves an *extended mind*: one which is part of, and in active connection with, the environment. They speak of *cognitive extensions* that support humans as they learn, giving as an example “the various physical and computational artifacts that are routinely used as cognitive extensions by children in school” (p. 12). This means that “cognition itself is neither bounded by the brain, nor perhaps even by the body itself” (Wilson & Foglia, section 4). This is a useful point to bear in mind in relation to assemblages and the leaky body (see the next chapter for more on the blurring of boundaries).

Wilson and Foglia (2017) go on to argue that “accepting embodied or extended cognition will have interesting implications concerning autonomy, sociality, personal identity, and responsibility” (section 6.4). This seems particularly relevant to disabled people, who are subject to particular discourses around ideas of (in)dependence and autonomy in relation to their environments. Oliver

(1993), for example, argues that the idea of “dependency” has been used in the oppression of disabled people, who are seen as overly dependent on others. This is despite the fact that modern industrial societies necessarily engender a state of mutual dependence, in which all people rely on others to a greater or lesser extent. While not denying that different people have different levels of (in)dependence, he argues that disabled people who have high levels of dependence on other people are on one end of a spectrum (in)dependence, rather than on one side of a binary of dependence vs independence. In the same volume, French (1993b) asks rhetorically, “what’s so great about independence?” (p. 44) arguing that the misguided focus on making disabled people as “independent” as possible through external technology was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, she argues, technology can bring benefits to disabled people by providing better access to information or services. On the other hand, new technology is sometimes seen as a straightforward fix: once a disabled person has the right gadget, the disabling barrier disappears. French argues that the reality is much more nuanced.

In any case, disabled people’s dependence (upon other people and upon physical objects) is seen differently to non-disabled people’s dependence (which I discuss in more detail in the chapter “Verticality”). In relation to extended or embodied cognition, we might consider Clark and Chalmers’ (1998) example of counting on the fingers compared to calculators (pp. 10-11). They argue that counting on the fingers is part of embodied/extended cognition because the fingers are part of the body, whereas calculators are not, because they are external to the body. They go on to say, however, that in some future where calculators were integrated into our bodies in some way, this might be considered part of our embodied/extended cognition.

To return to embodied cognition, “evidence strongly suggests that exposure to a broader range of embodied interactions determines lexical richness and vocabulary growth” (Wilson & Foglia, 2017, section 4.3, para. 11) which might support the idea that “cognition is not bounded by the skull, so cognitive systems may include both non-neural parts of the body and even the beyond-the-body environment.” This understanding of embodied cognition, though, sometimes overlooks the differences between different ways in which different bodies might embody the same abstract ideas. Hall (2002), for example,

explains how one “norm of embodiment . . . concerns the primary of vision in dominant conceptions of communication and knowledge” (p. 7). Again, we see how certain forms of embodied cognition are more acceptable than others.

#### 5.4.1. Finger-counting

In the Harbour View classroom, it was clear that some types of embodied cognition were actively encouraged while others were discouraged. One example of an overtly encouraged form of embodied cognition was the representation of abstract ideas such as number. These forms of embodied cognition are encouraged by adults who demonstrate them to children and ask them to copy. However, the background of Cartesian dualism is so strong that it was common for adults and children alike in the Harbour View Early Years that it was common to separate what the “body” was doing compared to the mind and to help these to meet in some way. One instance of this was adults encouraging children to use their hands in a particular way to learn, such as in maths lessons when the children might use their fingers to “count on” when learning addition. For example, in the sum  $5 + 3$ , children might hold up five fingers to represent 5, then count 6, 7, 8 as they put up one, then two, then three fingers on the other hand. This leaves them with an embodied sense of the number in the form of their eight outstretched fingers, as well as a visual and oral/aural understanding. I also saw this happen outside of lessons, for example when a pupil, Yasmeen, and I had a conversation about babies. She told me:

If you go to one hospital you get one baby, if you go to two hospitals you get two babies. [A woman] goes into hospital and lies down. You can have one baby in your tummy or two babies.” She turns to one of her classmates and says, “You can have this many babies, or this many, or this many”, each time pointing to her outstretched fingers indicating one, two, three or four. [Adapted from fieldnotes]

I believe that Yasmeen was demonstrating her understanding of number as an abstract concept, as opposed to the names of numerals. At first, she uses the names of numerals, indicating that it is possible to have “one” or “two” babies, but does not show or embody this number. When she turns to her classmates to explain further, she does not use the words “one, two, three, four” but her meaning is clear because of her pointing (using one hand) to her outstretched fingers indicating the number (on the other hand).



Using fingers to count, a type of “embodied cognitive tool” (Bender & Beller, 2012) or “embodied numerosity” (Domahs, Moeller, Huber, Willmes & Nuerk, 2010), is described as an important aspect to counting objects (Ewing, 2016). Generally, finger-counting has been studied in children in relation to their development, but some research has found that it is important in adults too - Domahs et al (2010) conclude that:

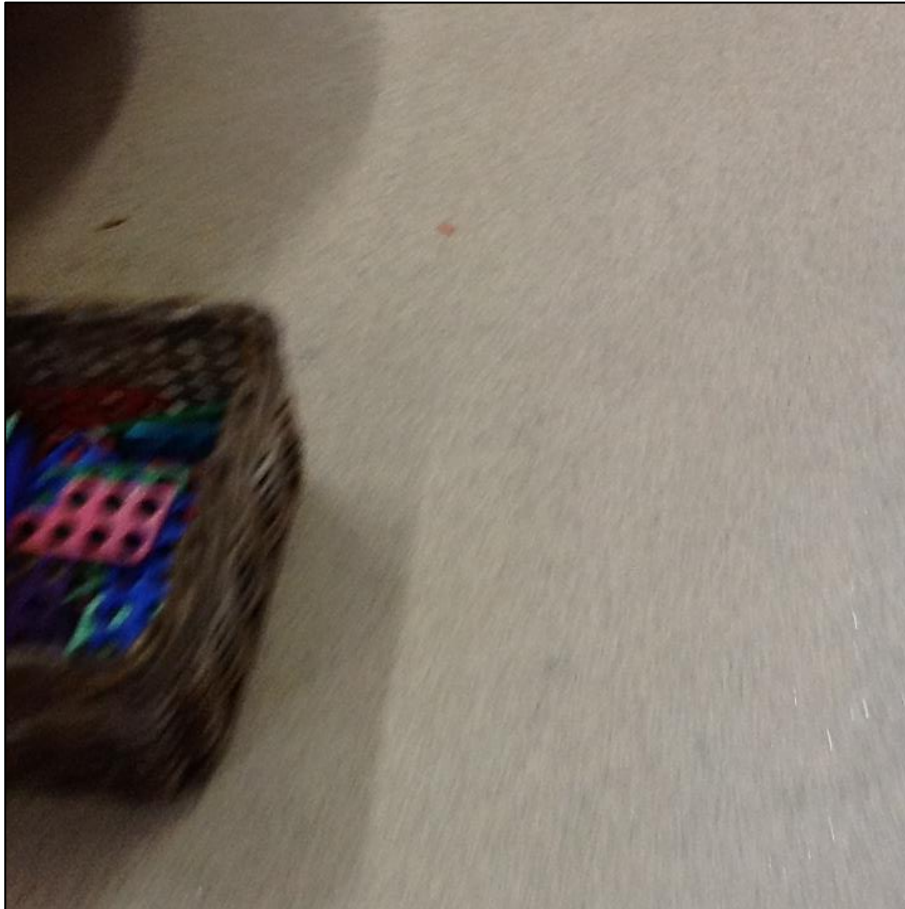
adult number representation [is] shaped by bodily experience, that is to say, by finger counting habits and structures . . . Thus, the present study suggests that **finger counting habits are not only important at a specific developmental stage**, but even influence the structure of adult number processing. These findings . . . support the idea that the constitution of seemingly abstract representations is at least partially rooted in our bodily experiences” (p. 264-5) [emphasis added]

Nevertheless, in the classroom, finger-counting seems to be generally seen as a development tool, or a way of getting to a better, non-embodied understanding of maths. For example, *Development Matters* suggests that a child at 30-50 months might start to “represent numbers using fingers, marks on paper or pictures”, which adults can support by talking with children “about the strategies they are using, e.g., to work out a solution to a simple problem by using fingers or counting aloud” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 3). This of course then sees the child not using such systems as lacking or delayed. It is valuable to consider how children’s embodied understanding of abstract ideas is considered acceptable, or even essential, when done in certain ways, while other bodily practices might be seen as unacceptable because they are not viewed as important for learning.

#### 5.4.2. Numicon

Finger-counting has been described as the first example of a *manipulative*: an object “that can be handled and moved, . . . used to develop understanding of a mathematical situation” (Griffiths, Back & Gifford, 2017a, p. 3). Despite many forms of manipulatives being available one study found that half of teachers used Numicon “which may be due to commercial marketing” (Griffiths, Back & Gifford, 2017b, p.5). Numicon advertises itself as a “concrete-pictorial-abstract approach” to mathematics which, among other things, helps adults “to assess a child’s understanding and progress by watching and listening to what they do and say.” It represents number through shapes made up of several squares

with a hole in the middle of each square. For example, the number five is represented by a shape made up of five squares with five holes (see illustration). This approach claims to be a “research based programme which was first developed in the late 1990s in order to meet the needs of children who were not reaching age related expectations for numeracy skills” (Lane, 2009, p. 152) including children labelled with SEND (Numicon, 2020) for whom their “Breaking Barriers” programme is designed (Teachwire, 2018). Research has suggested that this approach is helpful to both “lower” and “higher” attainers when they work in pairs (Barclay, 2018). This kind of multisensory maths education has been promoted as a way of supporting pupils labelled with SEND or those who have “mathematical difficulties” requiring “individual intervention” (Dowker, 2004; Dowker, 2009) including specifically those with Down’s Syndrome (Ewan & Mair, 2002; Faragher, Brady & Gervasoni, 2008; Horner, 2002; Nye, 2006; Nye, Buckley & Bird, 2005, Wing & Tacon, 2007). Many of these studies have been written by or funded by Numicon or people with a vested interest. Furthermore, the Numicon website is littered with language less to do with education than consumer capitalism: it claims to be “market-leading” and schools can book an appointment with a “rep” – interestingly, they leave out the first part, not explicitly calling them a “sales rep”, although presumably this is what it means (Numicon, no date). When use of a resource is driven by sales, we can begin to see how decisions about what embodied learning is “good” might well be influenced by the capitalist system rather than pedagogy.



*Figure 60 Photo of Numicon blocks in a basket on the floor.*

*Taken by Yasmeen*

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 59 Numicon number-line*

*It shows the numerals 0 to 10 with their corresponding Numicon shape (c) Oxford Owl 2020*

However, there is academic literature that focuses on pedagogical uses of Numicon. A few important points emerge from this literature. Firstly, much of the research focuses on interventions on individual children, rather than wider understandings of the complex (dis)abling assemblages in the wider environment. Secondly, it takes an uncritical stance towards the labels of learning difficulty and high or low achievement. For example, Uttley (2003), a maths lecturer, writes about using Numicon to support their son Sam who has a label of Down's Syndrome. Specifically, they highlight the ways they adapt

Numicon for Sam because he finds it hard to sit down and concentrate. On a positive note, Uttley does not feel the need to make Sam “sit and concentrate” (p. 18), instead adapting maths activities for him while he moves around. Uttley makes number relevant to Sam by relating it to his interests: books and lions. Uttley also explicitly links number to the physical world, for example by placing the Numicon blocks on the stairs so that Sam can find “stair 7”. Uttley is writing from a personal perspective, rather than an academic one, but still considers Sam’s learning in relation to Down’s Syndrome and the resulting difficulties he has in demonstrating his concentration and learning through his body, by sitting still.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 61 Three lions used for Sam’s maths activities  
(in Uttley, 2003)*

Nevertheless, I am not arguing against use of the Numicon programme per se. As Lane (2009) states, “if the aim of mathematics education is to create numerate citizens then there needs to be an awareness and acknowledgement of the fact that what works with children with special educational needs can equally be effective in all mathematics classrooms” (p. 162). While I applaud the idea of giving all children high quality education regardless of any SEN

label, there are some unspoken assumptions in Lane's statement. Firstly, the idea of "citizenship" is contested and has been used by politicians from left and right to promote certain ideas – such as consumerism, freedom, and rights – which, Morris (2005) points out, align with neoliberal ideals (p.7). These values place disabled people at a disadvantage "in a society and an economy where the market is the sole arbiter of opportunities and life chances" (p. 35). In turn, as we have seen in the literature review, schools have historically been, and continue to be, places where children are prepared for contributing to the economy. Using a particular tool (Numicon) that schools must pay for, in the hope of improving the chances of children to participate in the economy, seems like a clear example of the ways education is tied to a particular notion of adulthood as a productive, wage-earning, wage-spending citizen.

However, an important part of using Numicon was clearly that it should be used "properly". This is illustrated by my observation of the start of a maths lesson, as the teacher tips Numicon blocks out of a container onto the floor in the middle of a circle of children. She asks the children to find two blocks which add up to eight.

The teacher tips the Numicon blocks out on the floor and the children lean forward, some of them lying on their fronts, and reach out for the Numicon blocks. Once the children have had some time to find blocks which add to 8, the teacher picks a few out to use their "loud and proud" voices to tell the whole group how they have created the number 8. Some of the other pupils fiddle with their Numicon blocks, sticking their fingers in the holes or trying different combinations. As another child is telling the group how they made 8, the teacher interrupts to say, **"Some children are touching their Numicon and that means they're not listening."** In response to this, some of the children stop playing with the Numicon they have in front of them. (adapted from field notes)

This episode is interesting for a few reasons. Firstly, as discussed in section 5.3.1, adults often used visible cues to make assumptions about how well a child was paying attention. In this case, the teacher assumes that fiddling with Numicon blocks means that a child is not listening. Not only does this make an assumption about the ability to do these two things at once, it also makes an assumption about the "best" way to learn in that situation. For example, it might be that some children will better understand the concepts by physically feeling the holes in the Numicon blocks. Alternatively, they may not want to be in this maths lesson and prefer to play with the blocks rather than use them for their

intended purpose. Perhaps if they took the blocks away and explored them, they would find new, interesting ideas about maths, or about other things – like the colours of the blocks or the way that can be used to make shapes and patterns. However, as already mentioned, schools are designed to produce docile bodies (Foucault, 1995 [1977]; Burke and Duncan, 2015) that are in the “right place at the right time” (a Harbour View school rule, picked up on in Chapter 6), rather than encourage creative embodied experiences. Perhaps here, when the teacher aims to striate the space of the classroom, we can see instead the “emergence of smooth spaces that unsettle the education assemblage” (Youdell & Armstrong, 2011, p. 150), a change in the choreography that Youdell and Armstrong describe, and a shift of power, albeit temporarily, to children.

Tatham-Fashanu has had similar findings in her exploration of the institutional space of “the carpet” (p. 226) in Early Years classrooms – a space where children are expected to sit and pay attention in lessons (in Harbour View, these were mats rather than a carpet, but their function was the same). Tatham-Fashanu found that children “reappropriated” Numicon blocks into superhero masks rather than using them in the “correct” way – for maths (Figure 62). Tatham-Fashanu explains that this creative use of pedagogic tools was done carefully to avoid the teacher’s surveillance, resisting the expected correct behaviour and instead challenging the social order and making the space their own. While the children at Harbour View was not using the Numicon blocks in quite the same way, they were still resisting the directions of adults, using one of the few things they have some control over (their bodies) to resist what Tatham-Fashanu calls the “homogenising rules of the carpet” (p. 227). Rather than all sitting the same and doing the same maths activity, they showed their individuality through resistance to power. Generally, teachers wanted children to behave the same way as each other, sometimes picking out “well” behaved children in attempt to get other children to copy that behaviour. Yet, as we saw above in section 4.3.3, students are expected not to take copying too far: when Kali comes up with the correct answer to a maths problem by copying Zara, the teacher indicates that she should do it her “own way. This seems to indicate that the teacher is looking for a fine balance: children copying the teacher and

all following the instructions exactly (all sitting down, all silent, all still) and yet somehow also finding their “own way” to use Numicon blocks

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 62 Numicon superhero masks (in Tatham-Fashanu, 2021, p. 227)*

In this section I have explored ideas around embodied cognition and their use in the classroom. Particularly, I have highlighted how finger-counting and Numicon are not simply neutral tools of pedagogy, but rather are seen and used by teachers according to certain unspoken values, which are linked to capitalist systems in two ways. I showed how finger-counting is acceptable as a developmental tool, but children are expected to develop mental arithmetic skills and “move on” from finger counting. Furthermore, these tools are used to control children’s bodies to behave in the “right” way, creating a docility in the service of neoliberal capitalism. Secondly, I have shown how certain “market-leading” resources, with the backing of salesmen and catalogues, are encouraged in the classroom. Again, though, the expectation of using such resources “correctly” reminds us of the expectation of children to follow existing beliefs and knowledge about learning, rather than finding their own way.

### 5.5. Seeing but not seeing: When surveillance overlooks disabling assemblages

Despite adults' apparent concern with the minutiae of what children were doing in the classroom, there were also clear gaps in the surveillance of children in the classroom, as has already been established in the literature (Gallagher, 2010). This example shows how mainstream ideas about the inclusion of disabled pupils does not adequately capture the complexities of disabled embodiment in the classroom, and that crip epistemology can help us understand what is missing.

#### 5.5.1. Isla's story

One day I noticed Isla holding a book close to her face. It seemed she had to do this to see text and images properly. I later learned that she was in the process of getting a diagnosis of vision impairment. We could consider Isla's bodily practice, holding the book close to her face, as either a "fit" or a "misfit" between the person and the environment (Garland-Thomson, 2011). To understand why this could be seen as both/either a misfit and/or a fit, we can take Garland-Thomson's illustration which considers a blind student who uses a white cane and Braille books.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, Garland-Thomson takes a materialist approach in which there is not a generic disabled body, but specific embodiments involving interactions between bodies with agency and spatial environments. Garland-Thomson argues that a blind student using Braille and a cane could be seen as a misfit: a case where the student's embodied experience in a world designed for sighted people is marked clearly by the objects not used by other students. We might here consider that the Merleau-Pontian "I can" is limited by the environment designed for sighted people. However, Garland-Thompson also suggests a different way of seeing this situation: a "fit" in which the person and the environment have come together in a way that works, and the "I can" is enabled: adaptations have been made and the blind student is able to participate in education. We can go a step further and see this as a form of embodied crip epistemic insight – Isla's own way of understanding the world and making it work for her, changing the assemblage to "fit" her.

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<sup>10</sup> Although Garland-Thomson and I both use the example of a visually impaired student, this is coincidental and can apply to people with various impairments or with no impairment.



Garland-Thompson's approach is similar to Hall and Wilton's (2016) understanding of assemblages that are ever-shifting, and have the potential to be either enabling or disabling. Importantly, the environment is not happening TO a person, but rather the person is an active agent in the ever-changing spatial assemblage. As an active agent with her own epistemic insight into her experience, Isla's unconventional bodily practice (holding the book close to her face) is perhaps a simple way to overcome the barrier of too-small text and pictures, and creates a good fit between a child and the environment. On one hand, there is nothing inherently wrong with this way of reading and looking at images. We can consider reading close-up to simply be a "way of doing things differently" (Hansen & Philo, 2006, p. 502), just as people might move around a room differently according to a complex "situational ethics" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 206), as I discussed in the literature review. So, was Isla's experience of looking at the book a fit or a misfit? Crucially, we must remember that this was one moment in time, around which Isla and the whole assemblage were always part of "relational becomings", rather than a fixed, stable truth about Isla's embodied experience in the world (Hall & Wilton, 2016). Using Stephens et al's (2015) framework of emplaced subjectivity (as discussed in the literature review, along with a cripistemological perspective we can see this moment as Isla taking control of her situation in the best way she could according to her own embodied knowledge of a world that does not "fit".

My concern with Isla is whether she had a choice. Was she happy holding books close to her face to see them? Did she (or her family or teachers) know that it was possible to get children's books with large print, Braille or Moon<sup>11</sup>, or touch-and-feel elements? (Bookstart, 2018). I was concerned that there did not appear to be any books which she could access to the same degree as other children, who were encouraged to pick up books and look at them on their own, or with adults. I felt that this was a barrier to Isla accessing the same resources as other children. We must therefore consider how adults in the classroom might look for "potentially enabling moments" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 201), and support children in creating them. Of course, this will wax and wane as the assemblage changes: for example, Garland-Thomson's blind student uses a

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<sup>11</sup> Moon is a system of raised shapes to enable blind people to read by touch.

white can in a familiar environment, but if the class takes a school trip to an unfamiliar environment, they may want to use a sighted guide (Royal National Institute of Blind People [RNIB], 2014). This change of environment means the fit/misfit has changed too. In this situation, therefore, the blind student needs to know that the environment will be different; they need to know that they have the option of being guided; the guide needs to know how to guide, and so on. Similarly, Isla could be supported, for example, when the classroom layout changed (as it did a few times a year). But I soon found out that the process of supporting Isla in the classroom seemed complicated by bureaucracy. As I go on to explain in the next section, medico-educational processes were not in place to support Isla, and getting her the resources she needed was a slow process, leaving her unable to access one of the most basic of educational resources – books.

#### 5.5.2. Accessible resources

The lack of large-print books was not the only barrier that might create a disabling assemblage in the classroom. For example, a moveable whiteboard had the numerals 1-20 on laminated paper, each with a background either fading yellow to orange or light blue to dark blue. They also had several objects representing the numeral, e.g., the number 8 had eight objects pictured.

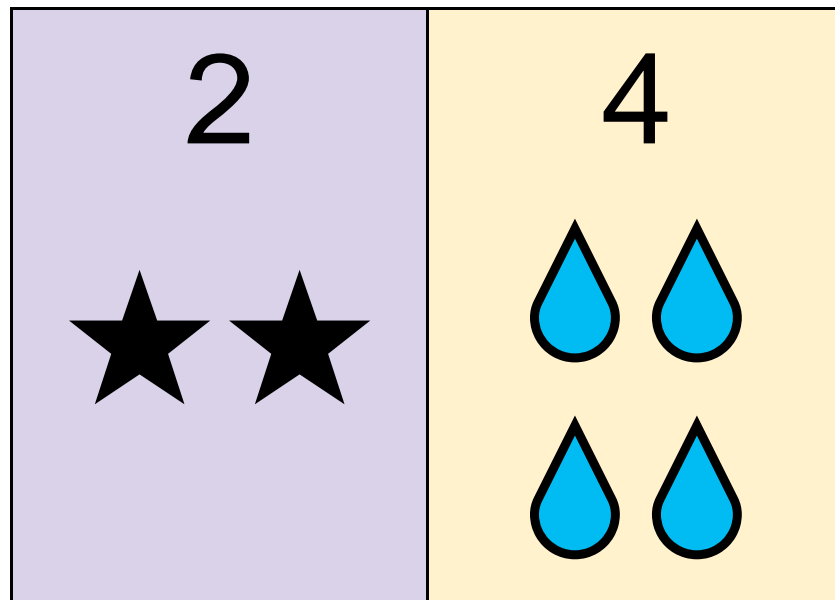
I realised that the numbers stuck to the whiteboard would be very inaccessible to someone with a visual impairment or a “print-disabled person . . . for whom a visual, cognitive, or physical disability hinders the ability to read print” (UK Association for Accessible Formats [UKAAF], 2012, p. 5). This description uses a medical/individual model by locating the problem of inaccessibility in the impairment (or “disability”) of the individual person, not the barriers that they face. Nevertheless, the document focuses on ways of removing barriers to “print-disabled” people. This includes the “golden rules”, including a “good contrast between text and background” and non-glossy paper (to stop light reflecting off the surface and producing glare) (p. 9). The advice adds that text should not be placed over a patterned background; instead, a plain colour background should be used with good contrasting colours. In short, the small size of these numbers, the busy background; the lack of contrast and the shiny

laminated paper all come together to create a very inaccessible learning resource.

What struck me about these two cases, books and numbers, was that there seemed to be simple ways to improve Isla's experience so that she could better access some of the fundamentals of learning: letters and numbers. Large print books for children can be easily sourced online (Bookstart, 2018) albeit with a limited range. It would be quite easy to create number cards that were more accessible, if they were simply bigger, with clear, contrasting colours and simple illustrations.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*The coloured backgrounds and small illustrations make them difficult to see.*



*Figure 64 Examples of more accessible number squares.*

*These follow UKAAF's "golden rules".*

Furthermore, UKAAF (2012) points out that “it is a legal requirement that students with a visual impairment have access to modified versions of materials that their peers are given” (p. 50). So why did Isla not have this access? It’s not entirely clear. During my time at Harbour View I did not have many opportunities to speak to the class teacher or more senior staff as their time seemed always to be taken up with teaching and assessment (the dreaded “paperwork”) for the EYFS. When I did get snatched chances to speak to them, my impression was that they were waiting for the Qualified Teacher of Visually Impaired students (QTVI) to advise them, as decisions on how to make lessons accessible fall to a QTVI or “other appropriate professional” (UKAAF, p. 50). Until then, Isla did not have any low-vision aids such as magnifying glasses or “alternative format” books. The embodied consequence of this complex web of assemblages - statutory services, public sector cuts, overworked teachers, inaccessible books - was Isla unable to access a book.

Furthermore, it is important to note that primary school spaces are created not only by what happened in that moment, but by overarching existing structures - both physical (e.g., the building and its contents) and legislative/legal (e.g., school policies). For example, the first thing that struck me walking into the Early Years classroom was the amount of noise. The open plan arrangement meant that I could hear music, voices and other sounds coming from all three classes. Yet these environmental barriers to learning did not seem to be minimised as much as they could have been, despite some children having been given a label of SEND (a label that might suggest more attention should be paid to the learning environment) - not to suggest that children without such a label might not have struggled with the noise too. Using the social model as a tool to analyse the environment suggests several ways in which schools like Harbour View could reduce environmental barriers for students with a range of impairments. Furthermore, valuing embodied deaf and/or disabled epistemological

For example, NDCS states that background noise can make it harder for deaf pupils, so they advise reducing background noise, including using fabrics (such as curtains, carpet or felt) on hard surfaces, and that teachers work together in shared open-plan teaching areas to make sure that noisy activities, such as a music lesson, so not interfere with quieter lessons like reading (NDCS with

NatSIP, 2015, pp. 52-54). Yet I saw these barriers everywhere: the high ceilings and hard surfaces increased the volume of background noise in the open-plan environment and lessons were frequently difficult for me to hear and follow because of music coming from other classes. As a result of these barriers, I noticed signs that children were struggling to follow lessons, such as inattention or confusion when trying to follow the teacher's speech. Clearly, one of the challenges for schools trying to be more inclusive is austerity: better inclusion is pushed to the bottom of the agenda and seen as "nice, but we can't afford it" (Timberlake, 2017, p.1). While the idea of "affording" to be inclusive needs to be challenged, I also observed situations that could have been avoided: by thinking about d/Deaf people when designing the building, for example, and by making sure the budget for books and other resources is spent on more accessible options.

#### 5.5.3. Beyond accessibility to radical inclusion

Of course, "accessibility" is not a neutral term. Cripistemological insight can help us to see that underneath ideas of "access" is still an expectation of children having "normal" bodies which can access "normal" books. The UKAAF's 2012 guidance on creating large-print resources relies on an idea of an existing text that is modified to suit a particular student. The process begins with assessing the student (UKAAF, 2012, p. 53) to consider the best fonts, colours and layouts to use with them. The implication is that the world assumes sightedness as the norm – with blind people needing adjustments. So how might we imagine a world in which disabled children are neither pathologised and labelled, nor left with disadvantages that other children do not have? Again, we return to the idea of a normality of doing things differently (Hansen and Philo, 2007): if we use crip epistemic insight, how might things look different for different people? What would happen in a world where blind people authored all books? How would that look, and how might a sighted person go about accessing those books? Would everyone listen to audiobooks or know how to read Braille? Would every child have an e-reader where they could adjust the size, colour and layout of any text? Would books exist at all? Perhaps oral histories and storytelling would become the default way knowledge is shared and understood. I am aware that this is an ambitious and radical idea, although not a new one. But it has been

argued that “in order to be inclusive of disabled students, schools need to transform in radical ways” (Greenstein, 2016).

However, it is not unheard of, for example for Deaf people, “such worlds do exist, and have existed in the past” (Sacks, 2012, p. 28). Sacks’ example is Martha’s Vineyard - an island off the coast of Massachusetts with a large deaf population before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where nearly everyone, deaf or hearing, could sign (Sacks, 2012, p.28). If Deaf people lived “with no handicap” in Martha’s Vineyard, communicating with Deaf and hearing people alike in Sign (Davis, 1995, p. 882), might it not be possible that people with various “impairments” could live a relatively barrier-free life, in assemblages which tend towards enabling? In fact, rather than considering Deaf and disabled people’s best option as “living in a barrier-free world”, we could go a step further. Crip epistemic insight has so much to contribute to the world. The Deaf people in Martha’s Vineyard were active agents with their own unique language, and “contributed to the developing national language [American Sign Language] the unique strength of their own” (Sacks, 2012, p. 21).

## 5.6. Conclusion

Kusters (2010) cautions against straightforwardly seeing communities such as Martha's Vineyard communities as utopias, which some Deaf people see as "an idyllic opposite to the Deaf communities of Europe and North America" (Woll & Ladd, 2003, in Kusters, p. 4). Certainly, I do not suggest that disabled people should be forced to return to the days of isolation and segregated schooling. Yet some disabled people look back on their segregated schooling with ambivalence, noting that, for the first time, they felt understood and even normal because they were around people who understood something of their perspective (French, 1993a, p. 71). One of Greenstein's (2015) recommendations in developing a radical inclusive education was to rethink knowledge itself – who has knowledge that is valuable and worth considering? If we understand that (dis)abled children each have unique (crip) epistemological perspectives, we might be able to build an education system that values these various perspectives, rather than giving "access" to one, privileged perspective. Perhaps we can envisage schools which combine the best of the experiences of people like French – the possibility that children could feel "normal" (included, not set apart from their peers) yet also without the pressure to be "normal" (accepted for their differences and without the oppressive pressure of a narrow definition of development). They could also feel unique, with their own valuable perspectives, their own embodied epistemic insight, to offer. Perhaps in such schools, the pressure on teachers to subject their wards to endless surveillance would reduce, safe in the knowledge that each child is learning from others, teaching others, and always *becoming* in their own way.



## Chapter 6: “In the right place at the right time”: Containing leaks and flows

At Harbour View School, we are in the right place at the right time, so that we are safe and secure.

At Harbour View School, we keep safe hands and feet, so that we do not hurt ourselves and other people.

(Excerpt from Harbour View School *Behaviour Learning Policy*)

### 6.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how all children and adults at Harbour View are in a complex web of embodied interactions with each other and the environment, and how these assemblages crystallise in certain moments through the ever-shifting power dynamics in the classroom. I have considered some of the key features of the Early Years setting at Harbour View School, including the importance to adults of keeping children’s bodies in check through (discontinuous) surveillance that disproportionately affects children labelled with SEND. I have also considered how the classroom is divided into space that is higher and lower, with children only able to access the lower space. I pick up on both of those themes in this chapter and extend them to consider the idea of children’s bodies being in “the right place at the right time” - a school rule which exemplifies Foucault’s ideas of institutions creating docile bodies.

In the literature review, I considered some theoretical ideas about leakiness and the way in which certain bodies (female, child, disabled) are seen as failing to adequately contain themselves, physically and metaphorically. In this chapter, I build on this, using data collected at Harbour View, to consider how the Early Years classroom is set up to encourage the containment of bodies in different ways, from the locked doors of the school keeping all children in, to activities being kept in their designated area of the classroom. I also consider how this containment is contingent on time, and what is the “right” activity or behaviour for the “right” space depends on the time of day. I will demonstrate how adults exert power over the classroom setting—often done in the name of classroom management to create an optimum learning environment. I argue, however, that this is based on the notion of a “typical” child and normalcy, which often does not create an inclusive classroom for children whose minds and bodies are not

“normal.” I will use assemblage theory and the social model of disability to consider the specific ways in which school policies expect children to be “in the right place at the right time” and how some constellations of bodies, times and space are viewed by adults as less acceptable.

Finally, I bring all these ideas together to critically consider primary school toilets. As previously discussed, there are gaps in adult surveillance of children which allow for resistance. One such gap is in toilets, where the gaze of adults might finally be lost. Yet, toilets remain a site of scrutiny in the classroom as adults are concerned with ideas of children’s development. I conclude by arguing for a reconsideration of leaks, in which we embrace leakiness in its various forms as ripe for the possibility of (over)flowing and flooding with new ideas.

## 6.2. Doors, gates and windows: borders and boundaries

As Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2015) explain, borders and boundaries have long been associated with barriers in a social model sense – preventing access to a particular place. They state that “children offer creative and practiced (re)imaginings of the boundaries, [and] borders” that they encounter (p. 56). I pick up on this idea, showing how borders and boundaries are enacted within Harbour View, and how they are also resisted, pushed, and crossed by children into new, sometimes unmapped, territories.

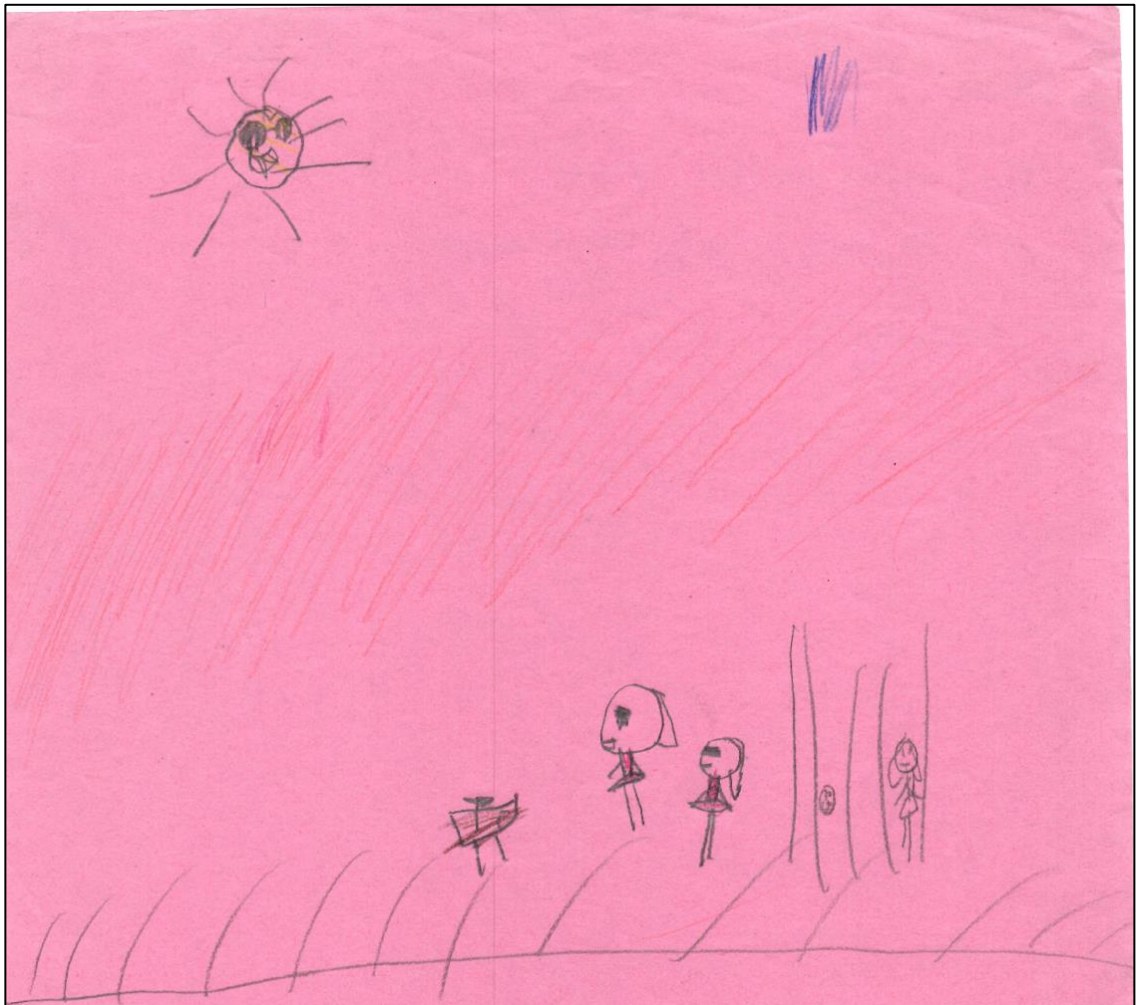


Figure 65 Maram's picture.

*It shows the sun shining down on an outdoor scene: two people are standing facing a raised bed with a plant growing from it.*

Figure 65 illustrates one of the ways children at Harbour View are physically locked into, or out of, certain spaces. The picture was drawn by Maram, who told me, “youse looking at that [plant]” (i.e., “you [two] are looking at that”) or possibly “you’s looking at that” (i.e., you is [*sic*] looking at that”). Both the figures are wearing pink dresses or tops and skirts. Behind the two figures is a gate or fence, drawn with five vertical lines. Two people are looking through the fence:

one is just a face, the other has a body as well. Maram told me that the two people looking at the plant are Maram herself and me, and that the people looking through the fence/gate are a baby boy and his mum (it was unclear whether this referred to Maram's mum or another mum). This matched the topography of the area where I took the children for gardening activities, with fences on three sides (two sides dividing off other parts of the school and one side onto a public footpath). Although I am not sure, I expect that this drawing was based on a real event, as it was common for children and adults to look through the fences to each other, sometimes waving or having a conversation.

This picture, depicting the division between those in the school and those outside, clearly illustrates one of the many ways that children are physically locked into or out of certain areas. As previously discussed in the chapter on verticality, certain areas of the classroom were off-limits to children, not because they were physically locked, but because of height differences and social/cultural understandings that places such as cupboards are not for children. In contrast, this example of children being in a locked area supports Burke and Duncan's (2015) argument (described in the literature review) that in some countries, pupils' bodies are fenced in, or strangers are locked out, because children are positioned as vulnerable and in need of protection: either locked in or locking strangers out for the children's safety. At Harbour View School, this was the case not just in outdoor areas: nearly every area of the school could only be accessed using an electronic pass. At first, because I was only a visitor, I had my photo taken every time I entered the school, which was printed on a visitor pass - a sticky label to wear at all times. These material items afforded me a privilege that children did not have: they allowed me to come in and out of the school, albeit I needed to ask another adult to physically let me in. Thus, I had a certain amount of freedom to move through the space as I wished. The temporary nature of these passes felt appropriate for my status as a visitor: each was stuck onto my clothes, only to be removed and thrown away at the end of the day, as though removing my temporary status. However, I made these pieces of ephemera somewhat more permanent by sticking some of them onto the notebook that I carried with me (Figure 66).

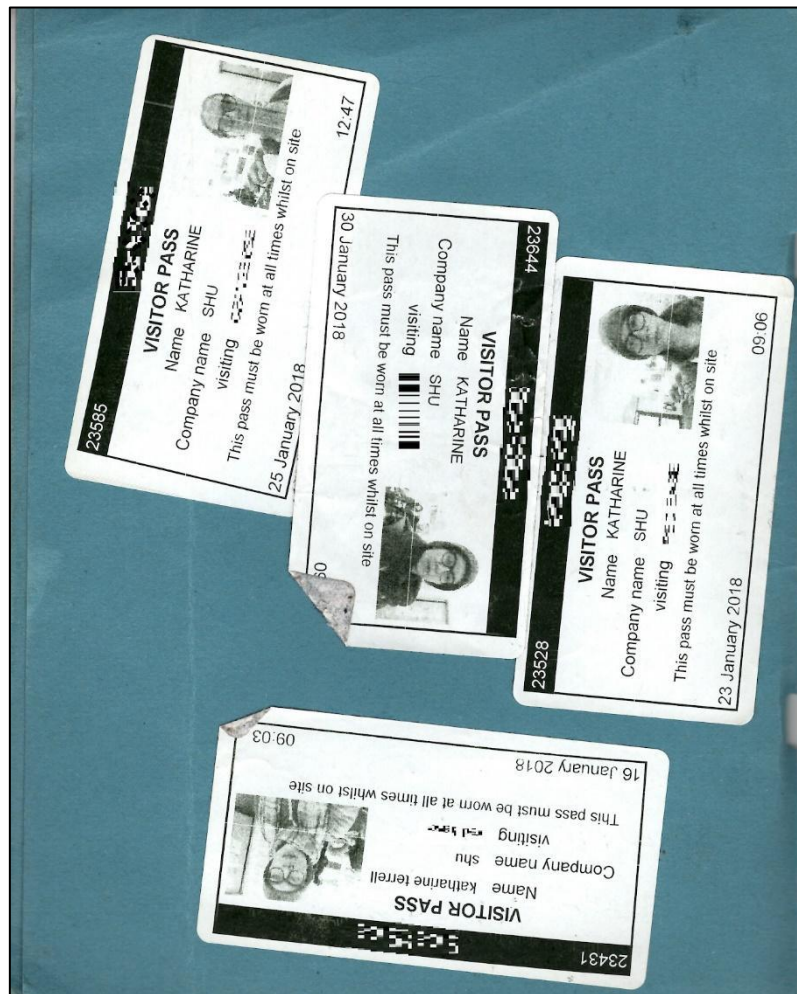


Figure 66 A scan of four of my visitor passes.

They are stuck onto the cover of an exercise book.

Each pass is a white label about the size of a bank card, with a black bar across the top with the name of the school (redacted) and the pass number both written in white. Underneath in black writing it says:

#### VISITOR PASS

Name KATHARINE

Company name SHU

visiting [redacted]

This pass must be worn at all times whilst on site

[date] [time]

Later, because I was in the school frequently, I got my own identity card and lanyard - a privilege afforded to staff and long-term volunteers. This meant I was able to freely move around the school, as I could open the electronically locked doors. This felt like a promotion of sorts - I had moved from being merely a

visitor, with sticky paper labels, to a semi-permanent role. I never felt like any of the roles ascribed to me by children fitted though - I was not staff, or a teacher, or a teaching assistant. In some ways I was a misfit (Garland-Thompson, 2011). However, these material objects - sticky labels and the lanyard/pass - indicated my adult status. Crucially, they indicated to children and other adults that I was allowed in the space and could move freely between different areas. Maybe my role was not completely clear, but my adult status and my visitor pass/ID card conferred upon me freedoms that others did not question. The striated space of the school - separate rooms and areas, each with a designated and defined purpose - became smoother for me once I had a card. This smoothness, however, came with a price. To be accepted into the school as a visitor I needed to agree to follow the school's rules and policies (including statutory requirements such as safeguarding) and, in some cases, contribute to surveilling and controlling the children. For example, when taking a group of around six children down the corridor from one area of the school to another, the children were running, jumping and talking loudly and excitedly. A senior member of staff came out of an adjoining office and reprimanded the children, then turned to me to say that I had to make my expectations of them clear.

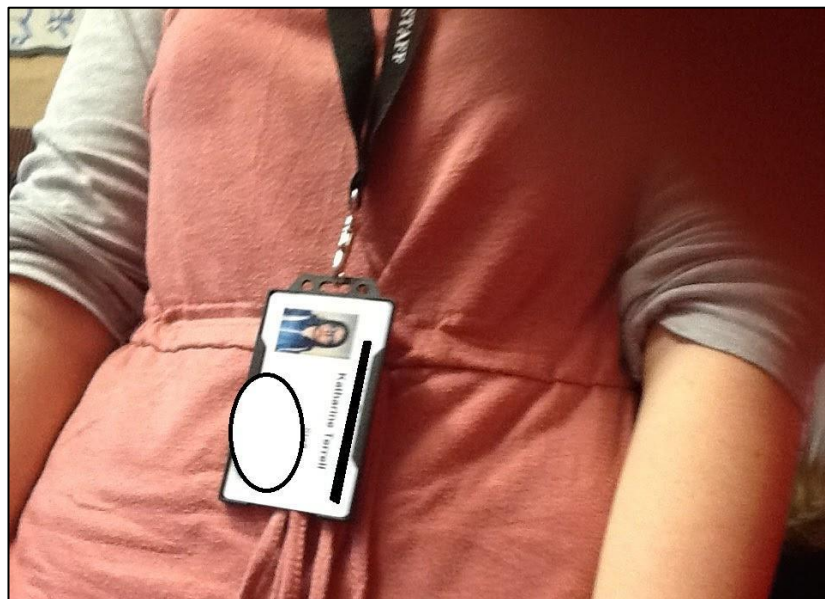


Evidently, this meant that I was expected to control children's behaviour in ways that I sometimes found uncomfortable.

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reasons.

*Figure 73 A blurry photo of me taken by a child.*

*I am looking at the camera with a half-smile and waving. I am carrying a blue exercise book and a sheet of paper. I have a black lanyard around my neck with a white identity card attached in a black case, although the details of the identity card are not visible. I am wearing a pink dress with a long grey top underneath, a blue watch, and large brown glasses.*



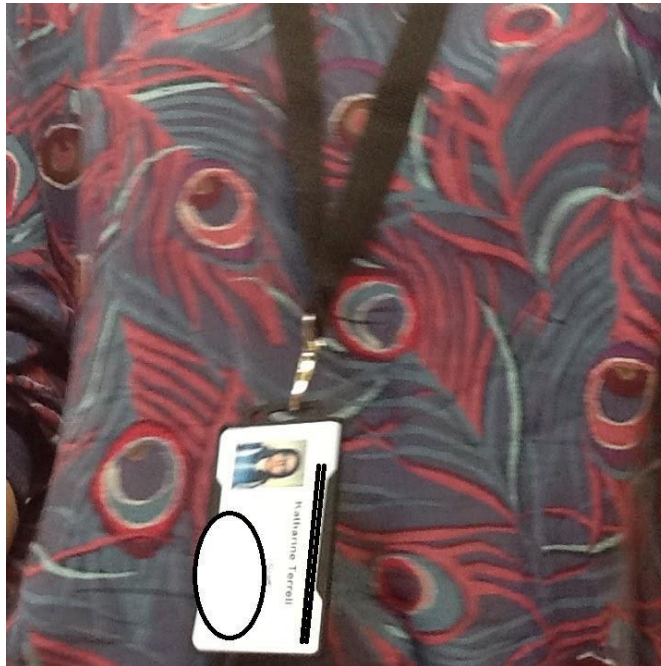
*Figure 74 Me wearing the identity card on a lanyard, close up.*

*My passport-style photo and some writing is visible on the card (taken by child)*

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 67 A child sits in a chair hugging a purple toy monkey.*

*Under the monkey my identity card is just visible. Not visible is the lanyard around the child's neck.*



*Figure 68 A blurry photo of my identity card.*

*It hangs from a black lanyard, with my passport-style photo and some writing visible.*



Some of the children at Harbour View seemed very aware of the power of the identity card and the possibilities it offered. The photographs above include two close-ups of my identity card hanging from the lanyard taken by different children. Only once I saw these photographs did I realise the prominence of the card from the perspective of the children: it was clearly in their eye-line, swinging at the end of the lanyard, offering a tantalising possibility of something to grab. This possibility must have been even more tempting knowing the opportunities that the identity card gave. As well as seeing adults moving freely between different spaces, the children also saw adults occasionally give a trusted child their identity card to run a quick errand (to collect something from the school office, for example). Some children never got this special privilege (presumably because they were not trusted to behave “appropriately”) and the sense of unfairness was evident, as some of the children would ask me if they could use my card to open the door when we left the classroom to go to activities such as gardening. One such child was Jess, who would often playfully grab my identity card and pretend that she was trying to take it away from me. I was torn between not wanting to contribute to controlling children’s bodies and movement within the school, and knowing that I was held responsible as an adult in the school for upholding (or at least, not encouraging children to break) the rules. I made a judgment that Jess could use my card to open the door when I went out of the classroom with her and a group of other children. She grabbed the card and excitedly ran away with it. I asked for it back, but in vain. I spent the next ten minutes or so full of anxiety that I would be discovered having broken the rules by giving a child my identity card. Although she eventually returned it to me, it was a stark reminder of the way movement through space is full of complex power dynamics: not straightforwardly that adults control children, but that structures of power and surveillance - including school policies and staff hierarchies - are a constantly shifting surveillant assemblage. One way I used to explore this was the model rooms method. I used this as a way for students to creatively explore ideas about different areas of the school. For example, some children clearly chose to make a model room which had a specific purpose, such as this box made into a canteen.



Figure 70 Photograph of a cardboard box with no lid.

The photo is taken from above. Inside, a child has placed two pictures of a plate of food with cutlery.

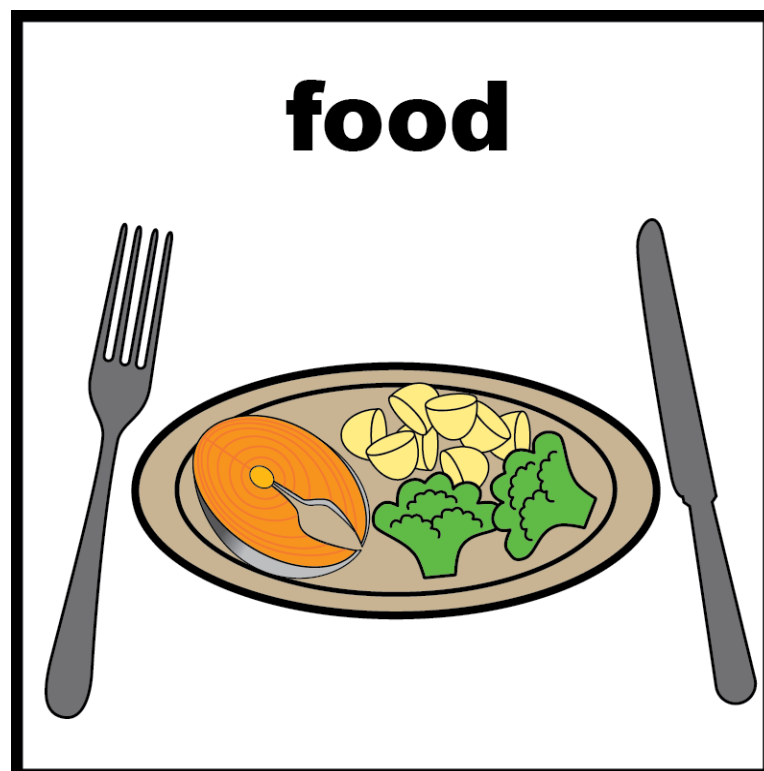


Figure 69 "Evening meal"

Image similar to that used in the "dining room" box, showing a plate with a fish fillet, potatoes and broccoli, with cutlery (Easy on the i, no date-e).

In this example, the child wanted to put the picture of the meal in one of the boxes but did not want to use any of the boxes that were already decorated to look like various areas of the classroom. Evidently, they felt that a plate of food with cutlery did not belong in the “classroom” box. They therefore picked an empty box to place the pictures of food in. Here, we can see a clear boundary: the existing “rooms” were not for a plate of food, and so a different room needed to be created. We might see this as an example of how children have learned and internalised rules about what goes where – “in the right place at the right time”. However, children did not always follow these rules – rather, there was a constant “choreography” (Hirst, 2008) between adults trying to “striae” space, and children resisting and making it “smooth” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I will explore this choreography further in the next section.

### 6.3. Classroom choreographies

Having discussed some of the physical boundaries around Harbour View, and children's understanding of "the right place at the right time", I now return to the maths lesson discussed in Chapter 5, to further explore some of the embodied consequences of classroom "choreographies" which can be socially unjust and normalising (Hirst & Cooper, 2008). The first thing the teacher does in her maths lesson is to ask all the children to sit in a circle. This kind of directing of the class was common in the Harbour View primary classroom: the teacher had several ways of getting the children's attention and moving them from one activity (and therefore one area) to another. For example, the class had a "tidying-up song." When the teacher played this song, the children were supposed to stop what they were doing and start tidying away the things they had used for that session (building blocks, pencils, toys, etc). In the case of moving to sit in a circle, we can see the way the teacher plans the physical layout of the area of the classroom in ways that are beneficial to learning. The children sitting in a circle means that everyone is facing each other, and there is a space in the middle for the Numicon blocks. This then creates a sense of equality: like at King Arthur's round table, no-one is visually more important than the others.

Yet, it remains clear who is in charge: the teacher. Even if the teacher sits on the floor with the children, she remains in charge of "choreographing" (Hirst & Cooper, 2008) the movement of children's and other adults' bodies, and the physical environment. In one case, I saw a similar scenario in which a group of children sat in a circle with a teacher. One child was sitting on the opposite side of the circle to the teacher. He was singled out and asked to come and sit next to the teacher. I realised that this was because the teacher thought he would hear better sitting next to her, as he wore hearing aids. This adjustment to the classroom choreography could be seen in several ways in relation to Garland-Thomson's fitting or misfitting (2011). Maybe the teacher was aware of how assemblages can create barriers to learning, and may have been trying to adjust the "child--hearing aid--background noise" assemblage in a way that benefitted the child, using her powerful status to create a better "fit" for him. However, the assemblage is more complicated than just the three aspects of child, hearing aid, and background noise. There are countless other aspects

making up interacting assemblages in which the importance of different constituent parts wax and wane. The teacher might see the child, note his difference to the “norm” and try to create a more enabling environment for him without fully understanding the other important parts of the assemblage that she is disrupting (for better or worse). We might speculate, for example, that the child in question could have chosen that position because it offers a good position to see the teacher’s body language and lip-pattern. Or, he may have wanted to sit next to his friend, or liked the position because it was warm, or because he had a good view of his favourite picture. The child’s attempt to fit, or to create a smoother space, may have been disrupted by the adult’s misguided attempt to do the same.

The above example shows that the teacher has the power to move children’s bodies around. This in turn might contribute to a culture in which children (feel that they) are not in control of their own bodies. Secondly, it highlights that child as fundamentally different from the other children - not “normal” (Davis, 1995). Perhaps other children found it hard to see or hear the teacher, children whose learning environment could have been improved. But these were overlooked in favour of a child with a visible difference: a hearing aid. Of course, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with “doing things differently” (Hansen & Philo, 2006), and we should be aiming for a world in which people’s ways of doing things differently are normal. I have seen this practice, to some extent, at gatherings of (primarily disabled) people with an interest in disability studies. I have attended conferences, for example, where attendees were explicitly told by the convenor that bodies being and acting “differently” was embraced: sitting on the floor, or on a chair at a table or without a table, or standing, sitting within the circle or outside of it; these were all explicitly presented as “acceptable” ways in which to exist in that space. At least one participant openly requested an “adjustment” to the ways people participated which would enable her to better take part. However, in that adult-only setting, no-one singled out another person as requiring adjustments. The organisers made some adjustments proactively but crucially, people should be able to disclose their “access requirements” to whomever they wanted at the time and place that they wanted (or not at all) and still be included.

The previous chapter explored some of the issues around d/Deafness which are worth returning to here. In particular, using d/Deaf epistemology we can approach the teacher's movement of a child's body from a different perspective. O'Brien (2020) has shown how deaf people make adjustments to their environment to improve their experience in it (pp. 39-40). Maybe the same happened here: for example, the deaf child may have chosen to sit in that position for reasons unrelated to his impairment or barriers in the classroom. Maybe he wanted to sit near his friends, or perhaps he felt further from the scrutiny of the teacher by getting further away from her. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the teacher's "choreography" of the students comes with a responsibility to consider the ways in which power relationships are inscribed and re-inscribed. It positions the teacher as an authority on children's embodiment, reinforcing the idea that professionals know best for children.

I should be clear that this teacher was probably doing their best with the resources and knowledge that they had: this is not an individual problem but a systemic one that continues to rely on the myth of the normal child (Baglieri, et al, 2011). For example, some elements of a classroom, such as the furniture, are obviously designed for a typical child, rather than a typical adult. When I visited Harbour View Primary School, I was reminded of the first time I entered a primary classroom as an adult and was astonished by how small the chairs were. Many others have undoubtedly experienced this phenomenon of experiencing "child-sized" chairs and feeling surprised or disconcerted by them feeling smaller than they remember from their own childhood. Of course, this is to take a view of size as absolute and objective rather than relational or experienced. While the chairs might not have shrunk in relation to the rest of the room, the experience of sitting on one at my current height, weight and size is quite different from my memories of the experience of sitting on a similar chair at the age of five when I was shorter, lighter and smaller. The apparently mundane truism that adults and children experience children's chairs differently contains many important ideas and assumptions that reflect and recreate how assemblages enable or disable people, including my own assumptions about my embodied experience being typical.

In the classroom at Harbour View, there was no question that children needed appropriately sized furniture. No-one had to make any special requests to

ensure that child-sized chairs were provided because it was simply taken for granted. Yet stories from disabled friends, colleagues and acquaintances suggest that the process of getting “assistive technology”, “adaptive equipment” or other types of support to remove disabling barriers at all levels of education is at best slow and bureaucratic and at worst impossible (Hansen, 2002, p. 119; Hannam-Swain, 2017). The obvious reason for the difference is the expectation of normalcy that has been widely discussed in disability studies (Davis, 1995; Mallett, Ogden & Slater, 2016; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009). Baglieri et al (2011) state that they aim to unravel the myth of the normal child and to “question school organization, personnel, and practices that perpetuate the damaging myth of normal/average/ordinary/typical/standard children” and “disrupt notions of what constitutes a “‘normal’ body/mind” (p. 2148). This normalcy goes into everything a school does. A mainstream school might expect most five-year-old pupils, for example, to be around 108cm (World Health Organization, 2006, p. 30). However, the usefulness of growth charts has even been questioned by medical professionals (Binns & Lee, 2006).

Of course, height is far from the only bodily difference that might make typical chairs unsuitable: weight, body shape, mobility of arms or legs, experience of pain or sensory issues, ability to hold an upright position, and many more might make the chair-child-classroom assemblage far more problematic. Yet all children were expected to use the chairs without a problem. Clearly, then, the classroom is designed for a “typical” child, with specialist aids or support brought in when a child presents a challenge to the status quo. This then reinforces the idea that a certain type of body/mind is “normal” for children, perpetuating the idea of normalcy which works to create a bureaucratic category. As Fitzsimons (2017) argues, “approaching accessibility as a compensatory measure can distract from other aspects of the complex relationships between space design and the experiences of disability” (p. 88). In other words, thinking of disability and the physical environment as just a matter of making adjustments for individual people can flatten out the complexities of spatial assemblages, the realities of doing things differently and more imaginative ways to think about bodies in space. This, Fitzsimons argues, could help every body reach the “full spectrum of bodily capacities” (p. 88).

### 6.3.1. Toilet space

Inspired by Slater, Jones and Procter (2018, 2019), I wanted to get the opinions of children about their toilets. I was reluctant to use observation to see how children experienced toilet spaces. Despite the very open toilets in the Reception class area, I did not want to invade children's privacy, nor to (be seen to) act inappropriately. I did not think it was appropriate to take photographs of children while they were in the toilet spaces, even if they were not actually going to the toilet. Additionally, none of the children took any photographs of toilet spaces when they were given the tablet computer to take photographs of whatever they wanted. I did not want to pressure them to do so, both for concerns about the privacy of other children and because I wanted to let them choose what was important to them. I had hoped that children might have photographed the toilets (without anybody being visible/identifiable) but this did not happen. This in itself was an interesting finding: children were uninterested in, or actively against, photographing the toilets. This left me with a dilemma: how could I find out the views of children around this important but taboo subject in an appropriate way? The literature suggests that "What children choose to do in relation to school toilets – to comply or to protest – is political in that it is their embodied expression of everyday power struggles" (Burton, 2013 p. 16). This important space within schools is often overlooked or disregarded as taboo, and yet for some children, including (or especially) those labelled as having SEND and/or those in an Early Years setting, the power of toilets as a civilising space is clearly an important one (Slater et al., 2017, 2018).

When I brought out the model rooms, in part to get children's perspectives of the toilet space, the toilet room was the least used – children generally ignored it and focused on the others. The toilet images provoked some amusement: in a group activity one child picked up a picture of a person defecating (Figure 71) and laughed at it, with some other children pointing and joining in the laughing. Then another child put the picture in the "correct" room - the box decorated to look like a row of toilet cubicles. Although the children generally did not speak about toilets, it seemed they had opinions and experiences worth paying attention to. Firstly, the taboo nature of the discussion was evident; secondly there was clearly a desire from at least some children to demonstrate the "correct" place for a paper person to poo—in the right place at the right time--in



a paper toilet cubicle. It was clear that some pupils, at least, knew that food “should” be in the canteen, and pooing “should” be in the toilet.



*Figure 71 A photo of a printed picture of a person defecating on the toilet.*

*It has been placed in the model room with toilet stalls.*

Despite my initial reservation about using observations, I came to realise that much of the reason for this doubt was my ongoing concern about how much children were already observed in the minutiae of their lives at school, with

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 72 Photographs of Ruby*

*A series of six photographs shows a child called Ruby having a snack, pouring out a drink, washing up cups and then washing and drying hand (STA, 2014, p. 12)*

photographic records made (see the methodology chapter for more discussion of this). In official guidance, although this does not extend to the use of the toilet, it is very much accepted to observe and record children washing their hands after eating as evidence of meeting the ELG 5: Health and self-care (STA, 2014). For example, Figure 72 shows an example of the evidence collected of a child named Ruby. Although there are no photographs shown of this child washing their hands after using the toilet, the staff record “Ruby’s teacher checks with the rest of the team that Ruby is managing the toilet independently” (STA, 2014, p. 12). Similarly, another observation states: “After going to the toilet, Harry can independently wash his own hands following the instructions on the wall. He also regularly reminds other class members” (STA, 2014, p. 8) – a clear example of not only self-surveillance but of horizontal surveillance of other children. I felt that I needed to trouble this one-way observation and observe the assemblages in whole and in parts, rather than focusing on the children’s activities without the context of the adult rules in place. Before I introduce my observations, however, it is worth setting the scene around the toilets at Harbour View.

The Reception children's toilets and sinks, separated into boys' and girls', were in rooms in the corner of the open plan teaching area, so that children could access them without leaving the electronically locked area. My own initial observations focused on the size and height of the fixtures and fittings: "the toilets and sinks themselves are small [and low down] – to be used by a "typical" child. Soap and hand towels are put at a height that children are expected to be able to reach" (my field notes). This is a good example of a time when my adult status affected my view of this space designed for children to use. I saw that the toilets were designed (by architects and builders, guided by rules and regulations) for a "typical" child, and I was aware that the idea of a "typical" child is highly contested, and not an objective truth (as indicated by the scare quotes in my field notes). Yet my own embodied experience was that the toilets and the sinks would have been too small for me to comfortably use: a body-environment assemblage, or misfit (Garland-Thomson, 2011). And of course, why would they be designed for an adult? Thorne (1993) observed that schools have two sets of furniture, for children and adults respectively, including in the toilets, and states, "I knew I had crossed more fully into kids' spaces when the sense of scale diminished, and I felt too large" (1993). In this way, despite my knowledge that these toilets were "normal" sized for "normal" children, my embodied experience is that they were small and not for me.

My further observations highlighted other ways in which height is used: the layout is not just designed to be child-sized but also so that adults could keep an eye on children:

But these toilets are also designed for adults to be able to watch and supervise children. The door of each toilet stall only reaches to about 5 feet high – certainly I, at 5'3" [1.6m], would be able to look into the toilet stall over the closed door if I was next to it. As well as being able to look into each stall from inside the toilet room, there is a window that looks into the room. There is no option for children to be completely private, away from adults' eyes. (Field notes)

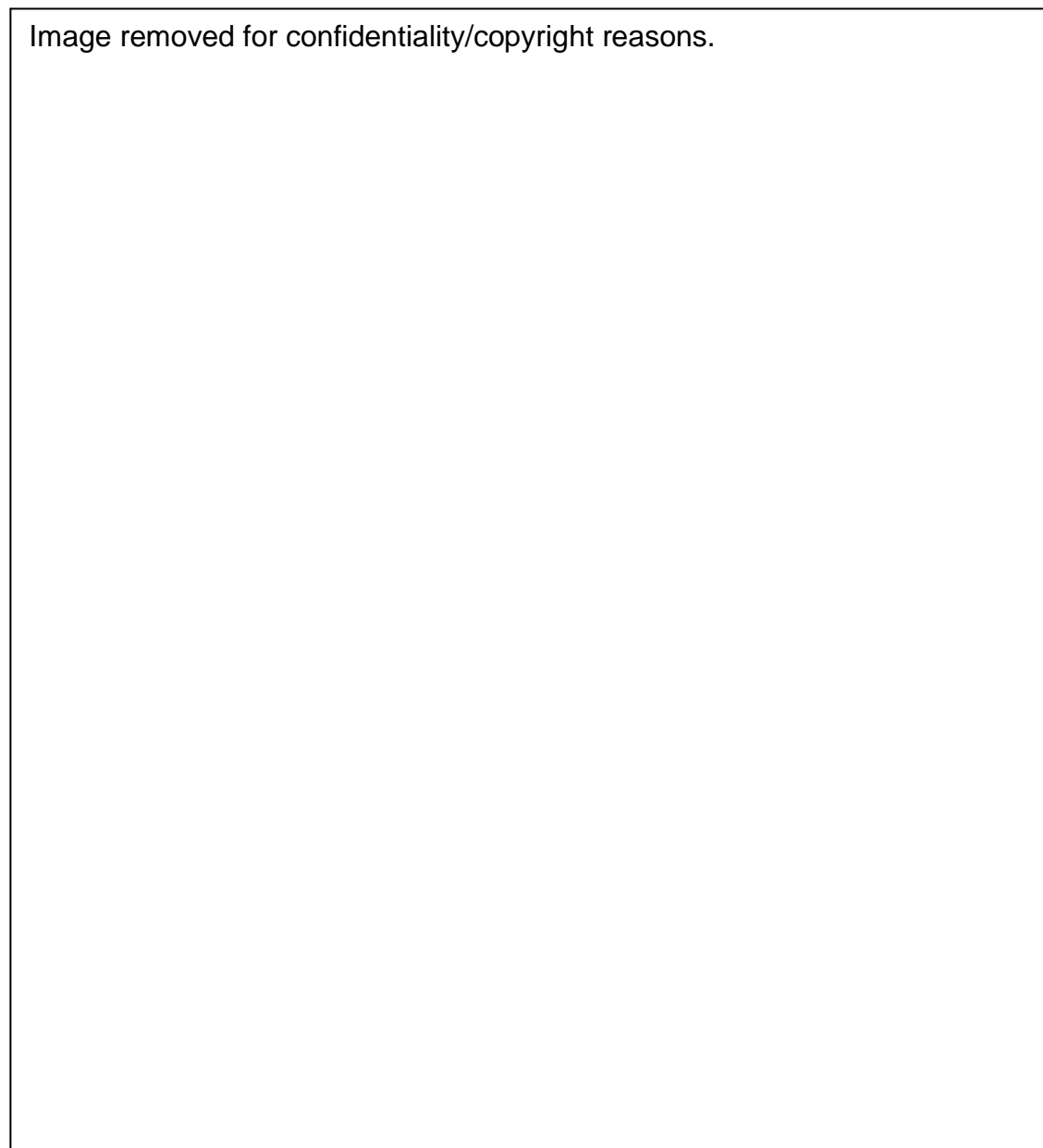
Although it would be unthinkable for adults' toilets to be so open, the kind of arrangement found at Harbour View has been promoted in government guidance as making "passive supervision" of children easier (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2007, p. 7). This architectural openness works with "dominant discourses operating in the preschool [which] constitute some children as 'problem bodies' apparently requiring (and justifying) direct intervention" (Millei & Cliff, 2014, p. 244). Certainly, the architecture of the Reception toilets at Harbour View led to an open feel between the toilets and the classroom. They felt like an extension of the (incomplete) surveillance of the classroom (Gallagher, 2010) rather than a separate room, especially as the door was often open or ajar (see Figures 73 and 74). As I will go on to explain,

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 73 Entrance to the boys' toilets.*

*Note the windows both low down and high up on the door, and the high windows along the wall, which look onto the toilet cubicles (the toilets themselves were visible through the high window if the if the cubicle doors were visible through the high window if the if the cubicle doors were open). Photograph 246*

this contributed to the positioning of certain bodies being problems sometimes needing intervention.



*Figure 74 The boys' toilets.*

*On the right is the door to the boys' toilet. The door is of light-coloured wood, with a black footplate and vent; two window panels one above the other, and next to each is a finger plate - one a few feet off the ground, the other around six inches above that. The upper window panel of the door has a laminated sign saying "Boys' Toilets" above a photo of a brown-skinned child and a white child both with short hair. The door is ajar and has a black fingerguard all the way down the hinged side. Behind the door, part of a toilet cubicle is just visible. To the left of the door is a wall with a shelving unit in front of it. At adult eye height there is a window that looks into the room (photo taken by me).*

Like other schools, Harbour View is bound and guided by statutory guidance on the building, design and layout of toilets, and other associated documents including, for schools in England, The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012 (SPRs) which "apply to all existing and new schools maintained by a local

authority” (DfE, 2015, p. 4). Before the SPRs came into force in 2012, guidance by the (then) DfES as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) (2007) programme included best practice for designing and building school toilets<sup>12</sup>. Although the 2007 DfES guidance discusses children’s privacy in toilets, in one Welsh questionnaire, less than half of primary school aged children said they were always able to “close and lock the toilet door” at school (Barnes & Maddocks, 2001, p. 86). This highlights a clear gap between policy and practice. It also shows one way that assemblages of power and regulation are dispersed through legal and statutory means.

Despite this evident concern with the architecture of school toilets, these spaces are “a rarely analysed space in preschools” (Millei & Cliff, 2014). The limited body of literature on school toilets “perpetuates the dominant structures of ‘normalcy’ that teach us about the ‘right’, ‘ideal’ and ‘normal’ way of being child/adult/human” (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018, p. 952) in relation to development bodies, gender, disability, behaviour and so on. A useful literature review identified the importance of toilets as space of refuge for children away from surveillance by adults (Burton, 2013, p. 10), which supports Gallagher’s (2010) conception of the school as a site of incomplete surveillance: toilets can be an escape from surveillance. This, Millei and Cliff argue, should cause us to question the extent to which school toilets should be understood “as forming a part of a modern (disciplinary) institution”, despite their role in surveilling, disciplining and normalising practices (p. 244). Nevertheless, Burton (2013) suggests that “what children choose to do in relation to school toilets – to comply or to protest – is political in that it is their embodied expression of everyday power struggles” (p. 16). When I entered Harbour View, my pre-existing opinion was that adults surveilled and controlled children’s bodies, in direct and indirect ways, through toilets, and that children resisted these rules and regulations.

This, however, does not speak to the complexity of the social and cultural norms around toilets. Nor does it allow for the subtleties and nuances around who is in a position of relative power and the shifting nature of these power

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<sup>12</sup> Although this programme funded secondary schools, DfES (2007) says that “the specifications and solutions may also apply to other educational buildings” (p.4).

relationships. I soon realised that my observations around school toilets did not fit into neat binaries of adult/child, powerful/powerless, comply/protest, surveilled/hidden. Rather, about and around the toilets there were myriad interacting assemblages waxing and waning and intersecting with each other. As Burton (2013) states:

Toilets can be places of **refuge** from the adult controlled environment; a **social** space for children only. This can result in conflict with adults . . . In fact, the site of this **battleground** is incidental, as what is at issue is not the toilet facility but an unmet need in the absence of other enclosed, private communal spaces to offer children **a break from the unrelenting surveillance** of the school (p. 10 [emphasis added])

This quote highlights several important points, all centring on the idea of toilets as a child-only space. Firstly, that toilets can be a “refuge” from adult control; secondly that these adult-free spaces can be social; thirdly that toilets can become a “battleground” in which children’s and adults’ desires or intentions can clash; and finally, that toilets are often the ONLY space that has been designed by adults to be adult-free space where children can escape the relentless surveillance of the school. On the latter point, the literature suggests there are caveats to this. Notable examples include some schools where toilets are explicitly designed to allow for adult surveillance (DfES, 2007, p. 7) and accessible toilets for children who require the personal assistance of an adult: these illustrate that children might continue to be under surveillance in schools. On the other hand, it has been argued that schools are not in fact panoptic but are actually sites of incomplete surveillance (Gallagher, 2010). Schools have been characterised, as per Foucault (1995 [1977]), as a key site of surveillance within society. Gallagher argues that this over-simplifies both Foucault’s conceptions of surveillance and the panopticon, and the ways in which surveillance works in schools. It might therefore be better to understand school toilet surveillance as an extension of wider school surveillance: at times powerful but never complete. Nevertheless, the creep of surveillance into the toilets, with windows at adult-height, meant that at Harbour View, toilets were not the break from relentless surveillance that Burton (2013) describes.

Beyond surveillance, the toilets at Harbour View also represented power struggles in a different way – by making clear the segregation of bodies by (dis)ability, which I will now consider.

### 6.3.2. Toilet segregation: dis/ability and child/adult binaries

The school has an accessible toilet for use by children in any year group, and they say they will meet children's needs in relation to equipment as best as they can, subject to funding (Harbour View school website). This is not intended as criticism of the school per se, but of the wider ways in which children are at the mercy of funding (from Local Authorities, the National Health Service, social services, etc). For example, Bird (2020) reports on a child in Wales, Imogen Ashwell-Lewis, who was unable to move from her old primary school to any other primary school in her home county of Monmouthshire because none had a toilet that was accessible to her. Her mother says that for 20 months (as of February 2020), she had to be home-schooled because of this (Bird, 2020). This is a clear example of a time in which a lack of suitable toilets had a profound impact on a child's life beyond the use of toilets themselves: in her mother's words, being able to go to a suitable school is "not just about learning – it's about the friends you make and the social skills you learn too" (Hill, 2019). While children who use a "normal" toilet can go to any school of their choosing, children who use accessible toilets are at the mercy of "Mr Reasonable" - the "creation of systems which prioritise certain ways of being over and above others," with a focus on normality and productivity to serve neoliberalism – the kind of person who decides what is "reasonable" and what is not (Slater, 2015, p.10). Children like Imogen and her family must argue their case, sometimes in front of a tribunal (Bird, 2020) (see also Terrell and Hannam-Swain, forthcoming 2022) composed, we can imagine, of various Mr Reasonables, arguing that the "reasonable adjustments" they request are, in fact, reasonable.

There was no accessible toilet in the Reception toilets. The space too small for transferring from a wheelchair, there were no grab rails, no "paddle" flush handle and no hoisting equipment, to mention just some of the features that make a space more accessible (Hanson, Bichard & Greed, 2007, pp. 26-47). While it is perhaps obvious – and undoubtedly important – to point out the difficulties this could create for many disabled pupils, I would like to take this a



bit further, drawing on Hansen and Philo (2006) to consider how this space can be considered a “non-disabled space” in which some disabled bodies are made to feel unwelcome while also making some non-disabled bodies feel welcome. They argue that:

Such spaces are rarely discussed in terms of how and why they accept the appearances and conducts of the non-disabled, nor in terms of what they offer to ‘the mobile’, ‘the sighted’, ‘the hearing’ or ‘the able’. The conformity of such spaces to the non-disabled remains almost entirely unquestioned, and in effect the non-disabled remain ‘unmarked’ in much the same way that white people are commonly unmarked, set outside of racial or ethnic categories, in mainstream Western localities. (p. 496)

In other words, we might gain new insights by not just considering how certain toilets are inaccessible and/or unwelcoming to some disabled people, but also how precisely they are accessible and/or welcoming to some non-disabled people. I have been careful to say “some” disabled people and “some” non-disabled people because of course there is no one-size-fits-all approach to accessibility. As Hansen and Philo point out, some disabled people are sometimes accepted into non-disabled spaces “provisionally” – because their embodiment is close enough to the “norm” that they are unmarked (p. 499-500). For these reasons, my discussion of children’s use of the toilets focuses relatively little on physical accessibility and more on behaviours that are accepted as normal (or not) in and around the toilet.

As well as having separate male/female and accessible/inaccessible toilets, it was an accepted, unquestioned fact that toilets are segregated also by adult and child status at Harbour View, as in other schools. In her reconsideration of the “least adult role” in childhood studies, Atkinson (2019) explains that her attempt to be “least adult” in her fieldwork with children did not work for a few reasons, including the fact that she used the adult toilets and could use the toilet without asking for permission. Despite these observations being, in her own words, “banal”, they are nevertheless profound, reflecting “the adult/child binary [which] is one of the most rigid organisational structures in our society, and one that is perhaps most vehemently maintained within the space of the school” (Atkinson, 2019, citing Barker & Smith, 2001; Holloway et al., 2018). This simple insight gave voice to something I had never considered before: for many children, the first segregated toilets they encounter are at nursery or

school: “developmental discourse in relation to the toilet is particularly prevalent at the time that most children move from the institution of the family or home to that of the state (nursery/kindergarten/pre-school/school)” (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2019, p. 413). As the literature review demonstrated, writing on school toilets tends to support (implicitly or explicitly) normative ideas about child development but also about how the world *is* or *should be*.

These separations were so ingrained that I felt quite uncomfortable trying to question it. To ask outright, for example, “why don’t teachers use these [children’s] toilets?” felt like inviting scrutiny from adults about my reasons for asking such questions, and I always feared that this would be seen as a “safe-guarding” concern. Although I felt (and continue to feel) justified in academic curiosity about embodied toilet experiences, I was worried that I would not be able to explain this to teachers and other adults at the school, knowing as I did that that education professionals “remain distant from children’s bodily experiences” (Millei & Cliff, 2014, p. 244) and see toilets primarily through a developmental lens. I was also concerned that my interest in children’s embodied experiences of toilets would add to the surveillance that children (and especially disabled children) feel in relation to toilets. I did not want them to feel uncomfortable or that I was watching them in a private space. It is probably telling that I was concerned primarily about how I would be seen by adults, and only secondarily how my research might impact on children. Yet I was interested in children’s understandings of the reasons for the segregations of bodies into different toilets, as well as more general experiences of toilets. As explored above, however, it seemed that children’s responses in relation to toilets were mostly repeating back ideas about the “correct” figure (the person pooing) was in the “correct” place” (the toilet). This may well demonstrate that the strong messaging from the school, that bodies must be in the “right place at the right time”, had been successful. Unfortunately, with limited data directly from pupils, I relied mostly on my observations which I explore further next.

### 6.3.3. Leaky bodies

Despite having limited data directly from pupils about their toilet experiences, I collected valuable observations of how toilets, weeing and pooing were understood in the complex assemblage of classroom life. Before going into

these observations, it is worth considering in further depth some of the important academic background to ideas about leakiness. In the literature review I considered some of the theories around the “‘leaking, lacking and excessive’ bodies of disabled children” (Goodley & Runswick-Cole 2013, p. 1), borrowing from Shildrick’s (1999) ideas of “leakage, excess, lack or displacement”. This seems particularly germane in the Early Years classroom, where adults have certain expectations of children’s development in relation to containing leaks. Bodies which “fail” at containment in an embodied and literal sense can be seen as “leaking”. Such “leaky bodies”, those which fail to contain bodily fluids for example, are therefore seen as a problem (Liddiard & Slater, 2017; Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018 & 2019). For (dis)abled children, though, they are still on the borderline of being a “problem” – as they are expected to be able to develop out of this state of leakiness into adult bodies which properly contain. There is always the spectre, however, of the future adult body which fails at such containment. I build upon Liddiard and Slater (2017) who argue that (adult) “impaired bodies which spill, exceed and leak are . . . precarious, threatening, and problematic” (p. 330). Yet there is also possibility in this leakage: in *Testo Junkie* Preciado “offers a dynamic account of ideas coalescing, pooling together, and flowing with new and various combinations”, taking the metaphor of “waves” of feminism which “crash together, bubbling, shimmering” (Evans, 2018, p. 296). Preciado’s account of bodily feminism is overtly sexual; while this might not immediately seem to apply to children, as Liddiard and Slater (2017) argue, there is often a close connection between the denial of sexual selfhood and the denial of adulthood to some disabled bodies.

While this chapter focuses on the experiences of children, I want to keep in mind the ways in which adult female bodies have been especially subject to ideas around their failure to contain. It is important here to note that people of various genders menstruate (Frank, 2020), breast/chest-feed (MacDonald, Noel-Weiss, West, Walks, Biener, Kibbe & Myler, 2016), and/or experience miscarriage (MacDonald et al, 2016; Ellis, Wojnar & Pettinato, 2015). Nevertheless, these have historically been, and often remain, seen as “female” or “women’s” experiences, often theorised through feminist classics, as Frost (2007) does in relation to miscarriage. Menstruation “has been regarded as

evidence of women's inherent lack of control of the body and, by extension, of the self. In other words, women, unlike the self-contained and self-containing men, leaked" (Shildrick, 1994, p. 25-6). The leaky female body is also seen as potentially polluting, when undertaking the "dirty work" of breast-feeding in public (Battersby, 2007). Yet the blanket "breast is best" message from health professionals also denies "non-expert" embodied opinions, which are themselves seen as "polluting" the purity of the promotion of breast-feeding. However, there have also been times when the "male" body has come under scrutiny for leakiness, in ways that are pathologised: "lapses in mental and physical self-control such as . . . blushing, crying, exhaustion, breathlessness, masturbation, melancholy, lack of confidence, extreme sensitivity, and self-consciousness" (Stephens, 2008, pp 421-22).

Some literature also highlights the experience of menstruating in primary school, and the practical barriers to changing sanitary pads (Kehily, 2015). Again, however, the focus appears to be on the social and cultural meanings of these experiences (taboos and etiquette about menstruation and puberty, for example). While these are undoubtedly important, there remains less of a focus on the specifics of the bodily assemblages and geographies of these embodied experiences.

One process that everyone experiences in some form is urination. Despite the universality of urinating, there remains gendered aspects, including the pathologisation of "female urinary incontinence", which is defined as a urinary leakage that is involuntary or inappropriate (Jordan, 2007, p. 206). The use of the term *involuntary* clearly shows the importance to medical experts of a person controlling their body, while *inappropriate* has social implications - who decides when and where is appropriate to urinate? Jordan explains how incontinence is seen in medical literature as a deviation from the norm of a self-contained, self-controlled body. It specifically focuses on the failure of female bodies to contain, and the treatment recommended aims to regain control of the bladder. This advice "upholds a notion of womanhood as . . . based on the inevitability of physical (and social?) decline" (p. 214). While incontinence in (older) women is seen as decline, this does not consider people who have not (yet) learned to contain: many children and disabled people urinate involuntarily

or at “inappropriate” times/places. Yet only adults are labelled “incontinent”, while younger children failing to contain are seen as being on a journey towards the normal, expected behaviour around urinating. It also does not consider people who need assistance to contain “appropriately”, such as “Pete” who as a child:

wouldn't drink so I wouldn't need the toilet especially at night as the regular [residential] school nurses used to threaten to put you in an incontinence urinary sheath or in an incontinent pad. I wasn't incontinent but if you needed more than one wee in the night then using one of these things was discussed ... (Liddiard & Slater, 2017, p. 327)

As discussed elsewhere throughout this dissertation, the EYFS framework focuses on the normative stages of development for a child from birth to five, and the expectation of a child's readiness for starting Key Stage 1. As such, there is a mixture of what might be considered more typical academic learning, such as numbers and letters, along with “developmental” issues such as toilet training. Children's bodies containing their fluids is posited very clearly as a matter of typical physical development in guidance. One ELG includes children of 40-60 months being able to “manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including . . . going to the toilet independently” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 27). Independence, therefore, is also a key concept in ideas about proper toilet use. What this fails to consider is the ways in which toilets are used as a civilising space (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018). Part of this civilising process includes dictating when students can use the toilet. Davis, Watson & Cunningham-Burley (2017), for example, describe a special school where each child would be “toiletted” before going home, meaning that “children were rarely given a choice about when they went to the toilet in the afternoon and how they governed their own bodily practices” (p. 223). This creates a mixed and complex assemblage in which children find themselves: on the one hand, specific embodied toilet experiences (shitting, pissing) are largely ignored apart from to contain and control them; on the other hand, adults intervene in children's experiences (through denying them agency over their needs, for example) in a way that seems both physically “hands-off” yet has real embodied consequences for the children.

#### 6.3.4. “They’ve wet themselves”: Toilets and the Early Learning Goals

A clear example of the embodied consequences of toilet assemblages in practice comes from one of my observations in the Harbour View Reception class:

As the pupils start various activities (playing in the “salon”, hiding in a den, running around and building things), I head back [to the area near the toilets], where I can hear an adult in reception class 2 saying, “Go to the toilet!” It is quite loud, so it attracts the attention of both me and other adults and children, who look towards the person shouting. A child is standing in front of the adult, looking embarrassed.

“You asked me before!” Continues the adult.

The child half-walks, half-runs through reception class 1, towards the toilets.

“I think [they’ve] wet [themselves],” comments the same adult to another adult, while standing in the middle of the classroom. (My field notes.)

This short event, no more than a few minutes long, stuck with me. Rather than feeling more empathy with the adults involved, as might be expected (as most of the adults were like me in age, gender and ethnicity), I felt a deep empathy with the child. They looked embarrassed and panicked, perhaps caught between the need to go to the toilet and the concern with asking permission. It reminded me of times when I had been “caught short” and felt ashamed for my “failure” to contain.

Here, the adult’s use of the generic terms “going to the toilet” and “wetting oneself” reflect the typical wording used by documents such as *Development Matters*, which states that children aged 40-60 months should be “usually dry and clean during the day” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 27). This wording demonstrates education practitioners’ distance from bodily practices observed by Millei and Cliff (2014, p. 244): rather than using terms which explicitly bring the body or bodily fluids to mind, *Development Matters* uses the euphemistic “hygiene and personal needs” and “going to the toilet” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012). Like the term “personal care”, “personal needs” does not address the embodiment of toilet activities. Similarly, “dry and clean” does not explicitly state that it refers to (lack of) bodily excretions. On one hand, we might consider that this euphemistic language ensures the child’s dignity, rather than using taboo

words that explicitly refer to taboo bodily functions and substances. Yet on the other hand, this euphemistic language still refers to the inescapable fact that “we all shit and piss” (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018, p. 951) - it is a normal, everyday occurrence. The document could easily have used the child-friendly terms “wee”, “poo”, “wiping bottom”, “wetting yourself” or even the more formal and scientific sounding “urination” and “defecation”. What difference does it make to hide bodily fluids (or, at least, talking about them) behind a veil of respectability when everyone experiences them every day?

Rather than this language being deployed to protect the dignity of the children involved, it reinforces ideas about what is unacceptable, shameful and/or embarrassing: a failure to contain (Liddiard & Slater, 2017). Specifically, a child has “failed” to contain when they “go to the toilet” in the wrong place and/or at the wrong time. Thus, the child in the observation above can be seen to have “failed” in two ways: spatially and temporally. Spatially, they have urinated in the wrong place, both in the wrong room (not the bathroom) and with their clothes still on (not in the toilet). Temporally, they have urinated too early (before they reached the toilet) and too late (after the adult had already told them to go) and, as Hansen & Philo (2007) point out, the conditional acceptance of certain non-normative bodies is reliant as much on ideas about managing time as space. The use of the word “clean” emphasises not the entire process - involving leakiness, messiness and fluids - but the desired result: the successful containment and control of leaks. Rather than using more child-friendly terms, they have employed euphemistic language that overlooks any messiness.

The importance of *independent* containment and control is also expressed in the ELG for children aged 40-60+ months: children “manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently” (p. 27). We might imagine that “independent” in this sense means a pupil using the toilet without the support of an adult. Yet it has been argued that:

the disabled toilet and its attendant controversies shows us something more about the nature of “dependency”; it flags the possibility that autonomy may not, in itself, be without limits as a desirable social goal—not just for the disabled [*sic*], but for people in general (Serlin, 2017, p. 218).

Disability studies has taken up the mantle of troubling the social goal of independence and questioned the “traditional meaning of ‘independent’ as doing things without assistance” (Woodin, 2006, p.6). The Independent Living Movement and Centres for Independent living state that “independence is not linked to the physical or intellectual capacity to care for oneself without assistance; independence is created by having assistance when and how one requires it” (Brisenden, 1989, cited in Morris, 2004). Nevertheless, the traditional idea of doing things without the assistance of others is echoed in documents such as the SENDCoP (DfE, 2014) which reflects neoliberal ideas of preparing children for a “successful transition to adulthood” in modern Britain with British values (Burch, 2017). This idea of development as learning to contain while growing into a “successful” adult is rarely challenged in existing literature around school toilets, which instead “expects and prioritises an independent toilet user by a certain age, thus excluding some disabled children and others who may require assistance to use the toilet throughout life” (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018, p. 952).

To take this a step further: no-one goes to the toilet independently. By this, I mean that the complex embodied experience of going to the toilet is, like everything else, connected to people, places, things and time in interlocking and ever-changing assemblages. This argument has been around for nearly 30 years in relation to disabled people using “special apparatus such as wheelchairs, ramps or other artificial aids”: “Well yes,” Oliver (1993a) states, adding rhetorically, “don’t we all use artificial aids of one kind or another[?]; try eating your dinner without a knife and fork or going to Australia without an aeroplane” (p. 163).

In school toilets, for example, someone else has built the bathroom stalls and installed a lavatory and sinks; another person cleans up and restocks the soap, toilet paper and hand towels, the last step in a long and complex supply chain. Of course, much of this work seems disembodied: we might know that a person has been involved, but their body is not there in front of us. A cleaner restocking toilet paper is sometimes invisible and undervalued, viewed as dirty and lowly women’s work (Soni-Sinha & Yates, 2013). Despite the cleaner experiencing their job in an embodied way, for the user of the toilet this kind of dependence



seems less of a shared embodied experience. When we do not share a space at the same time as another human body, this might feel less embodied and therefore that we are less dependent.

At other times, this dependence on others might seem more embodied: perhaps we find ourselves in a public toilet with no loo paper and we call to a friend or stranger to pass some under the door; or we have trouble reziping our clothing and we ask friendly strangers to help us (both of which I have witnessed in women's toilets). Once I found myself stuck in a toilet cubicle in primary school when the lock was too stiff for me to open; I felt such relief when an older girl heard me shouting, shimmied under the door of the stall, helped me out and then gave me a hug of reassurance. These are more personal, intimate examples of dependence upon other people because they involved close physical contact with someone, yet they might not carry the same stigma of depending on other people to, for example, wipe your bum. Here we find a contradiction: we think of full adult status as belonging to people who are independent, but we change the meaning of "independence" depending on whether the person already has full adult status *and* whether we consider the assistance to be routine/natural or unusual. A disabled person or a child who needs support from another person to redress after using the toilet is not seen as independent; a non-disabled adult doing the same still retains their full adult status, their need in that moment being an aberration, because they normally do not need that assistance.

So, when I (an adult with the attendant privileges) went to the toilet at Harbour View, I did not do so "independently". I depended upon my shoes to protect my feet as I walked; I depended upon my staff "fob" to let me out of the locked doors of the classroom; I depended upon the architects and builders who designed and built these toilets; I depended upon the cleaners that made it a safe, hygienic place to be; I depended upon the care-taker who ensured that blockages had been cleared; I depended upon the friendly member of staff who pointed me where to go when I got lost; I depended upon the optician who had prescribed my glasses to see where I was going. I do not say these things to be obtuse but to clarify that everyone goes to the toilet interdependently via complex social, cultural and physical infrastructures. Butler (2015), writing about

the rights and possibilities of mobilisation and assembly, uses the “broad claim” from disability studies--that all bodies require support to move” to argue that:

If we are on the streets, it is because we are bodies that require public forms of support to stand and move, and to live a life that matters” [infrastructure supports the] “right of the disabled [*sic*] to walk, to have pavements and machines that make it possible. (p. 138)

This supports Butler’s argument that the public funding of such infrastructure (including, one assumes, accessible toilets in schools) is not only a right of the body itself, but it is also a precondition for other rights such as assembly. How can we protest if we can’t piss? This is not to argue that we are all equally dependent on other people – clearly, some people’s needs are met more than others in different situations. However, it troubles the idea that only some people are dependent on others.

We can assume that this adult was exasperated because the child at this age should, according to these guidelines, “manage” their toilet needs “successfully” and “independently” and remain “dry.” Yet the guidelines do nod towards the ways in which success in this area depends upon wider assemblages. They state that to create positive relationships in this area, adults should, “acknowledge and encourage children’s efforts to manage their personal needs” and give children “opportunities to talk about how their bodies feel” (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 27). This adult could have approached the situation with these things in mind: they could have said, gently, sensitively and without judgement, “you feel like you need a wee? That’s ok! Off you go” and offered help if the child wanted it. I want to be clear that this is not about this particular adult; this is not simply a call for education practitioners to have more training in this area (although that might help). Rather, it reflects the adult’s wider concerns about children’s embodied toilet experiences and can therefore teach us something about adult-child-toilet assemblages. The adult was more concerned about certain parts of Early Years guidance focusing on containment and independence, rather than the parts that focus on understanding and support. Furthermore, it was clear that this child realised that they had peed in the “wrong place” (not in a toilet) – reflecting the model rooms incident described above, where children put the model pooing man in the model toilet room.

However, not all children were so quick to follow the rules about what toilet rooms are for, as I will now explore.

#### 6.3.5. What are toilets for? Eating in the toilet

One example of a child using the toilet space for the “wrong” reasons was Inaya. It was lunchtime, and Inaya was eating a sandwich while walking around the classroom. This was discouraged by an adult, who wanted this pupil to sit down as the other children were doing. Suddenly there was a small commotion by the threshold between the main classroom and the toilets: Inaya was evidently trying to walk into the toilet with a sandwich in hand. The adult tried to position herself at the toilet entrance, so that Inaya could not walk in. Inaya was unhappy about this and tried to push past. I did not see how this ended because I needed to be with other children in a different area. I also did not know why Inaya was trying to take the sandwich into the toilet. The most likely explanation, to me, was simply needing to use the toilet and not thinking about putting the sandwich down before doing so. Perhaps Inaya did not want to leave the sandwich behind in case somebody else ate it. Perhaps the toilet environment was more suitable (maybe the light was better, or it was quieter), reflecting children’s unmet need to escape constant surveillance (Burton, 2010), but I did not see anyone attempt to ask or clarify this with Inaya.

This struck me as an interesting event, bringing together the ideas about development, the “civilising” power of toilets and of classrooms, and the embodied surveillance and resistance of children’s bodies, especially those labelled with SEND. In this case, normalcy might dictate that people do not eat in the toilet. Yet Inaya’s “normality” was a way of “doing things differently” (Hansen & Philo, 2007) which was not accepted - a form of “conditional inclusion” (Karmiris, 2019). It was as though the school said to Inaya, a child labelled with SEND, “you can be here physically in the same classroom as everyone else, but this is conditional on you behaving normally”. In this case, normal behaviour meant being in the right place at the right time – and adults made clear through their actions that the toilet was the wrong place.

But perhaps wanting to eat in the toilet is not so unusual. In fact, a study of 5000 people in five countries suggest that 12% of adults take food into the toilet

in offices (Initial, 2016). In Japan, a phenomenon known as *benjo-meshi* (*toilet meal*) caught the attention of the media: this was people choosing to eat on their own in the toilet, most commonly as a way of avoiding other people (Takeda, 2016, pp.4-5). This became common enough that some universities provided space for people to eat on their own, and “experts” weighed in to pathologise the behaviour (Tsuji, 2008; Ninomiya, 2011; Sato, 2013, all cited in Takeda, 2016, pp. 4-5). Despite adults’ concern with hygiene, I argue that in fact a child taking their lunch into the toilet illustrates wider problems with education settings, rather than disabled children needing to be “trained” to behave appropriately. As Slater, Jones and Procter (2018) argue, school toilets are connected to ideas of civilisation and therefore to normative, and oppressive, ideas of children developing into normal adults.

There is also tension here with the understanding that children’s imagination and creativity are important to support and develop, and the neo-liberal idea of individual freedom is promoted as a “British value” (Crawford, 2017). This (from my observations) often means children using things for their unintended purpose - a toy doll becomes a “gun” that can shoot at “baddies”. Indeed, this is often encouraged by adults, as reflected in the EYFS which suggests that adults can “model pretending an object is something else” to support a child’s play (Moylett & Stewart, 2012, p. 6). Clearly, however, there are unwritten rules about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to do beyond the invisible boundary between the classroom and the toilet (invisible because the door was nearly always open). Inaya did not know or care that one of the unwritten rules was that sandwiches do not cross that line.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

Adults’ attempts to control the classroom-bodies assemblages are attempts at striation: mapping the space as a form of controlling it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Yet, as we know, maps are not space – they are representations of it. The borders and boundaries that adults map out in the classroom are subjective, and sometimes in direct contradiction with the idea of an “open plan” classroom. As with the use of embodied cognitive tools in the classroom (section 5.4.), children are expected to be free, and explore, and find out things their own way = except when they are not. They should be “free” within the

boundaries given; “explore” without going too far; “find out things” not on their own schedule but on the schedules set by adults, by the Department for Education, by capitalist demands of normal, productive bodies. Schools such as Harbour View can therefore be seen to be teaching children exactly what they need to know to become such productive bodies: boundaries are set by people above you, and you must learn not to breach them. By understanding that leaks can be a source of disruption to hegemonic power, we might begin to see how leaks can be channelled into flows, lines of flight that can help us resist and disrupt oppressive power practices. While leaks do not always run counter to modes of power, they always represent opportunities (Kushinski, 2019). I return to this idea in my conclusion when discussion how adults and children might learn together how to harness this power.

We could see Inaya’s sandwich-toilet incident as a “disorienting intersubjective encounter” which, Karmiris (2019) argues, can be a way to problematise normalcy while imagining other possibilities of being in the world. We should use these encounters to disorient ourselves and our thinking – after all, following a well-worn path never led to new discoveries. However, we should not fall into the trap of seeing disabled people as (only) having value when teaching the non-disabled some lesson about gratitude or seeing the world differently. Instead, we should reconsider the spatial, embodied assemblages from multitudes of angles, remembering that we will never have a full picture. Chandler (2010) urges: “let us trip up in the cracks and dwell in the liminal spaces of disability. These trips may be painful and these in-between spaces may be uncomfortable” (“Disabled identification”, para. 2) – these liminal spaces include boundaries (between, through and around bodies) which are constantly under question. The importance of doing this is that we learn from them: “we will find that we are not alone in these trips. We know things grow in the cracks, flowers and the like” (Chandler, “Disabled identification”, para. 2). I will add to this: that cracks allow leaks and leaks are full of possibilities.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### **cast off (or cast something off)**

1. (*Knitting*) take the stitches off the needle by looping each over the next to finish the edge: *when the piece of knitting is long enough, cast off | cast off a few stitches at the armhole.*
2. set a boat or ship free from her moorings: *the boatmen cast off and rowed downriver.*

(Stevenson, 2010).

### 7.1. Introduction

Thank you for coming on this journey with me so far. Now is the time to cast off. When knitting, casting-off is the last thing you do – bringing all the loose yarn together, creating a neat edge that finishes the piece into one tidy package. No more can you see the slipped stitches and the uneven rows – it is a finished product.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

Figure 75 10\_Binding off the final few stitches

[Photograph], by Jane Starz, 2020, Flickr. (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/janestarz/50028143938/>) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

But I am also casting off this study in another sense: letting it free of its moorings and seeing where it goes. Rather than an ending, as with knitting, this is a beginning. This is scary and exciting at the same time: letting a ship out onto the wide, smooth space of the sea which sailors try to “stiate” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) through mapping and navigation but will never be controlled.

Image removed for confidentiality/copyright reasons.

*Figure 76 Casting off*

Thus, in this final chapter, I will try to capture some of both ideas – coming to an end but also setting free into the wider world and the freedom of unstriated seas. First, I will remind you of the journey we have taken together – how I started with a messy tangled ball of yarn, unpicked it through the literature review, then began to knit with it in later chapters. I will revisit the tools I used to create my data, and lay out my findings around embodiment, (dis)ability and classroom space. I will then draw these threads together in the discussion, making clear how the ideas fit together and what conclusions I can draw from the analysis of my data. Next, I will discuss some of the implications of my findings, as well as the limitations of my study. Finally, I will end by highlighting



the original contribution to knowledge that I have made with this study, and make suggestions for future things to knit, and future seas to sail.

## 7.2. Revisiting the journey

As I showed in the literature review, children's bodies have been sites of scrutiny for many years. Children labelled as being disabled and/or having SEN are especially at the mercy of potentially oppressive ideas of what a normal child is and does. This hits at the heart of child-adult relationships: adults expect children to "develop", at the "appropriate pace", and these adults use the power they have over children to monitor this. Yet, there are non-pathologising ways of considering children's embodiment - centring their experience and understanding it in a complex web of interactions. Crucial to this is also understanding that "becoming" (Hall & Wilton, 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015) is not for children only: everyone is in a state of "becoming" in their physical environments, parts of never-ending shifting assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) of bodies and space. We can use the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) to understand how such assemblages can become enabling or disabling at different times and in different ways. Part of exploring this involves taking lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984) from existing assemblages into something new. In her exploration of children's experiences of "embodied becoming of autism and childhood", Smith aims to "experiment with a line of flight from the autistic-child-research assemblage into new spaces of potential and possibility where the becomings of bodies within the collision of autism and childhood can be celebrated" (Smith, 2016, p. 19). I hope I have done a similar thing – taking experimental lines of flight towards new, creative, different ways of thinking. This includes understanding the leakages between different physical and ideological boundaries and the enabling potentials of leaks - behaviour that will not be contained by school rules, for example, and "leaks" out. In this way, I bring together theories of embodiment, space and disability and discover/create new ideas and new contributions to knowledge (as discussed in more depth later in this chapter).

My methodology is embedded in the ontological-epistemological framework developed from the above-mentioned ideas of embodiment, space and (dis)ability. It is also based on the idea that all children can participate in research and have valuable things to communicate about their own embodied experiences. This is an important ethical point: children have the right to say yes to participating in research, in an appropriate way for them, just as they

have the right to say no. The creative methods I developed - drawing, playing, photography - all gave the children at Harbour View the opportunity to express themselves in ways that were comfortable to them. In addition, my observation of classroom life helped me to move away from individualising accounts of children's embodied experiences, towards understanding the ever-shifting assemblages. I was also aware that my embodied presence was part of these assemblages, rather than observing from some imagined "outside". Critically, I included children as participants whether or not they had a label of impairment/disability/SEND. As explained below in section 7.3.2., this is a novel approach giving us greater insight into the embodied experiences of (dis)ability.

Having established my theoretical and methodological background in Chapters 2 and 3, I began to apply these ideas to my data in Chapter 4 "Verticality". This chapter focuses on vertical space in the classroom, showing how upper space(s) at Harbour View are, literally and metaphorically, the realm of adults. They use higher spaces - such as cupboards and display boards - to exert control over children, by both physically restricting their access to such space and by displaying their adult labels for children - such as "SEND". The adult realm of displays and notices is set at a height that children are not expected to see, because they are connected to the adult world of labels, targets and regulations - specifically in relation to children's expected developmental goals. Adults in the classroom also take advantage of their height to tower over children, taking photographs of them in the classroom to show "evidence" of them meeting the ELGs. These targets, in turn, are surveilled and controlled via wider assemblages of politics and policy, both national and local. Adults, like children, have the option to resist such power in their own ways - for example, by talking over the heads of children. The example discussed, of adults talking about HR policies, shows both that adults are literally and figuratively "higher" than children, but also that they are also subject to rules and regulations, which they discuss away from the surveillance of those "higher up".

The children at Harbour View, on the other hand, experience the world from lower down - being generally shorter, having smaller chairs, playing with activities set out on the floor. Adults expect children not to remain "low down", however, but to move "upwards", metaphorically and literally, by growing up, progressing towards the goals set out in the ELGs. However, as I have shown,

this expectation has the possibility of stifling (dis)abled children's possibilities. Firstly, it assumes that upwards progression is essential to full adulthood - meaning that those deemed not to have developed in the appropriate ways continue to be infantilised into adulthood. Secondly, it does not allow for a critical understanding of development, narrowly defining goals that create docile bodies in the service of capitalism and ignoring other ways of embodied becoming. But children, like adults, can and do resist these vertical power dynamics and expectations - through such apparently mundane acts as lying on the floor or taking a photograph of an adult, pupils demonstrated their agency and allowed them to subvert expected power dynamics. For a minute or two, they took back control. Chapter 4 thus makes a contribution to disabled children's childhood studies in considering height and child/adult power relationships in greater depth than previous work, as I discuss in section 7.6.

In Chapter 5, I used the insight of Deaf epistemology, a form of crip epistemology, to interrogate apparently mundane moments in the classroom. This Deaf epistemic insight gives a new way to think about how children's bodies are expected to be and act. I showed how some bodily practices are encouraged, for example finger-counting, as they are visible, embodied ways of demonstrating to adults that children are learning in the "right" way. Again, this involves the pressure from above for teachers to demonstrate that their pupils are meeting the appropriate goals at the right time. Yet for some pupils, their bodily practices are overlooked despite indicating potential barriers, as the example of Isla shows. Rather than ignoring Isla's embodied practice of reading a book close to her face, this could have been an opportunity for the adults in the classroom to approach the problem in a different way, to view the classroom-child-book assemblage through a crip epistemological lens. This, I argue, can help us to reconsider radical inclusion (Greenstein, 2016) in ways that have not been previously considered. I pick up on this idea shortly, suggesting how adults in schools might "listen" to children in various ways and reflect on how they might look for, and create, "potentially enabling moments" (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 201).

In my final substantive chapter, I pick up on Harbour View's behaviour policy, and the exhortation to "be in the right place at the right time". This, I argue, can be understood as a way of attempting to contain children's behaviour through

physical and imagined boundaries - from locking children into (and strangers out of) the school, to controlling the movement of children's bodies through classroom "choreography" – controlling both where and when things happen. Adults are expected to teach children to contain their "leakiness" - be it leaks of bodily fluids (weeing) or leaking of behaviour from the "right" place to the "wrong" place (eating a sandwich in the toilets). This takes me to an analysis of toilet spaces, building upon previous work in DCCS (Slater, Jones & Procter, 2018 & 2019) to reconsider that most overlooked yet important school space. Rather than seeing leaks as negative, we can begin to view them differently, as opening up possibilities.

### 7.3. Limitations

Like any study, this has limitations in its scope. Firstly, I undertook my fieldwork in only one school, in two year-groups (Reception and Year One). My findings are therefore not generalisable to other schools or other year-groups. Neither can they be applied to all the children in the setting – their embodied experiences within classrooms assemblages will all be unique. Secondly, my analysis is just that – mine. It is only one way of understanding the data, and other people’s analysis of the same data (even people with similar ontological-epistemological positions) might be very different. There is no correct way to understand and analyse the data I collected and co-created with the children at Harbour View. However, I have done my best to do it justice, to consider each drawing and photograph carefully and not to speak on behalf of the children.

Thirdly, this data was collected at a series of specific moments in time. The bulk of this work, including the data collection and analysis, was undertaken before the advent of COVID-19 and therefore I do not touch upon this topic throughout. Having said this, it would be remiss not to mention the huge impact of the COVID-19 on schools. There have been widespread concerns about the impact on children of missing so much face-to-face schooling; the Institute for Fiscal Studies issued a press release highlighting the danger of lower educational achievement and the lost earning potential over the lifetime of the children affected (Sibieta, 2021). Clearly, as I discuss throughout this thesis, children’s worth is presented largely in terms of their potential to generate income as productive adults, and education is presented mainly as a means to this end. However, there have also been signs of hope, such as one study in India which found that children labelled with “special needs” also experienced a “brighter side” to home schooling during lockdowns: Vincent, Nalini and Krishnakumar (2021) found that homeschooling “reinforced family bonds; opened up spaces for homeschooling and digital learning; strengthened relationships with parents, communities, and teachers; and paved the way for technological adaptation” (p. 210). There are undoubtedly many more questions now in relation to classroom space and embodiment in an era of face masks, lockdowns and social distancing.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this thesis makes some important theoretical and methodological contributions to the field. These are all the more important now, in a world where the lines between physical spaces and virtual spaces are all the more blurred, and where bodies are more than ever seen as potential sites of “leakiness” – of contagion by a virus, but also of behaviours such as mask-wearing and self-isolation. I will discuss the significance of my findings in more detail now.

### 7.3.1. Discussion

**Aim: to use Disability Studies perspectives to explore (dis)abled children's embodied experiences in primary school spaces.**

**Objective 1: To consider how the concept of embodiment be understood in relation to, and applied to, (dis)abled children's experiences.**

**Objective 2: To investigate the embodied ways that (dis)abled children experience school spaces.**

**Objective 3: To explore how primary school spaces enable and disable children with and without impairment labels.**

The three objectives of this study have been woven throughout. The first objective, to consider the concept of embodiment in relation to (dis)abled children's experiences, was achieved through exploration of my observations of embodied power dynamics in the classroom, typified both by height differences between adults and children (and adults' use of such differences), and through the understanding of adults trying to control classroom assemblages, including children's bodies. This can be seen through Chapter 4, where I explored adults using their height to their advantage in the form of displays and discussions over children's heads. In Chapter 5, I explored how embodied practices can be seen differently through taking a cripistemological standpoint; and in Chapter 6 I showed how attempts to contain children's bodies are rife within the school.

The second objective was met through paying attention to children's communication with me through the data, understanding what they were saying about their own experiences. For example, in Chapter 4 I posed the question "what is a floor for?" and in Chapter 6 "what are toilets for?". In a way, these two questions reach the heart of my approach: to question accepted "facts" (about children and adults, about education, about disability) and to use lines of flight to uncover new ways of thinking about the mundane. In Hajrah's case, a floor was for lying on; in Inaya's case, a toilet room can be for eating in. But these were only snapshots of an assemblage at one point in time. At another time,



perhaps Hajrah used the floor to jump on; maybe Inaya likes to use the quiet room or the playground to eat in. Whatever the specific situation, pupils at Harbour View showed again and again that they could resist the control of the boundaries and surveillance of adults, rather than submitting to the oppressive expectation of docility.

The third and final objective was to explore how primary school spaces enable and/or disable children. The lens of assemblage theory has been invaluable to achieve this, recognising that everyone and everything is in a state of becoming; that there is no single static enablement or disablement but ever-shifting constellations of bodies, space, power and resistance.

These three objectives have helped me to meet the overall aim of this study. I have painted a picture of the primary school classroom as a space in which adults hold control over children's bodies through the geography of the classroom; that is, adults aim to create spaces in which everything and everybody has a purpose and a place. This unspoken but unavoidable power dynamic which is reflected in the physical environment of the classroom and the way children's bodies are choreographed in an attempt to stop leaks and flows. Yet, children are not passive: they are agents that resist control through various ways: lying on the floor, taking photographs looking up at adults, eating their sandwiches where they are told not to. These embodied practices push boundaries, step over them, force them open to create leaks, that might become torrents, that could flood the classroom with new, exciting perspectives.

### 7.3.2. Original contributions to knowledge

This research contributes to an understanding of how children in the Early Years classroom experience spaces in an embodied way. As discussed above, this has practical applications, in informing the practice of teachers and other adults working in the Early Years by inviting them to consider with “outsider” eyes how classrooms and other educational spaces are constructed and ever-changing, and the effect that this has on children. However, beyond these practical applications, this study also contributes to the development of new knowledge that informs theories of childhood, disability and embodiment. The main contributions this thesis makes are:

1. Including children with any or no label of impairment, SEND, or disability;
2. Using photography both as method and a form of embodied resistance;
3. Bringing together various existing theories and applying them in new ways.

I will now expand on these.

#### *Contribution one: Including children regardless of SEND label*

My first contribution to knowledge is in my inclusion of children with or without impairments, labelled or not as having SEND, identifying or not with Deafness or disability. I have explained my reasons for this approach in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3: this is a choice made on epistemological, theoretical and methodological grounds. It accounts for the contested term “dis/ability” and the complexity of impairment labels. It recognises that children do not simply *have* disability – rather, they are given labels by medical or educational professionals which they may not agree with. They may have their own descriptions themselves, which may not match with their adult-given labels.

In Chapter 5, I delved into the approach of using Deaf and crip epistemologies to understand non-Deaf and non-disabled experiences, or experiences which may be on the borderline (for example, Isla, who was in a medical and educational limbo while waiting for a diagnosis). Taken together, I have shown how disability theory and cripistemology can be used to understand experiences of anybody (and any body). This recognises that all bodies exist in ever-changing assemblages that enable and disable according to context. This is not

to say that the social phenomenon of disability is not real, or that we are all disabled. Rather, it recognises that the boundaries that separate disabled people from non-disabled are porous, flexible, and leaky (Chapter 6).

#### *Contribution two: Photography as method and resistance*

The second contribution this thesis makes concerns photography as both method and embodied resistance. As mentioned in the introduction, one gap in the literature concerns using photography with (dis)abled children aged 5-7 as a form of embodied resistance to power and control in the classroom. Rather than simply being a visual method available to the children in my studies, I interrupted the power dynamics of the classroom by giving children the opportunity to turn the gaze back upwards at adults. By doing this, I stepped over an unspoken boundary: previously, iPads were for adults only, to surveill children from above. Now, children could directly challenge this, albeit from their “lower down position” by surveilling what was happening above their heads and making a photographic record. My study makes a unique contribution in using the act of taking photograph as both a method of enquiry but also as a form of direct resistance to adults’ surveillance. Previous studies have shown how disabled adults (Jurkowski, 2008) and (dis)abled children can use photography as a research method to present their own stories and show what is important to them (Clark, 2005). Other studies have looked at disabled children’s and young people’s use of photography as a research method (McLaughlin & Coleman-Fountain, 2018); still others have considered young children’s use of photographic technology in the classroom for pedagogical reasons (MacDonald, 2012). However, there is a dearth of information about how children aged 5-7 can use photography as an act of resistance. This links to my embodied presence as a researcher in the field: I contest that my embodied presence in the classroom creates opportunities for resistance through my methodology. The data is there not only the resulting photographs, but the resulting assemblage of complex power dynamics. The resulting photographs illustrate, but do not fully encapsulate, this.

#### *Contribution three: Applying theories in new ways*

The third contribution of this thesis is the unique approach developed by combining existing theories around assemblages and applying them to the

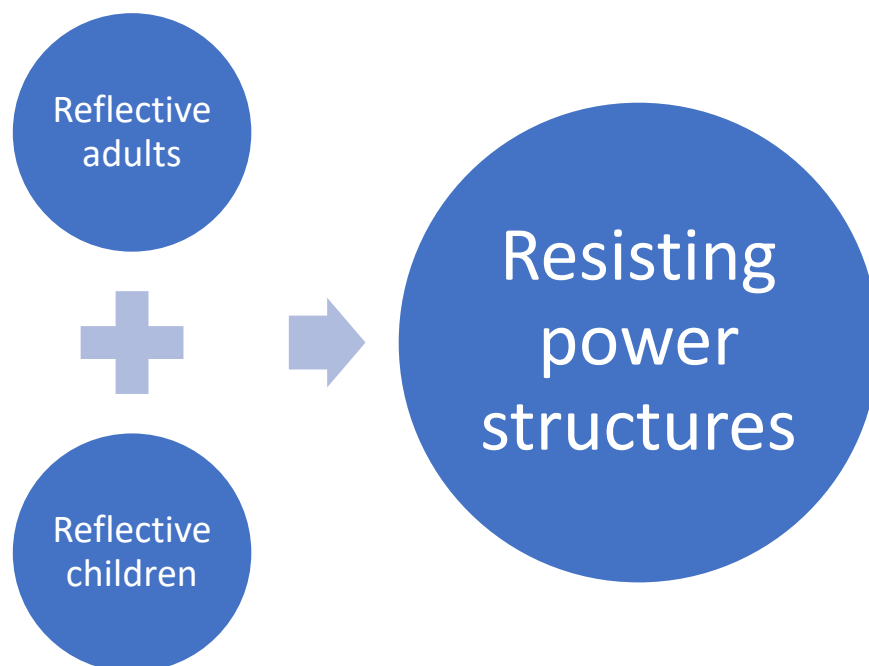
classroom through a social model lens in a way that has not previously been done. This shows both that these theories can be useful in a classroom setting while also pushes at the edges of existing understandings of the social model. Ideas around becoming and embodiment have been applied in a classroom setting in disability studies (notably by Stephens, et al, 2015). However, I build on this approach, borrowing from DCCS and assemblage theory. Thus, I take the principles of researching *with* disabled children; centring children; and troubling existing normative hegemonies (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 1618) while also thinking through the lens of ever-changing assemblages consisting of spaces and bodies to better understand how children's experiences fit into such assemblages. In Chapter 4, this resulted in novel understandings of the importance of height and verticality to power dynamics in the classroom, and how these dynamics can be resisted. In Chapter 6 I expanded and deepened the existing knowledge around the possibilities of leaks and flows in (dis)abled children's lives. Combining the ideas of hydrofeminism (Neimanis, 2012), lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and leaks (Goodley & Runswick-Cole 2013; Kushinski, 2019; Liddiard & Slater, 2017; Shildrick, 1999) leads to a trickle of new knowledge, that has the possibility of turning into a stream, a river, a flood, an ocean of new possibilities into which we can cast many ships carrying many ideas.

### 7.3.3. What next? Future directions

What, then, does this mean for classrooms? It is customary at this point to make suggestions for practice: to tinker at the edges of a broken educational system, to suggest that staff receive “disability awareness training” – which has been criticised in its approach of individualising and medicalising disabled people’s experiences (French, 1992). However, developing professionals’ understanding of disabled people’s experiences from disabled people themselves might go some way to improving adults’ understanding of disabled children’s experiences of school spaces. This is especially the case when it comes to understanding the implications of design choices, school rules and school architecture. Scrutiny of all these areas, in partnership with children, could go a long way to address some of the more disabling aspects of school assemblages.

There remains, however, a problem: adults benefit from the power difference between themselves and children. Keeping children quiet and “well behaved” does not just come from misunderstandings about how to create an inclusive classroom. Rather, in some cases it serves a certain purpose, to create docile bodies (Foucault, 1995 [1977]; Burke and Duncan, 2015) which are expected to develop “normally” (Goodley, 2011, ch. 9; Davis, 1995). Yet, other things happen in classrooms too: joy and care and exploration. It is clear from my findings that children already have the capacity to resist the oppressive forces of normalisation. If some small change can come from one individual person (myself), surely many people could make many small changes. I suspect that many teachers, teaching assistants and midday assistants would see the value in such an approach, but become subject to surveillance of their own, find themselves with limited power (Perryman, Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2018). My approach was entering a classroom and questioning everything. Why are toilets divided into girls and boys? Why are children’s personalised timetables stuck on the wall for all to see? Why doesn’t every child have a personalised timetable? Why can’t children eat their sandwiches in the toilet? To the other adults in the classroom, my questions must have seemed sometimes obtuse, obvious, or incomprehensible. Yet I kept asking, peeling back the layers, trying to understand.

This peeling back of layers is, for me, part of DCCS's call to trouble existing normative hegemonies (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 1618). From my observations in the classroom and my data analysis above, I believe that this questioning and reflection needs to extend to all adults in the classroom. Therefore, my first recommendation for practice is developing reflective adults. This in turn informs recommendation two – for adults to work with children to jointly reflect on classroom spaces. These two recommendations come together to create an environment where power structures are resisted in the classroom by both adults and children. I will explain these three recommendations in more detail now.



#### *Recommendation one: Develop reflective practitioners*

Although my focus has been on the children in Harbour View, I have made it clear that adults are both holders of power and subject to it (section 5.3). Furthermore, as I have explained, the power structures that surveill adults are precisely those that induce them to surveill children. That is to say, the government's surveillance of teachers, discharged through Ofsted, for example, is there to enforce the surveillance of children by adults. However, my research shows that existing hegemonies are enacted and reinforced every day in the classroom, yet are often invisible or unnoticed to those with (relative) power. For example, adults may never consciously consider what it means to have eye-level descriptors of developmental goals on the walls beyond, "It's in the EYFS", or, "It's important that Ofsted can see we're following the guidelines". It might

never occur to a busy teacher or an underpaid teaching assistant that these might be doing more harm than good. Therefore, we should be promoting an education system in which adults, whatever their job title or level of seniority, are enabled to look for, and find, “potentially enabling moments” (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 201), as I did with Isla (section 5.5.1). I am not a “specialist” in vision impairment, and I have no teaching qualification, but I had the time and space to think about these things from an outside perspective and to apply existing knowledge from the literature around disability and education, to better understand the wider contexts.

This of course might be easier said than done when practitioners are already expected to do so much and constantly being asked to do more. However, this is not about doing *more*. In fact, it may be about doing *less*: stepping back and looking at things as a bigger picture, and discussing thoughts with colleagues of all stripes. This might be achieved through listening to disabled adults’ memories of their time in school. What did they find liberating, and what was oppressive? What was enabling, and what was disabling? These valuable perspectives can help adults to see the classroom with new eyes and consider how they might reflect on their own practices and classroom spaces, and how children and adults *become* in the space. This would require teachers’ workloads to decrease to a manageable level, and to be given more autonomy in how they used their time, giving them the time they need to simply “be” in the classroom and see it afresh. This could develop the capacity for considering lines of flight that could give further insights into embodied experiences in the classroom (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)

Of course, in order to effectively reflect, teachers would need to communicate not only with each other and disabled adults, but also with children. This brings me to my second recommendation.

#### *Recommendation two: Adults work with children to reflect*

As I have shown, adults are under pressure to apply certain ideas to children, about developing upwards (Chapter 4), about using embodiment in the “right” way (Chapter 5), and being in “the right place at the right time” (Chapter 6). However, adults can reflect on different ways of thinking about such ideas. What if, instead of “upwards”, we thought “outwards” – working to broaden

understandings, understanding non-normative embodiment, and seeing the potential of leaks. The Early Learning Goals of the statutory framework state that children should, by the end of the EYFS:

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions [...]
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding (Department for Education, 2017, p.11)

I propose that we flip this goal around, to make it an aim for adults who work with children. Rather than surveilling for the sake of checking developmental milestones (Chapter 3) adults should “listen attentively” to children – and of course “listen” should be taken in its widest sense, of paying attention in all its forms. This might take the form of observing, but this should not be another form of surveillance. Instead, it should be a conversation (spoken or unspoken, or a mix of the two) aiming to understand children’s perspectives, their unique embodied epistemic insights (Sanchez, 2015, p.3) (Chapter 5) and their ways of *becoming* in the classroom (Hall & Wilton, 2016; Stephens, et al., 2015). This would include responding with “relevant questions, comments and actions” to “clarify their understanding” (p. 11). For example, in the case of Inaya who ate her lunch in the toilet (Section 6.3.5), adults could respond by “listening” to what Inaya was “saying” rather than simply telling her she was behaving inappropriately. Was Inaya saying that she was fed up with the hustle and bustle of the classroom? Did she need some space away from the bright light of the classroom? Was she thirsty and getting some water? By improving communication skills with a variety of children, and understanding that communication is not one-way, adults could begin to have more productive conversations with children that also value their “normality of doing things differently” (Hansen & Philo, 2007).

This could also take the form of more intentional information gathering in and around the classroom. Children are rarely consulted about their environment; the power dynamics of the classroom are rarely conducive to adults learning from children. For example, on-going conversations about the way space is laid out could help adults learn what children need and want, in order to support all children to make the most of their learning environment. Assemblages are co-



created and ever-changing: this can be used to the advantage of children and educators alike to consider how spaces could be more enabling. This must be an on-going project, recognising the constantly changing assemblages. Adults already change the set-up of the classroom for different seasons and different topics, and certain features are perennial (such as reading corners and teaching mats). It therefore could be part of this on-going process to open conversations with pupils, either planned or ad hoc, about how they feel about their embodied classroom experiences. Of course, there will be times when adults know what children need or want but cannot provide it. This is why my third and final recommendation is adults and children learning about, and resisting, power structures together.

*Recommendation three: Resisting power structures together*

Goddard (2010) argues that instead of schools inducing submission to power, they should instead “equip individuals to understand their own formation as subjects so that they might comply with, refuse or transform those practices” (pp. 32-3). It is notable that “individuals” can refer to anybody, child or adult, as all are subject to powers above them. In the case of primary schools, adults might consider the ways they can resist potentially oppressive power structures, supported by colleagues and the community. This does not always have to be extreme or disruptive, although it can and might be. For example, when Isla could not access books because of their small print, the existing power structures require a medico-educational procedure that requires a diagnosis from a doctor and an assessment by a teacher specialising in visual impairment. While doctors and specialist teachers may have a role to play, I question why these hoops must be jumped before putting certain things into practice. Adults could already work with Isla to find ways to make the classroom more inclusive: to make numbers bigger and clearer and to get large print books, but also to value her perspective of the classroom.

Similarly, just as I did when I handed children an iPad to take photos, adults can support children in acts of joyful resistance. Every time a child did not follow a rule, or took a photo of an adult, or lay on the floor, I saw as an act of joy. I saw children enjoying their bodies and experiencing them as fully as they could within the boundaries set. As Kushinski (2019) explains, every time a boundary

is breached a leak is created, and each leak is a possibility, a potentially liberating Deleuzoguattarian line of flight. As adults, we are all responsible for thinking about how we support children to experience their embodiment and resist oppression.

#### 7.3.4. Final remarks

If one person can make a difference by handing a child an iPad, then there is the potential for every classroom in the world to reconsider its practices. The education system may sometimes be indifferent to children's experiences, but I truly believe that most teachers, teaching assistants, behaviour support workers and various other adults care about the children they support. They themselves are victims of the system too, even if they benefit from it. If one person in every classroom started asking uncomfortable questions, resisting, pushing back against normative ideas, changes could start. If teachers could fight back against the tsunami of centralised government policies and truly listen to their pupils instead, handing them iPads, colouring pencil and monkeys, and if they had the time to understand what children have to say about their experiences, we might even see a mini revolution. If we can enable and encourage children to leak into cracks, to push boundaries, and resist the normalising forces of education, we might be able to cast off and set sail in the right direction.

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In recognition that many of this literature was published on (unceded) land of aboriginal, first nations and native peoples, I have opted to include the names of the original guardians of the land, with the colonisers'/invaders' name in square brackets for Australian, Canadian and USA sources. This is a small step to acknowledge the violent and painful history of colonisation, that is inextricably linked with space and the oppression of bodies.

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## List of Acronyms

ASD	autism spectrum disorder
BSL	British Sign Language
CCTV	closed-circuit television
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAL	English as an additional language
ELG	early learning goal
EYFS	early years foundation stage
EYFSP	early years foundation stage profile
HR	human resources
LGBTQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer
NatSIP	National Sensory Impairment Partnership
NDA	National Disability Authority [Ireland]
NDCS	National Deaf Children's Society
NRT	non-representational theory
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PE	physical education
PPG	pupil premium grant
QTVI	qualified teacher of children and young people (or learners) with vision impairment
RG	restricted growth
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
SEND	special educational needs and/or disability
SENDCoP	Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice
SPRs	School Premises (England) Regulations 2012
STA	Standards and Testing Agency
UKAAF	UK Association for Accessible Formats
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation
VI	vision impairment

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical approval

Appendix 2 Sheffield Hallam University's best practice guidelines

Appendix 3 Participant information sheet (adults)

Appendix 4 Consent form (adults)

Appendix 5 Consent form (in loco parentis)

Appendix 6 Participant information sheet and consent form (children)

Appendix 7 "All About Me" booklet

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