



**This electronic thesis or dissertation has been
downloaded from Explore Bristol Research,
<http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>**

Author:

Lee, Claire A

Title:

Not “just another school day”

An arts-based dialogic inquiry into the learning lives of children from armed forces families in a UK primary school

General rights

Access to the thesis is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Public License. A copy of this may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>. This license sets out your rights and the restrictions that apply to your access to the thesis so it is important you read this before proceeding.

Take down policy

Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to having it been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you consider to be unlawful e.g. breaches of copyright (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact collections-metadata@bristol.ac.uk and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline nature of the complaint

Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item in question will be removed from public view as soon as possible.



**This electronic thesis or dissertation has been
downloaded from Explore Bristol Research,
<http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>**

Author:

Lee, Claire A

Title:

Not “just another school day”

General rights

Access to the thesis is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Public License. A copy of this may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>. This license sets out your rights and the restrictions that apply to your access to the thesis so it is important you read this before proceeding.

Take down policy

Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to having it been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you consider to be unlawful e.g. breaches of copyright (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact collections-metadata@bristol.ac.uk and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline nature of the complaint

Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item in question will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

Not “just another school day”:
An arts-based dialogic inquiry
into the learning lives of children
from armed forces families
in a UK primary school

Claire Lee

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol
in accordance with the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education, April, 2020.

Word count: 90974

Abstract

Children from armed forces families are often characterised in popular discourse as stoic little soldiers or vulnerable objects of sympathy. Research, mainly from the US, seeks largely to identify whether, and how, factors such as mobility and parental deployment support children's resilience or hinder their psychological, behavioural or educational functioning. This thesis looks beyond posited disorders, norms and functioning. It aims to contribute a more nuanced, critical understanding of the complexities of UK service children's learning lives, their priorities and interests, and the sociocultural contexts, policies and practices that shape their activity and their sense of self.

Over fourteen months I spent an afternoon a week in dialogue with seven service children aged 9-11 in a primary school. Developing a third space (Soja, 1996) which unsettled curricular boundaries and usual classroom practices, relationships and expectations, we talked, made things, drew, painted, wrote, sang, danced and played, and explored what mattered to the children. My theoretical and methodological approach combines theories of dialogism and utterance (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) with attention to spatiality, objects and multimodality. I sought to understand the children as meaning-makers, investigating how they made sense of and presented their worlds and themselves.

This thesis makes visible the methodological, ethical and pedagogical potential of such a third, dialogic space, and its effects on the children's sense of self and their relationships. It also contributes towards our understanding of primary-school-aged children's affective responses to challenge and change, and how they deal with these; their desire for belonging and connectedness; their chafing at constraints; their preoccupation with relationships, and their active use of social resources, objects and spaces to create coherent self-narratives, help one another to do so, and pursue their personal development. Drawing on this evidence, I propose questions for practitioners and decision-makers that prompt reflection on policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

Doing a PhD is often described as a solitary, even lonely endeavour. For me this was far from the case. I have been surrounded throughout by many wonderful people and I am truly thankful to all of you for your companionship, support and intellectual stimulation.

Thank you to:

Dr Frances Giampapa and Dr Helen Manchester, my supervisors. Your gentle guidance, constant encouragement, thoughtfulness and sense of humour have given me confidence and made the whole PhD experience a joy. I have learned so much from you both and feel very privileged to have worked with you.

My funders, the Economic and Social Research Council, without whom this project would have been impossible. To have spent over three years thinking, reading, writing and conducting research has been a great privilege.

The academic community at the School of Education, particularly staff and colleagues in the Centre for Knowledge, Culture and Society, for encouragement, stimulating discussions, and innumerable opportunities to think about what education could and should be. Thank you also to Dr Malcolm Reed, my supervisor from 2016 to 2017, for supporting me in applying for funding for this PhD, and for challenging and encouraging me to develop my understanding of theory.

My friends and colleagues at Bristol. Each of you has made this PhD a happy and enriching experience. Thank you particularly for fun and collegiality to my travelling companions Leanne Cameron (and also for your brilliant proofreading), Sha Liu, Nidia Avilez Nuñez, and Aminath Shiyama (Shimmi), and also to Diana Barrera Moreno, Duygu Cavdar, Jill Court, Sian Ephgrave, Jane Nebe, Zibah Nwako, Paola Ramirez and Trang Mai Tran.

The head teacher, staff and parents at the school I call Bridgeton in this thesis, whose generosity and trust made the project possible. And of course a huge thank you to eight very special children for giving so generously and creatively to this research and teaching me so much: Ella, Amelia, Keira, Archie, Dylan, Imogen, Jessie and Edward.

My parents for a lifetime of selfless and loving support, and my family, Peter, Toby and James, Samirah and Rosie, for your love, cooking and for keeping my feet on the ground. Peter, thank you for your expertise with the diagrams. And finally, my husband Sau Man. Thank you for your endless love and encouragement, and for believing this was the right path for me to take.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE: 27/04/2020

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introducing the project	1
1.1	Introduction: Three vignettes and what to expect from this thesis	2
1.2	Motivation behind the study	5
1.3	Thinking beyond “Little Troopers” and “doing very well in school”: constructing service children	10
1.3.1	<i>Problematizing “service” children</i>	10
1.3.2	<i>Little Troopers</i>	12
1.3.3	<i>“Doing very well”</i>	14
1.4	Changing the focus from “needs” to “learning lives”	18
1.5	Summary	19
Chapter 2	Positioning the research	21
2.1	Introduction	22
2.2	My theoretical journey	23
2.3	Introducing Bakhtin	24
2.3.1	<i>Meaning and social constructionism</i>	25
2.3.2	<i>“Otherness”: the dialogical principle</i>	27
2.3.3	<i>Meaning-making: the importance of context</i>	31
2.3.4	<i>Ideological becoming as a dialogic process</i>	34
2.3.5	<i>Authoritative discourses</i>	36
2.3.6	<i>Finalisation, carnival and third space</i>	38
2.4	Foucault, Bakhtin and hope	42
2.5	Summary	45
Chapter 3	Looking for service children in the literature	48

3.1	Introduction	49
3.2	Overview of the international literature on service children.....	51
3.3	Key discourses about service children	53
3.3.1	<i>Service children at risk: authoritative discourses and psychological approaches to research.....</i>	<i>53</i>
3.3.2	<i>Service children as resilient.....</i>	<i>64</i>
3.3.3	<i>Honouring children’s sacrifice.....</i>	<i>71</i>
3.3.4	<i>Summary</i>	<i>74</i>
3.4	Methodologies in the qualitative research literature.....	74
3.4.1	<i>Research with children.....</i>	<i>74</i>
3.4.2	<i>Deductive analysis of qualitative research.....</i>	<i>79</i>
3.4.3	<i>Interpretive studies</i>	<i>80</i>
3.5	Summary of review	83
Chapter 4 Developing the methodology and methods.....		84
4.1	Vignette: “I’ve got news!”	85
4.2	Introduction	86
4.3	Positionality, aspirations, values and power.....	88
4.4	Practicalities: access to participants, research spaces and positionality	94
4.4.1	<i>Introducing the children</i>	<i>99</i>
4.4.2	<i>Introducing the space</i>	<i>100</i>
4.5	Participatory and creative methodology and methods.....	102
4.5.1	<i>A dialogic approach to participatory research with children: problematising voice, empowerment and “being/becoming”</i>	<i>105</i>
4.6	Transcription and analysis	113
4.7	Coda: Returning to the vignette	118
4.8	Prologue to Chapters 5, 6 and 7.....	122

Chapter 5 Learning from the fieldwork: Constructing borders and closing down dialogue	125
5.1 Introduction: Vignette.....	126
5.1.1 <i>Policing the boundaries</i>	129
5.2 Dialogue: “If Donald Trump sent a bomb”	133
5.2.1 “Are you basically saying...?": <i>Collective meaning-making</i>	135
5.2.2 “Nobody feels my pain”: <i>Affect and emotion</i>	138
5.2.3 “Trumpy” and “Kim Jong Fun”: <i>Carnival and fear</i>	141
5.2.4 “Dear President Trump”: <i>Activism as a response to frightening news</i>	145
5.3 Dialogue: What do we learn about retaliating?.....	152
Chapter 6 Learning from the fieldwork: Space and place	160
6.1 Introduction	161
6.2 Conceptualising spaces	162
6.3 “We feel pretty safe”: The base as an affinity space	166
6.3.1 “I don’t have to have, parent vision, all the time”	171
6.3.2 “I’m not allowed to go ANYwhere”	174
6.3.3 “Out of the base it’s like the real world”	177
6.4 “I don’t know what school I’m going to when I move”	179
6.4.1 “I can keep in touch with all of you”	182
6.5 Reflections on meaning-making in the third space of the research group	188
Chapter 7 Learning from the fieldwork: Relationships, objects and affect	192
7.1 Introduction	193
7.2 Parents’ deployment	193
7.2.1 “When he goes away I’m really sad”	196

7.2.2	“My dad’s been away for two thousand years”	203
7.2.3	“You... don’t know if anything’s gonna happen”	207
7.3	Objects-as-utterances and narratives of the self	210
7.3.1	“You’re just not allowed to bring toys in, not even for just break”	216
7.4	“These are some cute people that I love”	218
7.5	Relationships in the third space	226
7.6	Summary.....	232
Chapter 8 Continuing the dialogue		233
8.1	Introduction: On the threshold	234
8.2	Key insights and contributions to knowledge	236
8.2.1	<i>Contributions to knowledge</i>	237
8.3	Further questions and reflections.....	239
8.4	Children’s positions within the third space.....	242
8.5	Troubling the project.....	245
8.6	Theoretical reflections.....	246
Bibliography		250
Appendices.....		280
Appendix 1 Ethical consent form		280
Appendix 2 Screenshots of the project leaflet provided for participants and letter sent to their parents		287
Appendix 3 Examples of analysis		290

Table of Figures¹

Figure 1.1 Images of service children in circulation	12
Figure 1.2 Documents (blue) and strategies (orange) relating to service children’s education in England	15
Figure 2.1 Diagram representing centripetal and centrifugal forces	37
Figure 3.1 Dates of publication of studies identified for literature review	50
Figure 3.2 Overview of literature identified for literature review	50
Figure 3.3 Images from Creative Forces Day	77
Figure 4.1 Research timeline showing key events and telling moments	98
Figure 4.2 Map for chapters 5 to 8	124
Figure 5.1 Keira's card (front and inside)	147
Figure 5.2 Jessie’s card text (left) and Ella’s (right)	148
Figure 5.3 Archie's card, front	149
Figure 5.4 Archie's card, inside	150
Figure 6.1 Jessie's multimodal piece	174
Figure 6.2 Ella's multimodal piece	177
Figure 6.3 Ella's free time activities	181
Figure 6.4 Dylan's painting	184

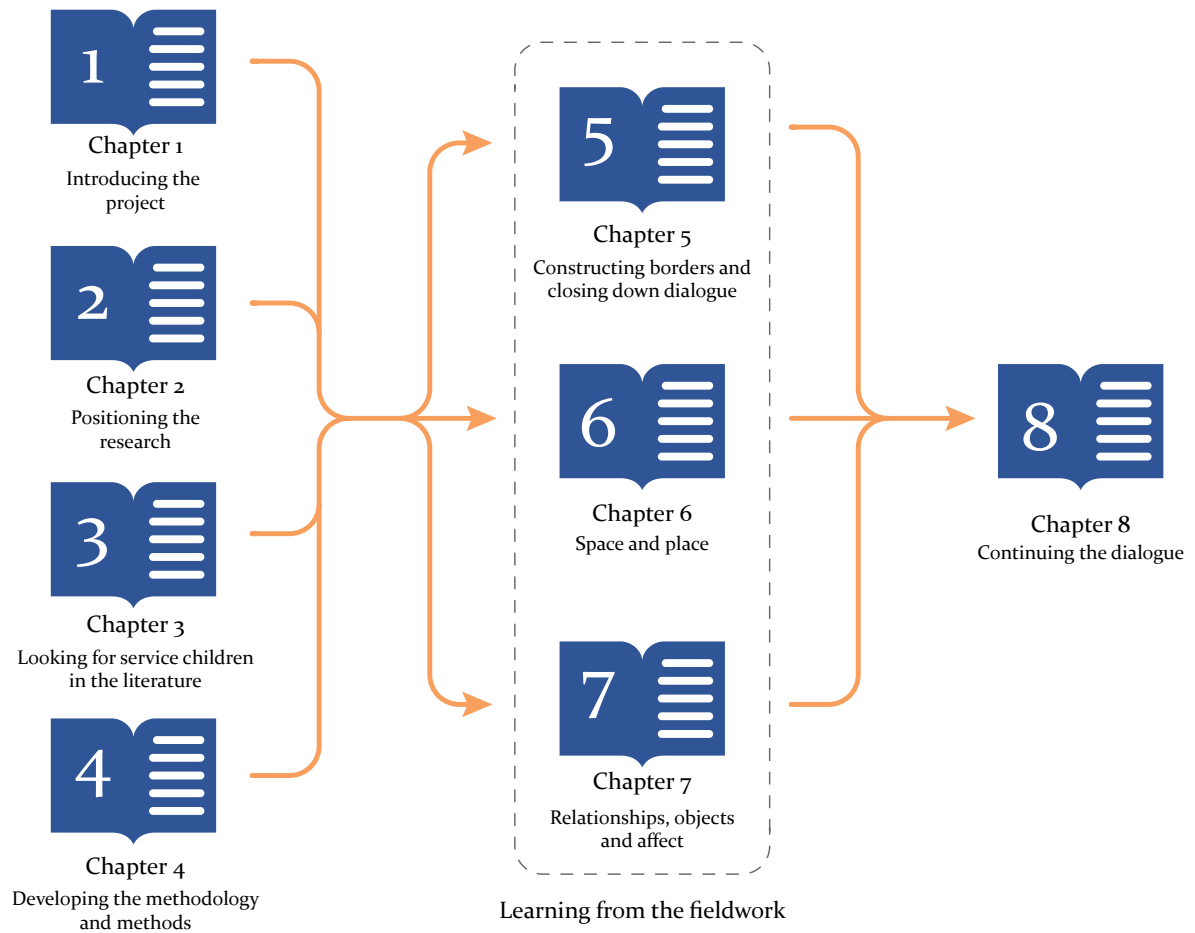
¹ Figures 1.2, 2.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2 and the thesis contents map on page xi were created with assistance from Peter Lee, for which I am extremely grateful.

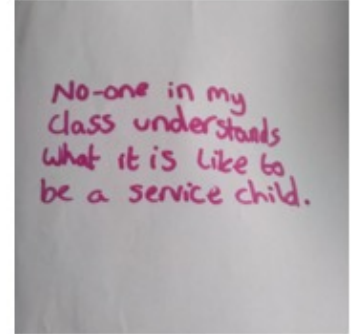
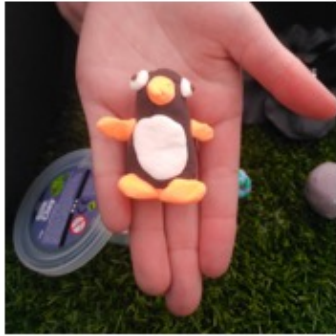
Figure 6.5 Dylan's model	185
Figure 6.6 Dylan's email	186
Figure 6.7 Ella's earlier "trapped" piece.....	190
Figure 7.1 Word cloud from fieldwork session 1	194
Figure 7.2 Ella's map	196
Figure 7.3 Detail from Ella's map	198
Figure 7.4 Detail from Ella's timeline: meeting her dad for the first time	199
Figure 7.5 Ella's poem	200
Figure 7.6 Archie's vase	205
Figure 7.7 Sketch of objects brought in by Imogen.....	211
Figure 7.8 Details from Imogen's timeline.....	212
Figure 7.9 Some of Amelia's objects	213
Figure 7.10 Amelia's seat.....	214
Figure 7.11 Amelia's wooden heart	216
Figure 7.12 Collage of children's photos	219
Figure 7.13 Images from fieldwork.....	226
Figure 7.14 Jessie's and Dylan's seats	228

List of Tables

Table 1 Definitions of terminology used in this thesis.....	28
Table 2 Children, dates of involvement in project and year groups	99

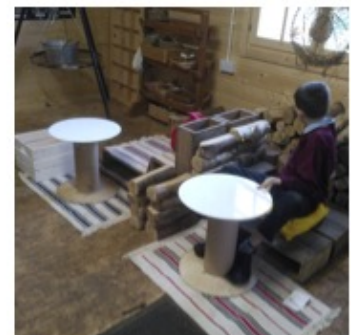
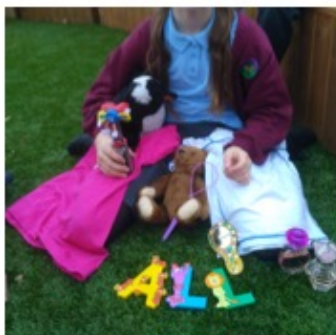
Thesis Contents Map





Chapter 1

Introducing the project



1.1 Introduction: Three vignettes and what to expect from this thesis

Christmas puzzle

It is almost Christmas, 2012. End-of-term tests, nativities and carol-singing are behind us, but a few days of term remain. Maths is on the timetable, and we're doing a Christmas-themed puzzle.

I've explained the task: replacing each letter of a word by its numerical position in the alphabet (A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, and so on) and adding up those digits, the challenge is to find a word which totals exactly 100. I've shown the children how CHRISTMAS adds to 110. The children get to grips with this task, treating it as a race. They soon discover that PRESENT equals 97 and REINDEER only 78. There are false alarms, errors and some frustration: "*Miss Lee, I can't believe I got 99 AND 101!*" "*Miss Lee, can I have RUDOLPH?*"

After around half an hour Felix and Matthew sidle up to me. They think they have the solution, and show me, hiding their paper from their rivals' eyes. I check: yes, exactly 100. Their word? AFGHANISTAN. Neither of their fathers will be home this Christmas.

Worrying about Dad

It's Remembrance Day, 2012, and we are quietly making our way back to the classroom from the school playground. We've been standing in a circle for our two minutes' silence; we've heard the Ode of Remembrance, and the Last Post and Reveille, solemn rituals familiar to me but new to some of the children. Andrew overtakes his friends to catch me up. He looks up sideways at me. "*Mrs Lee? I can't stop worrying about my dad. I'm frightened he'll get shot.*"

Saying goodbye to Louisa

It's a Friday evening in April and the other children have gone home. I'm in the suddenly quiet classroom with Louisa and her mother. Louisa's father has been posted to a new base: she is leaving today. She's had a formal farewell in assembly, followed by cake in the classroom. We've given her a card with photos of happy moments: Louisa with friends in their den in the woods; a moment of jubilation in the classroom; the Christmas play. She must have several cards like this by now, or maybe she throws them away each time she moves.

I've passed a package of exercise books to Louisa's mother with a letter for the new teacher. I hope this will help smooth Louisa's start at the next school. Among other things, the letter explains that Louisa finds maths easy, but struggles with writing. She may be dyslexic, but we've run out of time to investigate: that's someone else's job now. I'm sending more information than I often receive for a child joining my class at short notice. I can't post the letter, though, because Louisa's new school place isn't yet confirmed, even though she is supposed to start next week. We agree this is deplorable, but what can you do?

Louisa's mother looks strained. Her health is not good, and she has been cleaning and packing for weeks. She shrugs and turns to Louisa. "*We're used to it, aren't we?*" Louisa nods.

I think of this thesis as my contribution to a dialogue about service children, a contribution which extends that somewhat muted and restricted dialogue in new directions and brings in children, who have largely been excluded from it until now. During my study I have come to understand a dialogic approach as an attitude, not only to communication, but to life itself. This is a philosophical and ethical stance of radical openness and humility, which welcomes unpredictability and difference and resists rigidity and closure. Living out the argument that “all that is unethical begins and ends when one human being claims to determine all that another is and can be” (Frank, 2005, p. 966), I make no attempt to tell some definitive, finalising truth about service children. To do so would be both impossible and unethical: every child’s experience is different, complex, and changes from moment to moment. Instead, this thesis makes the case for an approach to knowing children that is animated by dialogic ethical and theoretical commitments. I narrate how I gathered together a group of children and developed ways of exploring together what mattered to them, not knowing exactly what we were looking for in advance, but learning how they made sense of who they were and who they wanted to be, and of the influences that powerfully shaped their lives. Alongside this I tell my story of gradually becoming a researcher, having been a primary school teacher for many years.

I also think of the thesis as a multi-voiced dialogue in itself, between children’s multimodal utterances, my own reflections, taken-for-granted assumptions, the ideas of several theorists, and other researchers’ findings. For this reason, this thesis is structured somewhat unconventionally. For example, I explain my theoretical framework in **Chapter 2**, before turning to the literature about service children in **Chapter 3**. This allows me to draw on important conceptual resources in my discussion of the literature. I also consciously avoid the language and linearity of *research questions – data collection – findings*, which, as I discuss in **Chapter 4**, suggest there are once-and-for-all answers to pre-defined questions which can be found with the right collection tools, rather than brought into being through dialogue. While **Chapters 5, 6 and 7** offer rich insights into the children’s learning lives, I have chosen to construct these not as traditional “findings” chapters, to be followed by a discussion chapter. Rather, these three chapters reflect the way in which what I learned *about* the children’s lives was inseparable from our lived meaning-making activity and the space in which it took place. In these chapters, each of which foregrounds important themes from the fieldwork, I interweave images, vignettes, sections of transcript, reflections, concepts and extended quotations from children, theorists and researchers. And in **Chapter 8**, rather than stating

conclusions I offer questions, provocations and prompts for reflection, to extend the dialogue into the future. As Bakhtin (1986) writes, “There is never a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future)” (p. 170).

Every reader will bring to a thesis their interests and expectations. For those hoping for hard facts, universal truths or a neat “how-to” guide for managing service children, this thesis will undoubtedly disappoint. For those, however, who hope to gain insight into the complexities and nuances of the learning lives of a group of service children, their interests, priorities and concerns, their sophisticated ways of making sense of the world, and the powerful influences which shape their everyday existence, what follows will, I hope, provide interesting reading.

I have started with vignettes for several reasons. First, they present the point of departure for my research project, outlining some of the concerns, critiques and questions at its core. Some of these provocations are everyday problems faced by children from armed forces families; others concern our knowledge and understanding of children, and these matters underpin my approach to ethics, theory and methodology. Second, the vignettes introduce my partial insider-researcher positionality and the unique understanding and access this afforded me. Finally, they illustrate how I shall present much of what I have learned in this research. The vignettes and sections of transcript in this thesis could be described as “creative non-fiction” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 155). They recount real incidents and interactions, “telling” moments that, while fleeting, provoked deep reflection and troubled me long afterwards. I hope that I can evoke something of this sense-making for the reader. My vignettes are responses to raw, everyday encounters, and help me make sense of those experiences (van Manen, 2006). They are also inevitably and unapologetically partial, framed from my point of view, and curated to illustrate the points I wish to make (Flewitt, 2011). Thus they are open to – and welcome – the reader’s reinterpretation. As Peuranen (1998) argues, “a reader has an opportunity to enrich and deepen the text, to understand it better, and to find things in it that the writer... did not know were there” (p. 31).

1.2 Motivation behind the study

The dialogue about service children started for me many years ago. Such everyday incidents as those described in the vignettes may be familiar to any teacher who works, as I did for thirteen years, in a school with a substantial proportion of children from armed forces families. These vignettes illustrate just three of many occasions when observing how service children handled certain situations led me to consider how we could better understand their lives and take their interests, knowledges and priorities into account, particularly within the powerful institutions that govern their lives. How would they like to be understood and cared for? How do they make sense of their own lives? These questions are at the heart of this study.

Incidents like these also hold a personal resonance for me. I also grew up with a father in the Royal Air Force (RAF). I felt his absences deeply and feared at times for his safety. A childhood in an armed forces family can be simultaneously an ordinary and an extraordinary one (Sinor, 2003). Mine was substantially similar to that of my peers, yet differed in important ways. My family's photographs depict an unremarkable British childhood: picnics, sandcastles, campsites, special occasions. Yet each photo is tinged in some way by armed forces life: the family picnic takes place at an air show; my father is absent. The beach is in Germany, where I spent my early years, the photo depicting a visit from family back home. One picture shows a "Father Christmas" doing the rounds of the married quarters where we lived. Another shows my brother and me rough-and-tumbling with our dad. I remember that physical contact, the importance of knowing at that moment he was present and safe.

Perhaps the similarities in our childhoods attuned me to the service children I taught, or them to me. Knowing something of my background, they often sought me out to chat. Yet despite this, I was often unsure how to respond when children talked of their worries. I vividly remember Andrew confiding in me his fear of his father being shot. Knowing his father was in Afghanistan, where over forty British soldiers had died already that year, I struggled to find an answer that might reassure him without either dismissing his well-justified fear or making empty promises. I reasoned that if I felt under-informed about the service children in my care and ill-equipped to respond appropriately to them, teachers with no experience of armed forces life might feel even more so. A clash between military and educational cultures (Clifton, 2004) was brought home to me powerfully when a service parent recounted being chastised by

a teacher for telling his young daughter the hearses that passed her school playground contained returning “heroes”. He had replied, “*You just don’t live in our world.*”

The vignette *Saying goodbye to Louisa*¹ points to a systemic disregard of service children. Poorly-coordinated school transition procedures and military posting practices, and uncertainty about school places can make moving unnecessarily stressful (Ofsted², 2011; The Royal British Legion, 2017). Louisa’s experience is, regrettably, far from unusual. Service children often relocate mid-year, sometimes at extremely short notice; teachers may have no opportunity to plan for their arrival, let alone their continuing education. A child’s attainment data for English, maths and science, and a few basic facts³ are often the only information a school receives, and even this sparse information often arrives after the child. Sometimes children move on again before teachers have really come to know them well. What I remember most about saying goodbye to Louisa was a deep sense of fatigue: not only the temporary weariness of a family dealing with yet another house move and its many practical and emotional implications, but also the fatigue of feeling powerless, of being resigned to decisions made by indifferent others, decisions which they cannot refuse, having assented to these by the very act of enlisting in the air force.

I also remember my disbelief at the deputy headteacher’s reaction on hearing about Louisa’s imminent move. She simply asked how it would affect our data: no concern for Louisa’s feelings about moving, nor her friends’ reactions, nor even her future education. In a system in which schools are evaluated largely via children’s test results, one child’s arrival or departure can nudge a school’s standing in the data stakes, especially in a small school. Thus educational data, rather than the child, are often the default focus of attention. Children can be almost literally understood as “academic material”, the substance into which teaching is poured and from which outputs are measured which then define them. It is not uncommon in my school, for example, to hear teachers talking of the number of EHCPs or GLDs⁴ in their classes. Louisa was likely to move schools every two years. Surely, I felt, we should be building up a more

¹ All names of people and places in this thesis are pseudonyms.

² Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills

³ Attendance, free school meals eligibility and special needs record. A recent update to the transfer document provides an option to identify service children and highlight concerns about mobility and deployment.

⁴ Education Health Care Plan/Good Level of Development

sophisticated, more caring knowledge of her than the mere shadow cast by her test result data.

Incidents such as those described in the vignettes are also an important reminder that the everyday business of the classroom and the primary curriculum may be far removed from the children's interests. By "interests" I mean the children's priorities, the matters they attend to and engage with, which are shaped by their "social, cultural, affective and material experiences and present position in the world" (Bezemer & Kress, 2016, p.27). The title of this thesis comes from Edward, one of my participants, who argued that, whatever momentous events are happening in a child's life, "*To them [teachers] it's just another school day*". We were often unaware of our pupils' interests until they made us listen by exploiting the "cracks" they found in the school day: moments of transition, such as walking back to the classroom, or official activities they could bend to personal purposes, as Felix and Matthew did with the Christmas puzzle. Such "cracks" are often described as *third spaces* (e.g. Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Moje et al., 2004; Soja, 1996). What, I wondered, if we could overcome what I perceived as a compartmentalisation of the children's in-school and out-of-school lives, if we could expand these cracks to create third spaces in which we could listen – really listen – to children in the school? How could we recognise, attend to and even value the service children's knowledges and interests, rather than – intentionally or otherwise – expecting the children to leave these at the school gate? These ideas underpin the methodology of this study, and part of the aim of this thesis is to illustrate and theorise how I set up the conditions for this third space and how it evolved in practice.

At the time these incidents happened I had been teaching in Bridgeton school – a rural state primary – for about nine years, and also held a middle management position. Yet despite constituting almost a quarter of the school's population, not once had service children been the subject of discussion at a staff meeting or in-service training session. We fulfilled our obligations, monitoring their test results and accounting for our use of Service Pupil Premium¹ funding, but beyond this, service children were on few people's agenda. This is mainly, I suggest, because data spoke the last word. Service children's attainment data tended to raise

¹ Currently a sum of £300 per service child per year, to be used for pastoral care

few concerns, either in school or nationally; therefore, we deemed them resilient and not warranting particular attention.

At the same time, however, public awareness of the lives of armed forces personnel and their families was growing. The backdrop to this was the most extensive deployment of British troops since 1945; around a quarter of a million people were deployed yearly, mainly to Afghanistan and Iraq, at least once – and many repeatedly (Ministry of Defence, [MoD] 2016b). Reports of injuries and fatalities were frequent. The high-profile television programme *Military Wives Choir* drew attention to the challenges experienced by partners at home (Military Wives Choirs, 2016; but see Cree, 2019), and the Invictus Games Foundation did likewise for veterans and injured soldiers. What about the children, I wondered. What would they tell us if we were prepared to listen?

Prompted by incidents and conversations in school and my desire to better understand service children's experiences, for an MSc in educational research in 2014-15 (Lee, 2015) I carried out a five-week arts-based participatory project in the school I had taught in, with a group of nine 9-11 year-old service children. The children's eagerness to participate, and their eloquent and thoughtful artefacts and talk suggested that the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their lives was rare but precious to them. The study was not designed as a therapeutic intervention, yet the children had appropriated it to attend to their own priorities, as one participant described:

it would be good for other schools to make clubs like this where they could just, talk about what's going on in their lives, get something out of their chest and then play games and just have fun and forget about whatever's happening in their lives (p.37).

One of their parents also told me she thought all children should have such opportunities. As I describe in Chapter 4, and illustrate in Chapters 5 to 7, in this PhD I have built on the methodology I developed for the MSc, creating a third space in school in which, through making things and talking, the children could explore together what mattered to them. Some of their priorities were very clearly related to service life; others, like my family photos, were matters that affect any or all children, yet are often tinged in subtle ways by the unusual circumstances in which service children live.

The study I describe in this thesis is motivated, then, by my background as a service child and teacher of service children and my insistence that schools need both more complex knowledge

of service children and more sophisticated ways of knowing about them – and indeed all children – than our current default, the proxy of attainment data. As the vignettes illustrate, dialogues with children sparked my thinking about them in the first place. This study is all about real live children, learning to listen to them and critically understanding what it means to listen.

1.3 *Thinking beyond “Little Troopers” and “doing very well in school”: constructing service children*

From what I have written about my unwillingness to define and finalise, it may seem rather contradictory to refer to “service children” as if they constitute some predefined and homogeneous group. In this section I discuss the term “service children” and identify some of the discourses about them as a cohort that are in circulation. I draw upon Bakhtin’s (1986) notion that “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (p. 69). I understand discourse as that chain, or network, of utterances – spoken, written or expressed in some other way – that relate to and construct a particular subject or theme, and influence all that is said and eventually even sayable about it (Gordon, 2002; see Table 1).

1.3.1 *Problematizing “service” children*

Everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realise myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 138)

Children spend their early childhood being taught who they are and where they fit into their cultural surroundings. In school, for example, they may learn that they are a “red group reader” or a “special needs child”; they gain reputations as “good” or “problem” pupils, which have a profound effect on the people they may become (MacLure et al., 2012). Bakhtin (1986) argues in the quotation above that such definitions are the powerful starting point for our very sense of self, an idea I expand upon in Chapter 2. If we take the view that “language, words, speech are the key means of subjectivity and consciousness” (D. Holland et al., 1998, p. 174), then discourses about service children are constitutive, not only of how we understand them, but of how they understand themselves and ultimately who they may become. In what follows I consider what is being said about service children, by whom, and in whose interest. What “self-evidences and commonplaces” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 234) or “authoritative discourses” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 344) need to be troubled?

I use the terms *service child* and *armed forces families* throughout this thesis, although I do so somewhat uncomfortably and cautiously, reluctant to define people by one of many aspects of their lives. I intend to denote, rather than define, certain children, yet I recognise that the

terms themselves are far from neutral. We rarely identify children directly by their parents' occupations; we do not speak of "construction" or "retail" children. Service children experience the joys and challenges common to all children. They celebrate, aspire to, struggle with, and grieve for the same things. They belong to the same schools, clubs, teams and religious groups, explore the same media, play the same games. I am wary, then, of implying that there is anything essentially "service" about the children themselves, that they are somehow "in" service. I am also anxious to avoid treating service children as interchangeable examples of some generic social category. Service children are above all people, with unique, complex and ever-changing lives, needs and priorities. Yet their existence is shaped in powerful, even "all-encompassing" ways (Children's Commissioner, 2018, p. 3), by the military, a "greedy" institution (Cosser, 1967; Dandeker et al., 2005) which exerts unique demands upon its members and their families. It is widely agreed that service children experience challenges and pressures that go beyond those of other children (Royal Navy and Royal Marines [RNRM] Children's Fund, 2009; Ofsted, 2011; Children's Commissioner, 2018). A common term to identify them is therefore helpful.

The term *service child* has been used in the UK since the 1950s (Institute of Education, 2019) and has been defined formally for English school census purposes since 2008 as a child who "has a parent or parents who are service personnel, serving in regular military units of all HM Forces and exercising parental care and responsibility" (Department for Education [DfE], 2010b, p. 4). This identifier enables schools to monitor test results and claim Service Premium funding. However, in defining what counts as a service child, it also excludes some who may for various reasons legitimately identify themselves as one and who may share many of the experiences of those who do meet the criteria; for example, children with a serving parent who is not their main carer, or children of veterans or of civilian contractors working for the military. In my research I planned to include any children who identified themselves as service children, although in practice all my participants fitted the official description.

To me, "service children", while not perfect, is less problematic or cumbersome than other possible terms. It carries fewer connotations of authoritarianism and aggression, for example, than "military children", a term some contrast with "civilian children" (e.g. Bradshaw et al., 2010; Mustillo et al., 2016). A term I refuse to use is "military brat" (e.g. Clifton, 2004; Ender, 2005; M. Wertsch, 2006). While some within the armed forces community consider it a term of endearment, "brat" invites unhelpful and unpleasant stereotypes "of authoritative

parenting, buzz haircuts, withdrawn emotions and relocating frequently” (RNRM Children’s Fund, 2009, p. 34). Using the less loaded term “service children” is a reminder that children of armed forces families, while formally recognised as part of the armed forces community (MoD¹, 2011), are in fact themselves civilians.

This point requires emphasising. It is often overlooked, as we might read from the images in Figure 1.1². These are taken from websites of three organisations that support service children: two charities, Little Troopers and Scotty’s Little Soldiers, and MKC Heroes, a network of after-school clubs. While I am not criticising the work of these organisations, it is important to consider how such images may be interpreted and may weave into powerful discourses about service children.

1.3.2 Little Troopers



Figure 1.1 Images of service children in circulation

Cartoons such as these work by stripping away all but a few basic characteristics. These images of children standing to attention or saluting, in oversized uniforms and helmets; the words “troopers”, “heroes” and “soldiers”; the regimental-style motto “Together as One”, along with insignia and flag, cannot but portray service children as homogeneous, quasi-military beings in their own right. They are reduced to miniature versions of their parents, soldiers-in-the-making, swamped by adult-size uniforms yet already embodying military stances and values of loyalty, service and patriotism. After-school clubs are named, like ships and naval

¹ UK Ministry of Defence

² Images reproduced by permission of Little Troopers, The Royal British Legion and Scotty’s Little Soldiers. None of these organisations are involved in this research project or its findings. My comments on these images are my own interpretation.

bases, “HMS” Heroes. I find all this troubling. Must the children always be described in military terms? Extending their parents’ occupation to children is problematic when we consider the terms of military service – not least the acceptance of the ultimate obligation to obey orders, even to kill or be killed. The cutesy, cartoon-like styling draws critical attention away from the realities of warfare, but it must not be taken lightly. In an era in which the legitimacy of contemporary warfare is often ambiguous and contested, such images weave service children into dominant discourses of “hero-fication” (Kelly, 2013, p. 722) which, Kelly argues, mobilise public support for the military and its operations. I see the same discourses at play in countless “military homecoming” videoclips and images available online, which construct children as both objects of sympathy and quasi-military heroes.

I am not suggesting the image designers deliberately seek to divert attention from the realities of warfare by portraying children as home-front heroes. Rather, I suspect they want to resist deficit representations of service children. The charity Scotty’s Little Soldiers supports bereaved children and carefully presents itself as pragmatic and positive. It is easy to see why designers depict children smiling broadly. Yet I find such branding problematic. “Little troopers”, “heroes” and “little soldiers” are heavily normative terms, implying that the children are valued for their ability to cope with adversity. Service children, like Louisa in the vignette, may be expected to present a stoic front, to display only a permitted range of emotions: preferably, as the Scotty’s Little Soldiers tagline affirms, to smile. If we consider the children as military beings themselves, this becomes an inescapable obligation, part of their service and sacrifice. But what about those who do not fit the norm of a compliant “little trooper”? Children who show vulnerability, grief or anger? Have those children failed? Have we failed as adults if we can’t make them smile?

Further, by focusing on the children’s ability to “soldier on”, we also divert attention from structures, practices and policies that act against their interests. We seek instead problems and solutions within the child, an approach Foucault (1982) describes as *individualisation*. We define social, emotional, behavioural and educational norms, and measure individual children against these, seeking signs of abnormality via tests, psychological questionnaires and observational methods:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each

individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. (Foucault, 1977, p. 304)

In this way, individual children are reduced to either success story or problem. We can then investigate how they meet our norms despite the odds, or design interventions to bring them into line with the norm, or at least perform in line with it. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the literature on service children is dominated by studies which do just this, investigating service children as bearers of educational or health data, or using them as a sample cohort for studies into resilience. In the next section, I examine two DfE documents in some detail to argue that such an approach also underpins the official stance on service children's education – and therefore the way in which service children are constructed in official discourses.

1.3.3 “Doing very well”

We can trace the current UK government stance on service children to a scathingly critical inquiry into their education conducted over a decade ago (House of Commons [HofC] Defence Committee, 2006). This inquiry highlighted numerous problems, including some I have already mentioned, such as inadequate systems for transferring pupil records, and conflicting MoD posting and school admissions procedures. It also criticised the invisibility of service children in the education system, and the “hands-off” relationship between the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the MoD. To give a flavour of this report, the authors describe the DfES's resistance to a service child identifier as “simply ridiculous, and a sad reflection of the importance which the DfES attaches to Service children” (HofC Defence Committee 2006, p. 39). Soon after this inquiry the government put in place a number of initiatives intended to ensure that the armed forces community faced no disadvantage compared with civilians (see Figure 1.2).

One of these initiatives was the introduction of the Service Child Identifier into the annual school census in 2008 and its use in 2010 to generate quantitative attainment data for service children, supplemented by a small-scale qualitative inquiry. The DfE published its findings in two reports, “*The Educational Performance of Children of Service Personnel*” (DfE, 2010b), and a “good practice guidance” document, entitled “*How Schools Secure the Progress of Children from the Armed Forces Families*” (DfE, 2010a). Neither document has been supplanted or updated since 2010, so they remain the authoritative word on service children, and their headline messages have been carried forwards into many other documents (e.g. McCullough &

Hall, 2016; Noret et al., 2014; Ofsted, 2011). It concerns me, then, that the two documents are highly problematic in several ways.

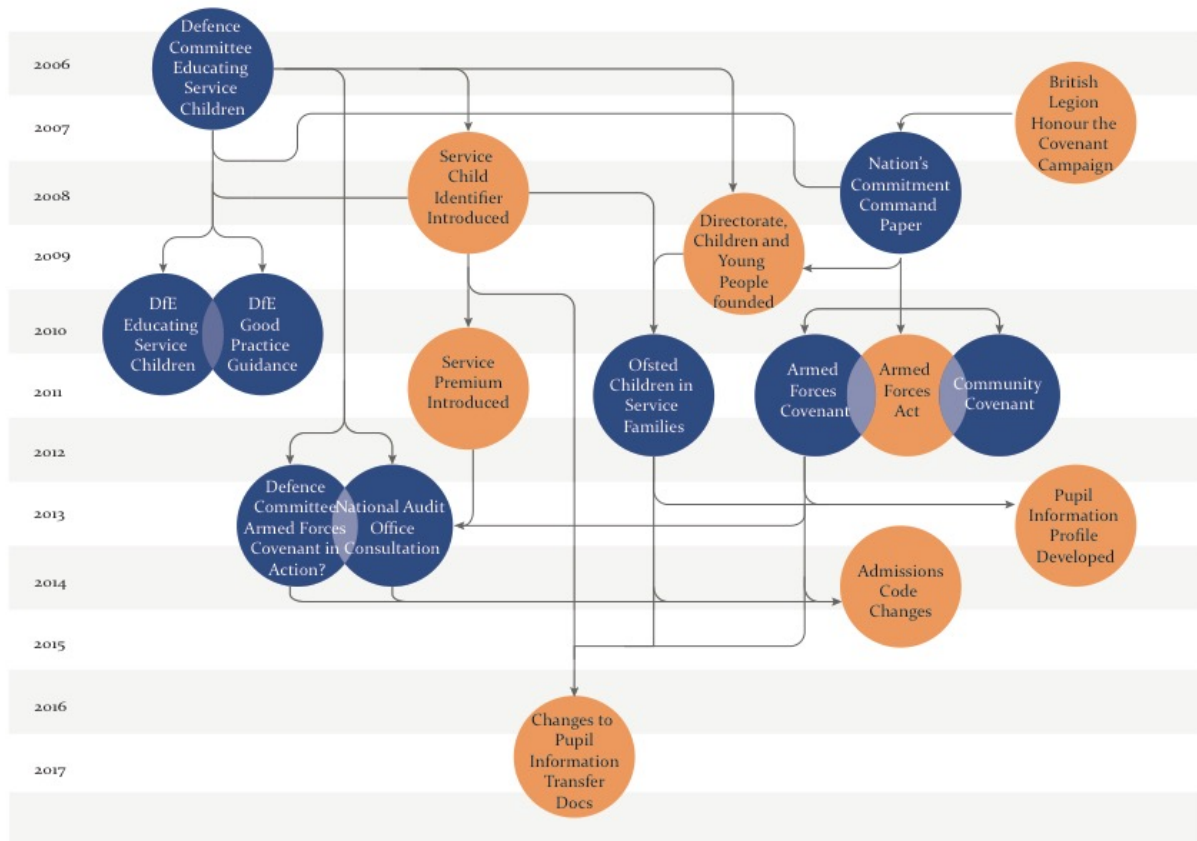


Figure 1.2 Documents (blue) and strategies (orange) relating to service children’s education in England

First is the mechanistic notion of education they exemplify, underpinned by the assumption that test results tell the entire story. As its name suggests, the Educational Performance document comments purely on test result data. The focus of the good practice guidance document, while it uses mainly qualitative data, is similar: to ascertain how schools “secure” children’s progress: in other words, how schools ensure the required test scores. Yet we must consider exactly what test results are based upon and what we can learn from them. To score highly in Key Stage 2 SATs¹, for example, a child must demonstrate competence in a narrow range of skills, including the specific skill of SATs test-taking. It is clearly naïve to expect to distil the entirety of a child’s education into a set of test scores, and yet this is the DfE’s default mechanism. In these documents, then, service children are constructed as products of

¹ Statutory National Curriculum tests taken at end of Key Stage 2 i.e. at age 10-11, used to evaluate pupil attainment and progress and school effectiveness.

educational inputs, represented and compared against norms by the data they carry through the system.

A second problem is that the documents appear to have been hastily and somewhat carelessly assembled. This is evident from the patchy literature review in the Educational Performance document (DfE, 2010a). The anonymous authors ask, “What is the international and UK research evidence on issues faced by service children?” yet, despite references to “several sources of evidence” (p. 9.), and the claim that “this chapter has considered the research evidence in this area” (p. 12), they include only four articles. All four are freely available online; one is read in summary and one, oddly, presents 1998 data on children’s reading and writing progress at Grade 8 in US Department of Defense (DoD) schools. From these four articles the authors also highlight the findings that suggest positive outcomes for service children and downplay the negative and critical ones. We must assume that the authors were not expecting the review to be read critically: this opens them to accusations of sloppiness or cherry-picking.

Third, the two documents are based on data obtained via the service child identifier in the census. Given that this mechanism was still in its teething stage and could only identify a subsection of service children – those below Year 11¹ in schools in England and whose parents had declared their service status – it is unsurprising that it only “found” around 37,000 service children in the school system, compared with up to 175,000 calculated from other sources (Ofsted, 2011). Even where data were available, this was unreliable for children who had moved between the different education systems of the devolved nations, from Wales to England, for example. Yet these problems with reliability and validity did not prevent the authors of the Educational Performance document from pointing to “the fact that service children outperform their peers” (DfE, 2010b, p. 35). The authors of the good practice guidance document proclaim in bold print that “What is clear is that many children from armed forces families do very well at school and there is evidence that overall they perform better than average” (DfE 2010a, p. 4).

These claims are doubly problematic, because they not only rely on less-than-reliable data, but also obfuscate some of the findings. If we pick through the graphs and boxplots of the 78-page Educational Performance document, we learn that the apparently excellent performance of

¹ In almost all English state schools, Years 1-6 are the primary school years (for children aged 5-11); Years 7-11 are secondary school years (age 11-16).

service children is explained by prior attainment and economic factors, and when taking mobility into account, service children's attainment drops significantly, a pattern found also in more recent data (MoD, 2016a). The authors state that "mobile service children do better than their mobile non service child peers, showing that they cope with mobility better" (DfE 2010b, p. 37), which in this reductive view of education equates to achieving higher GCSE grades. What they omit to mention is that service children are over three times as likely to be mobile than their peers (MoD, 2016a) and that school exclusions account for much of the lower performance of mobile non-service children (Children's Commissioner, 2018).

The good practice guidance document is also methodologically problematic. The authors' aim is to "collect examples of effective practice" (DfE, 2010a, p. 2), yet they do not indicate how they selected participating schools. Additionally, although the researchers consulted stakeholders in eleven primary and ten secondary schools, they allocated only two to three hours to each school, during which they conducted five separate meetings, including only one with a handful of children from either Year 6 or Year 10¹. From these they draw some substantial conclusions, such as that service children "don't want to be seen as 'special' or, in fact, different from anyone else [or] to be singled out for special overt consideration or treatment" (p. 2.). It astounds me that the authors consider it acceptable to make such unambiguous generalisations from this very small piece of research.

In an interview with Foucault, the point is made that "posing for discourse the question of power means basically to ask whom discourse serves" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 116). From the evidence of these two documents, I must conclude that the DfE is protecting its own interests, maintaining the status quo and deflecting criticism, rather than conducting a genuine and open-minded investigation into whether service children are thriving or surviving in the education system. Presenting what closely resembles authoritative evidence that the education system mitigates any disadvantage to service children, the department neatly sidesteps any responsibility to inquire further, and, in effect, closes down the nascent dialogue. Service premium funding then comes across as remarkably generous provision that forestalls any potential further criticism.

¹ Year 6 = age 10-11; Year 10 = age 14-15

It is not my intention in this thesis, however, to provide a re-appraisal of the DfE's findings. For the reasons outlined above, I have little interest in this project in attainment data as a unit of analysis. I am far more interested in learning from time spent in dialogue with real, living children, and witnessing the ways in which they deal with and make sense of their lives.

1.4 Changing the focus from “needs” to “learning lives”

My original idea for this study was to consider service children's needs. However, I have always been uneasy about using the word “needs” with its overtones of “neediness” or being “in need”. As I describe in the literature review (Chapter 3), service children are often described in deficit terms, which sits poorly with my desire for a nuanced understanding of their complex lives. Abandoning “needs”, I considered the idea of “wellbeing” before also rejecting this. To me, wellbeing is inseparable from the idea of being “not well” and requires some sort of judgement, quantification or classification, an idea I find too restricting. For a while I used the idea of “experiences” as a placeholder until something better came along. This seemed more open-ended than my previous ideas, but it still troubled me. What counts as an experience? What doesn't, and how do we decide? In deciding, are we not ourselves *constructing* that experience (Davies & Davies, 2007)? Yet the “lives” of service children seemed too broad. I was to research with children in school and it seemed arrogant to think that I could attend to more than a fragment of their lives.

It was towards the end of my fieldwork that it occurred to me that “learning lives” might be the term I was seeking. At that stage of the analysis, as I describe in Chapter 6, I had been struck by the way in which learning was a common denominator in everything the children talked about. Learning came across as an activity that flowed across settings, timescales and activities, and one that was inseparable from affect, relationships and the children's sense of self. To return to my three vignettes, learning in this wide sense is evident in each. Felix and Matthew, in addition to the “official” learning (to solve a maths problem by trial and improvement), were also unofficially learning to use an everyday, collaborative activity to handle the feelings connected with their parents' deployments, to generate solidarity with one another, and to draw attention to their priorities in the classroom. Andrew, similarly, was learning to obtain the reassurance he needs to deal with frightening situations. Louisa was learning both to adopt the stoical attitude required of her, and to handle change. I was equally

a learner in these situations. All this learning is not merely a cognitive enterprise situated in formal institutions at particular times, then, or the pre-planned acquisition of knowledge, but a “lifelong, life-wide and life-deep” (Erstad, 2012, p. 40) endeavour, which may often be unacknowledged, but which happens endlessly and everywhere and is deeply intertwined with our emotional development, our relationships and our understanding of who we are.

Erstad and his colleagues (Erstad, 2012; Erstad et al., 2009; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2017) use the idea of “learning lives” to attend to both the flow of children’s learning across formal and informal settings and the coherence between learning and identity. This resonates with what I was learning from the fieldwork, as well as with my desire to move beyond “needs”, “wellbeing” or even “experiences” but to remain still within the realm of education in its broadest sense. It also resonates with my reflections on my own life, in which, despite seeming important at the time, school was merely one of many learning spaces I traversed, a “node’ in a network” (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010, p. 381). A learning lives approach also draws on the work of the thinkers and theories that influence my thinking. It is informed by attention to culturally-situated literacy practices, the development of learners’ sense of self, their active concern with their own learning, and the constitutive nature of context and space and place, ideas that I bring together throughout this thesis.

1.5 *Summary*

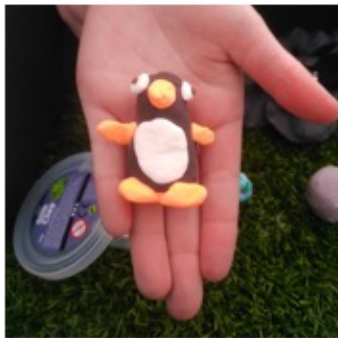
To bring this chapter to a close, the aims of this thesis are:

- To add to our understanding of the learning lives of service children, their priorities and interests and the ways in which these flow in and out of the school as one of many sites of learning.
- To better understand the children as meaning-makers, investigating how they explore, make sense of and present their worlds and themselves, and the social resources they draw upon and remake in order to do so.
- To make visible a research project that seeks to create a third space within a primary school, and to examine the methodological, ethical and pedagogical potential of such a project and its effects on the children’s sense of self, as meaning-makers and as social beings.

This is previously unexplored territory in the field of research with service children, and, combined with my theoretical approach, is rare in any research in UK primary schools. Few are granted the opportunity to spend an afternoon a week for over a year with a group of children in a school, free from restraints of curricular objectives or expected progress. In this PhD I have been given a unique opportunity to contribute to our knowledge of these children in ways that go far beyond the more common proxy of outcomes data. This is only made possible through my relationship with a school and an ordinary yet extraordinary group of nine to eleven-year-olds, and I consider myself hugely privileged to have been alongside them during what turned out to be a highly eventful year in many of their lives. I conclude this introductory chapter with invitations from two of the children who participated in my research, Imogen and Jessie:

“Use our research as knowledge and don’t waste it.”

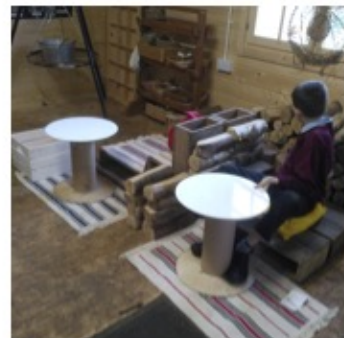
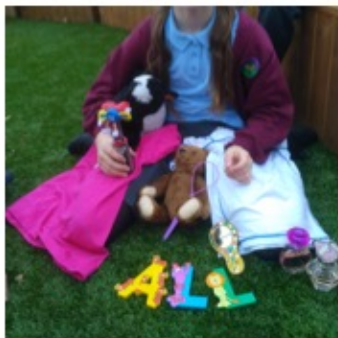
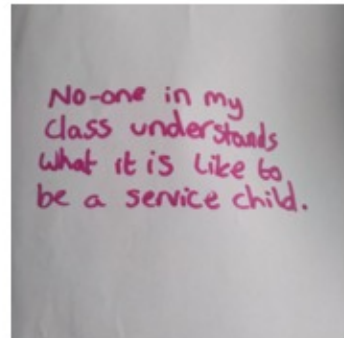
“Please treat our work with respect. Use it to learn about us and how we feel.”



Chapter 2

Positioning

the research



2.1 Introduction

Throughout this PhD I have attended conferences, research symposia and similar events arranged by organisations with an interest in armed forces families. These tend to be dominated by a desire for solutions: quantitative evidence of “what works” with service children. At a 2018 armed forces charity conference, for example, the president of a UK branch of an international policy research organisation appealed to researchers to provide “hard facts” and “hard science”. He ridiculed studies with small sample sizes and, by extension, qualitative research. In this he clearly demarcated what would count as credible and useful knowledge. With his imposing physical stature and forceful way of speaking, he exuded authority; yet his words reflected a host of unacknowledged assumptions about social reality and meaning-making, a lack of understanding of qualitative research, and a naïve belief that the kind of evidence derived from medical studies is transferable to other contexts. The tacit assumption was that we all agree hard facts are just waiting to be discovered by researchers with the right skills.

Such an unreceptive and unreflexive climate for qualitative research brings home to me the importance of recognising, developing and being overt about my philosophical and theoretical perspectives. I need to be able to persuade people my ideas are worth listening to, and defend these if challenged. Otherwise they may be dismissed as mere opinion – unreliable and invalid – by those working within the confines of the “what works” agenda. Lemke (1995) reminds us:

We need a theory because we always already have one. If we don't formulate explicitly our ways of meaning making in particular contexts, the meanings we make will be governed automatically by default, by the limiting meaning systems of our narrow communities, even when we are not aware of this. (p. 157)

In this chapter I explain the assumptions I make about the nature of reality and truth, and the thinkers and theories that have inspired and challenged me to develop my personal philosophy and helped me make sense of the whole research process. I start by reflecting briefly on my personal philosophical development and the values that drew me to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. I outline several aspects of Bakhtin's compelling theories of dialogism and utterance, including the links I see between social constructionism and his insistence that meaning does not inhere in the world but is created in situated dialogue. In Section 2.3.4, I describe Bakhtin's explanations of human development as rooted in our struggle with the

discourses of others. This leads to a discussion of authoritative discourses, and eventually carnival, which I see as a precursor to ideas of third space articulated by later thinkers. As this chapter foregrounds my Bakhtinian dialogic approach, my discussion of third space here is brief, but I return to these ideas elsewhere in the thesis, particularly in Chapter 6, where I describe how space and place became far more significant to the project than I had anticipated.

To conclude the chapter, I revisit some of these ideas in the light of Foucault's work. I explain how his thinking complements many of Bakhtin's theories and how the differences in emphasis between the two thinkers have been helpful in my understanding, particularly of power. I find analogies and illustrations helpful to clarify these concepts, but rather than bringing in many examples from my fieldwork before I have outlined my methodology and introduced my participants (in Chapter 4), I illustrate some of the theoretical concepts in this chapter with examples from my own teaching.

2.2 My theoretical journey

Before returning to university thirty years after my first degree, I had never studied philosophy or sociology in any formal setting. I soon realised, however, that while these were new disciplines to me, many of the ideas I was encountering resonated with what I had learned in informal ways. Through all my relationships and experiences, I have come across and responded to different values and ideas of how the world makes sense, how people understand it and act within it. I was brought up in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s and had a comprehensive-school education. I studied modern languages and lived in various countries. My family itself spans cultures, ethnicities and social classes. I taught in secondary and primary schools in the UK and founded and built up a women's choir over a decade. A principle that I adopted early on was to refuse and reject stereotypes, universal "truths" and judgements about people and their ways of life, and to focus instead on the local and complex, learning from and with people within their own culture.

My return to university in 2014 was partly sparked by an ethical dilemma: what to do when my values and philosophy were increasingly out of tune with the tasks expected of me as a teacher, when reflexivity and epistemological debate were supplanted by a written list of "non-

negotiables”, and when educational decisions were made in piecemeal fashion in response to Ofsted’s latest inspection framework? I felt de-professionalised as my work was measured against ever-changing criteria which had little to do with children’s learning and everything to do with providing evidence for inspectors. Additionally, in the Church of England (CofE) school I worked in, church policymakers supplied scripture-based ontological and ethical – and, increasingly, curricular – direction, monitored by SIAMS¹ inspectors. Yet, as Robinson and Fielding (2007) argue, when dialogue about the purposes of education is closed down, “the ‘how’ becomes little more than mechanisms devoid of moral or educational legitimacy” (p. 22). I felt increasingly isolated and disenfranchised in this environment.

It is no exaggeration to say that starting the MSc in Educational Research at Bristol was a relief and a delight. Now I could participate in dialogues about what education could and should be, and why – dialogues stifled in my school. I no longer had to toe the official line. I was excited to find a community of people writing and debating critically about education in ways that made sense to me. I could never have predicted that I would be captivated by the work of an early 20th century Soviet scholar, yet I found in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin a cohesive framework for the nebulous set of ideas, values and beliefs I had gathered over the years. I returned time and again to his writing, and to that of others whose work I found persuasive, and I found compelling explanations for things that puzzled or concerned me. In an early seminar, the tutors invited the new master’s and doctoral students to arrange ourselves roughly in a line across the room according to our philosophical positioning, from positivism at one end to postmodernism at the other. I tentatively placed myself two-thirds of the way along, not uncomfortably close to the postmodern end, but in that direction. This was the first step, literally, in claiming the ideas and theories that describe and form my ways of understanding and interpreting reality.

2.3 Introducing Bakhtin

As I explain in the very first paragraph of this thesis, a dialogic perspective underpins my research project. This is not only an ethical position, reflecting my desire to include children in a dialogue from which they have largely been excluded, but also a position that aligns with

¹ Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools

my ontological and epistemological stances – my beliefs about the fundamental nature of reality and the ways in which we can know about the world. The foundational thinker in dialogism is Mikhail Bakhtin. He has been described as “the most important Soviet thinker in the human sciences and the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century” (Todorov, 1984, p. ix) and as “a phenomenon, his notoriety such that he is cited authoritatively even by those who have never read him” (Holquist, 2002, p. xi). His ideas are widely considered to prefigure and even go beyond those of more recent thinkers (Todorov, 1984; Draus, 2001; Frank, 2005; Reed, 2005). I suggest, for example, we might understand Bakhtin as a third space thinker, in his radical “thirding” of conventional approaches to language and communication, which have tended to understand language in either-or terms: abstract code system or tool for acting in the world (Scollon & Scollon, 2014). Bakhtin’s capacious theories refuse to merely synthesise these two ways of thinking but go much further, providing, among other things, powerful explanations of communication, language, and humans as “authors” of their own lives. Bakhtin’s work addresses such questions as:

How does a thinking person – and we are all thinking people – develop? What happens when ideas, embodied in specific people with particular voices, come into dialogic contact? ...How does a person develop a point of view on the world, a set of attitudes for interpreting and evaluating it? What does our point of view have to do with our sense of ourselves, whether as individuals or as members of groups? What role does formal education play in acquiring and shaping it?
(Morson 2004, pp. 317-318)

Such questions are fundamental to my research project that aims to understand how a group of children make sense of the world and their position within it, and create and mobilise “narratives of the self” (Erstad et al., 2009, p. 100).

2.3.1 Meaning and social constructionism

A central premise of Bakhtin’s (1986) philosophy is that “no natural phenomenon has ‘meaning,’ only signs (including words) have meaning” (p. 113). Prefiguring social constructionism, his stance emphasises that the patterns and categories, coherence and purposes we take for objective reality are not given. Rather, humans construct these, and from our own standpoint, as we seek to make something meaningful and coherent of the world and our existence, to “tame the wild profusion of existing things” (Foucault, 2002c, p. xvi). This stance does not go so far as to deny the existence of physical reality, however. Nor does it negate the very real effects of social reality on people’s lives (Crotty, 1998). Take SATs tests, for

example. If we consider the many constructions upon which these are based – the knowledge and skills selected and tested; the curriculum and its privileging of certain knowledge and ways of knowing; the norms with which children are compared; schools themselves as certain types of learning communities; the idea of age-related progress; even ideas of age and individual progress – we must recognise that the entire edifice of school testing has no foundation in any underlying, essential reality. The science of assessment we rely on so heavily in schools is just one of many conceivable ways of knowing about children and their development. Yet, in the sense that an entire network of activities, discourses, documentation and even emotion surrounds them, SATs are a real thing: ask any Year 6 teacher or student. And they have real consequences, affecting children’s everyday school experiences in very concrete ways, and even contributing to children’s understanding of who they are and can be.

A recognition that we construct and interpret reality – and from a particular standpoint – means that knowledge is always partial and provisional: historically, socially and culturally contingent. An acceptance that nothing is universally true invites us to question time-honoured wisdom, to unpick the assumptions and actions that underpin our knowledge. This shifts the emphasis from trying to uncover “truths” to investigating how knowledge is constructed, and the resources and mechanisms used to do so. As soon as we start doing this, we run into questions of power: Whose knowledge counts? How does certain people’s knowledge gain dominance and other people’s get ignored? How are people constructed by others, what are the effects, and how do people resist? Social constructionism is, then, a critical epistemology, requiring us to pay close attention to the institutions that govern our lives and the discourses that both underpin and are constructed by those institutions. Thus “professional agreements become suspect; normalized beliefs become targets of demystification; accepted truths are rendered curious” (Gergen, 1985, p. 11).

From this epistemological position, appeals for “hard science” about people’s lives are untenable, resting on the assumption of an essential, unchanging truth that we can find if we strip away layers of human interpretation. Such a view fails to recognise that hard facts are “interpretations that we have forgotten are interpretations” (Caputo, 2018, p. 12). My project embraces the richness in nuanced, diverse and even contradictory meanings, and recognises that knowledge-making is a social process through and through. Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism and utterance provide compelling and sophisticated explanations of why this is so.

2.3.2 *“Otherness”: the dialogical principle*

Bakhtin’s epistemology and his theories of language are inseparable, and underpinning both is his “dialogical principle” (Todorov, 1984, p. iii). Its central premise is that we are constantly engaged in a dialogue with others and otherness: with utterances, discourses, interests, values and expectations. For Bakhtin, individuals and societies and even languages and other sign systems are far from cohesive, stable and single-voiced, often despite attempts to make them so; rather, they are in a constant state of renewal through never-ending interaction with “otherness”. Holquist (2002) explains this using the analogy of messages:

Existence is addressed to me as a riot of inchoate potential messages... some... come to me in the form of primitive physiological stimuli, some in the form of natural language, and some in social codes, or ideologies. So long as I am in existence, I am in a particular place, and must respond to all these stimuli either by ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing – for it is a form of work – meaning out of such utterances. (p. 46)

Life, then, is an unceasing dialogue with all manner of messages, or texts – and Bakhtin (1986) uses the word “text” in its broadest sense as “any coherent complex of signs” (p. 103); in other words, the product of people expressing themselves in a concrete situation (see Table 1). We encounter these messages or texts in the form of language, visual symbols, artefacts and other cultural tools and signs, as well as gesture and movement, and even the spaces we inhabit and the way our time is structured. These signs and texts accumulate to offer us powerful discourses about who we are and our place in the world. And we also play our part in the shaping of signs, texts and discourses.

Schools are places in which all this semiotic, dialogic activity is very evident, as Thomson, Hall and Russell (2007) describe in their “reading” of school wall displays. They relate the histories and discourses underlying the practice of creating displays in UK primary schools, and explain the various functions these performed in one setting for different audiences. As a “cumulative cultural text” (p. 385), the displays not only offered messages about “good” schools, teachers, students and work, but they also chronicled children’s trajectories through the school, helping them position themselves as culture members. Texts, then, both spring out of existing cultures and serve to renew culture. There is a dialogic relationship between the stock of signs available to us and the meanings we make with them in concrete situations.

Table 1 Definitions of terminology used in this thesis

Term	Definition	Examples
Sign	Something that combines form and meaning (Kress, 1997) to represent aspects of something in the world to someone	Facial expression, gesture, word, image, map
Utterance	Unit/act of situated meaning-making addressed to an audience	Verbal comment, gesture, image, grunt, written text
Mode	Cultural and material resources for meaning-making (Jewitt & Kress, 2003)	Written text, gesture, music, paint, font, colour
Multimodal	Describes an utterance or text in which modes are combined to make meaning (this is almost always the case)	Written text combining font, colour choice, layout etc; map; sculpture explained verbally
Mediational means	A cultural or physical tool with which an individual acts to achieve an activity	Paintbrush-and-paint, laptop, language, image, poem
Text	A realised accumulation of signs and utterances, the product of meaning-making activity	School wall display, map, sculpture, song, dance, verbal comment
Discourse	A chain, or network, of utterances that relate to and construct a particular subject or theme, and influence all that is said and eventually even sayable about it	Discourse of the “resilient” child; discourse around safeguarding in schools

According to Bakhtin, our inescapable task as humans is to respond to all the messages we meet. We interpret and evaluate them; we assimilate them into our own ideological¹ stance, or world view, allowing them to become “internally persuasive” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345); we

¹ Bakhtin uses the word “ideology” apolitically, in the sense of a “system of ideas” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.101)

adapt or reject them. It is difficult, then, to overstate the importance of the texts through which we form, and inform others of, our understanding of the world. And this has implications for research methodology. Bakhtin (1986) asks, “Is it possible to find any other approach to [the human] and his life (work, struggle, and so forth) than through the signifying texts he has created or is creating?” (p. 113). If we take the view also that texts operate “as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (Holquist, 1981, pp. 425-6), then attention to semiotic activity on a situated and local level also provides insight into the wider social and ideological contexts that shape people’s lives. As Bhabha (1994) points out, this is the

challenge of reading, into the present of a specific cultural performance, the traces of all those diverse disciplinary discourses and institutions of knowledge that constitute the condition and contexts of culture. (p. 233)

These are ideas I relate to closely in my desire to learn about the children’s lives in dialogue *with* them rather than *about* them. In my research, children are not mere subjects of others’ texts, but are interpreters and makers of texts and narratives about themselves, their lives and the conditions and contexts in which they live.

Another way of looking at all this activity is the idea, developed from the work of both Bakhtin and his contemporary, Vygotsky, that as humans we are almost never acting alone: “almost all human action is mediated action” (J. V. Wertsch, 1998, p. 25)¹. We accomplish everything we do with cultural or physical tools, which Wertsch refers to as mediational means. These may range from hammers to computers, or, less tangibly, number systems or language. In Wertsch’s view, a focus on individuals is incomplete: instead we need to consider “individuals-acting-with-mediational-means” (p. 25). He illustrates this idea with the example of pole-vaulting, an activity irreducible either to the athlete or to the material mediational means of the pole. The properties of the mediational means used and the individual’s facility with them are central to the accomplishment of the action. Thus a spoken utterance is a mediated action accomplished with the cultural tool of language and other signs such as gesture and facial expression, which results in a text, another cultural tool. And because cultural tools are developed by humans within cultural contexts over time, a focus on mediated action, according to Wertsch, is key to understanding human activity: it provides “a kind of natural

¹ I use James Wertsch’s initials here to distinguish him from Mary Wertsch, whose work I also discuss in this thesis.

link between action, including mental action, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which such action occurs” (p. 24).

One property of mediational means is their materiality (J. V. Wertsch, 1998). Even the least tangible of mediational means, such as spoken utterances, Wertsch argues, rely on movements of air and vocal tissue (see also Kress, 1997). In my project I have been increasingly interested in exploring ideas of materiality and particularly the roles played by material objects in constituting people’s understandings of themselves. Miller (2010), for example, argues that

A particular society elaborates its cultural practices through an underlying pattern which is manifested in a multitude of diverse forms. By learning to interact with a whole slew of different material cultures, an individual grows up assuming the norms that we call culture. The child doesn’t learn these things as a passive set of categories, but through everyday routines that lead to constant consistent interaction with things. (p. 53)

Miller and Wertsch make similar points: that investigating people’s interactions with objects can generate knowledge about their relationships, cultural values and beliefs, as well as the institutions and power relations which shape their lives. Influenced by Miller’s (2008, 2010) compelling explorations of people’s relationships with material objects, I began to be aware of the fascinating ways in which the children talked about, brought in, used and created objects in the fieldwork, often to initiate collaborative meaning-making activity and develop their sense of self. Bringing a Bakhtinian perspective to bear on the idea that we “think with” objects (Turkle, 2007) yielded rich insights into what the children gained from taking part in the research. As this theoretical perspective took shape through, rather than before, my fieldwork, though, I elaborate on these ideas further in my discussion (in Chapter 7) of objects and what the children did with them.

I stop short of describing my approach as sociomaterial, however. Despite seeing the richness in an approach which attends to the entanglement of people, affect, discourses, movement, materiality, time and space, and sensing myself even edging in that direction, my focus in this project is on objects as mediating artefacts, rather than on objects with agency in their own right. To me this would suggest the ontological position that objects have a certain autonomy. While I acknowledge that is a convincing argument (the weather, for example, or the objects at hand had some bearing on our research activity), in my project I am dealing almost entirely with created artefacts to which people respond and ascribe meaning. One child, for example,

brought in a giant inflatable banana one day, which certainly affected us, not least as it took up most of our space, but it was what the banana enabled Amelia to accomplish, and, within the social dynamics of the research group, that interested me. Mine is still a human-centred, rather than a post-human approach, then, and my unit of analysis is the situated activity of the children as they interact with me, with each other and with their environment through mediational means, which include texts of all sorts – visual, written, gestural, spoken and material.

2.3.3 *Meaning-making: the importance of context*

Bakhtin seems to have had a third ear that permitted him to hear differences where others perceived only sameness, especially in the apparent wholeness of the human voice. (Holquist, 1983, p. 307)

Another key notion in Bakhtin's thinking is *heteroglossia*, the dialogic relationship between utterances. Every utterance we make, according to Bakhtin (1986), "is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (p. 69). We are not born into a social vacuum. Rather, we inherit and become part of a world of interpretations, a "stream of verbal communication" (Vološinov, 1973, p. 81), already constructed and continually undergoing construction by humans. Looking backwards, everything we say responds to prior utterances and relies on a language system, words and *speech genres* – generic ways of talking in certain social circles – that we have taken from the mouths of others (Bakhtin, 1981). Similarly, in making a visual "utterance" such as a drawing, we redeploy available semiotic material (Dyson, 1997; Kress, 1997) and conventions of using it. Some refer to this as *intertextuality* (e.g. Bazerman, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). While this is a creative act, this is not individual creativity (Holquist, 1983). Because words, speech genres and semiotic material always carry the "flavour" of past usages, no utterance can be entirely free, single-voiced or neutral. In Chapter 7, for example, I discuss a map created by one of my participants. For this, Ella redeployed cartographic traditions and elements made available to her by her culture, such as representing each country by its external borders and using colour-coding and labels. The map, unsurprisingly, has North at the top and is centred around an extra-large UK. Any utterance, whether consciously or not, contains traces, then, not only of multiple voices, but also of rules, ideologies, values and emotions.

At the same time, however, every utterance is also a unique, unrepeatable event, addressed outwards, with particular intentions, towards the immediate audience and potential future

audiences. Meanings are never ours alone, because “the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 208). All these factors determine the meaning of an utterance and what can actually be said and understood, as Bakhtin explains:

The author (the speaker) may have unalienable rights upon the discourse, but so does the listener, as do those whose voices resonate in the words found by the author (since there are no words that do not belong to someone). Discourse is a three-role drama (it is not a duet but a trio). (Bakhtin, cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 52)¹

By way of illustration, I have often witnessed a child in school correcting another’s spelling. Often, she will explain not only the approved spelling but also a mnemonic or rule (“*Change the -y- to an -i- and add -es*”), employing the gestures, tone of voice and speech genres teachers use. In this she echoes not only past utterances but also the value that people place upon accurate and standardised spelling, and expectations of what children should be able to spell at certain ages. These values and expectations have their own backstories, of which the child is unaware, and are inscribed in curriculum spelling lists, textbooks and websites and embodied in such activities as homework, games, tests and spelling bees.

At the same time the child is addressing her utterance towards an audience, and with intention(s). She may wish to help the other child, but may equally desire to assert her superiority, or impress anyone else within earshot, or even herself, knowing she will be tested on her spelling in the future. She might also be working on her relationship with the other child, or trying to resolve a previous disagreement. Foucault (2002b) points out, “one and the same individual may occupy in turn, in the same series of statements, different positions, and assume the role of different subjects” (p. 105). No utterance ever “simply” transmits a piece of information from one mind to another. Utterances always become a new link in the never-ending chain of utterances, extending the chain into a new dialogic situation.

In Bakhtin’s theory of the utterance, context is all-important. Words and sentences possess only latent meanings until they are actualised in a concrete speech situation:

¹ Where I use Todorov rather than the original source it is because I often find Todorov’s translations clearer and more gender-neutral than others.

The constituent factor for the linguistic form, as for the sign, is not at all its self-identity as signal but its specific variability; and the constituent factor for understanding the linguistic form is not recognition of "the same thing," but... orientation in the particular, given context and in the particular, given situation – orientation in the dynamic process of becoming and not "orientation" in some inert state. (Vološinov¹ 1973, p. 69)

Scollon and Scollon (2003) offer the example of a stop sign lying inert on a painter's bench, which takes on meaning only when positioned in a particular orientation in a traffic system. All communication, Bakhtin argues, works in this way. Meaning depends not solely on the speaker's (or sign-maker's) intentions, but also on the *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1981), literally time-space, the unique and entire dialogic situation. Bakhtin understands space and time as "inextricably linked" (Timmis & Williams, 2014, p. 289), and intertwined with people's activities, the meanings they make of the world and even of themselves. Context, in this view, is not simply a backdrop to dialogue. Rather, the time and place in which an utterance occurs, the ways of communicating and behaving permissible in that situation, the history of the utterance and its relationship with other utterances, the audience and the relationship between speaker and audience, their moods and histories – all play a constitutive role in meaning. Chronotopes may be established and officially sanctioned in institutions, or may emerge as people find their own routines and ways of being (Kumpulainen et al., 2014). Any interpretation of an utterance's meaning must then take account not only of what is said, but of its chronotopic context.

An appreciation of the constitutive role of context and audience invites reflexivity, which I understand as sensitivity to my (changing) positionality as an adult/teacher/researcher and what this brings to the research (Etherington, 2004), as well as to the ever-changing conditions which all influence not only what we may say and the knowledge we make, but even what is sayable and knowable. This invites recognition that meaning is conditional and fleeting, rather than fixed, or finalised, for all time; a warning that I should be cautious about the claims to knowledge that I can make. It also invites a methodology that allows me to attend to the chronotopic context, rather than disregard it; ideas I discuss in Chapter 4.

¹ Bakhtin's and Vološinov's ideas overlap to such a degree that some scholars suggest Bakhtin himself authored works under his colleague's name.

2.3.4 *Ideological becoming as a dialogic process*

Dialogism emphasises the productive nature of struggle, between different points of view and understandings, between speaker and audience. A producer of texts “does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his own idea in someone else’s mind. Rather, he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69). Bakhtin describes this active struggle with “otherness” as fundamental to who we understand ourselves to be:

The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. (1981, p. 348)

In early childhood, according to Bakhtin, we assimilate all we are taught – including our very name – to form our idea of who we are and how the world works. As we mature and encounter other ways of understanding the world, we begin to understand that alternative interpretations are available and serve different purposes; these interpretations open up new possibilities to us. We learn to become critical and selective as we “rearrange, reword, rephrase, reorchestrate different voices and, by this process, develop... [our] own ‘authorial stance’” (D. Holland et al., 1998, p. 183). Bakhtin refers to this process as *ideological becoming* (1981, p. 341). As Matusov (2009) argues, the challenge presented by dialogue is fundamental to our development: “without a dialogue with other people, a person is locked in ontological circumstances of his or her own being” (p. 78). In Bakhtin’s philosophy, human becoming is always social and dialogic, and the self is never static, never finished.

This stance rejects dualistic philosophies that maintain that we consist of a material body that moves around the world, and a consciousness, spirit or soul that we carry within it: “for Bakhtin, ‘at the bottom of man’ we find not the Id but the other” (Todorov, 1984, p. 33). Such a stance conflicts with the ontological premises of the CofE school in which I worked and conducted my fieldwork, something that has profound epistemological implications and requires reflexivity. If I understand children as *beings* with an authentic, atomised inner self, then anything they tell me is their individual opinion which I can access given the right tools. The only question I would need to ask is, “Are they telling the truth?” Understanding them instead as *becoming* through struggle with others’ discourses, through interaction with texts, signs and material reality, is a different matter, and one that opens up opportunities for

interesting, complex and nuanced questions and truths, and an understanding of how the social shapes the lives of individuals.

Bakhtin's notions of ideological becoming as a dialogic process resonate closely with what I had recognised in my everyday work with children who were learning to critically evaluate the discourses of others. Some years ago, for example, I was teaching "the Victorians" to my Year 4 class. I had arranged for the children to interview "Queen Victoria" – a teacher colleague in costume, one whom they had known for many years. The differing responses of the children to this activity were remarkable. One or two unquestioningly accepted that they were meeting a real live queen. Most children gave me knowing grins and played along with the activity, with a few comments on the striking resemblance between Queen Victoria and Mrs Evans from Key Stage 1¹. Of particular interest to me, however, were the deeply puzzled reactions of a small number of children, one of whom whispered: *"I know that's Queen Victoria, but how can she be here when she's dead?"*

For many of the children, the learning here came through the challenges to their 21st century assumptions; they were intrigued by descriptions of life without many of the technologies they took for granted. For a few children, however, the learning was happening at an ontological level: they were struggling against a proposition that was "other" to their understanding that dead people cannot come back to life. I believe this process – in which the friction between one's own world view and an "other" leads an individual to question assumptions and develop new understandings – is precisely what Bakhtin means by ideological becoming. (In this case, these children's confidence in their ontology was restored when I admitted that Queen Victoria was indeed Mrs Evans.) And this does not end at adulthood: ideological becoming is a lifelong process.

Understanding children's becoming as a dialogic process goes far beyond the way in which the word "dialogic" has been used in UK pedagogical policy. I first heard "dialogic" mentioned in an educational context in the Year 6 curriculum document, which required children to "use the techniques of dialogic talk to explore ideas, topic or issues" (DfES, 2006, p. 41). After making inquiries, I concluded it simply meant less teacher-directed, more probing and open-ended classroom talk. I realise now that this is how Bakhtin's wide-ranging philosophy, as well

¹ Infant school (age 5-7)

as traditions of dialogical pedagogy (see, for example, Shor & Freire, 1987; Matusov, 2004; Wegerif, 2011) had been stripped of their epistemological and ontological elements and watered down into instrumental pedagogical techniques (Matusov, 2009).

Dialogism in its Bakhtinian sense also invites us to reject as artificial and blinkered some of the binaries that pervade much thinking about education (Erstad et al., 2009). We draw distinctions, for example, between formal and informal learning; curricular and everyday knowledge; serious and popular culture; cognition and affect; work and play; institutions and the outside world; the classroom and the playground. We raise conceptual barriers between learning that adults can specify, equip, direct and scrutinise as a science – and therefore control – and unruly, nebulous learning that happens outside adults’ knowledge and jurisdiction. Yet the encounters with otherness that Bakhtin insists are the key to our ideological becoming happen everywhere and in everything we do, and are unpredictable: “learning is the inevitable outcome of any and every engagement with the world” (Bezemer & Kress, 2016, p. 13). Dialogism also invites us to think of children’s intellect, emotionality, agency and sense of self as developing as a coherent whole, something we see happening in the “Victorians” lesson. The intended learning outcomes for that lesson had been solely curricular ones, based on a notion of learning as simply knowledge acquisition. Yet the whole-person learning that took place was far richer, far more transformative of the children’s sense of how the world works (but less measurable) than simply the ability to enumerate aspects of life in Victorian times. It is this learning lives conceptualisation of learning that I find exciting and worthy of exploration, especially because, as Sefton-Green and Erstad (2017) argue, it remains largely ignored by policymakers and in popular discourses of education.

2.3.5 *Authoritative discourses*

This leads me to another key aspect of Bakhtin’s thinking about dialogism: the authoritativeness of discourses. As Bakhtin knew first-hand from living in Stalinist Russia, not all the discourses and messages we encounter are valued equally. Some carry with them a weight of authority and persuasiveness, through “authority as such, or the authoritativeness of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line and other similar authorities” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 344). These authoritative discourses are seen as more reliable than others, are more readily adopted wholesale, cited and repeated, and thus have a greater influence on the continuing dialogue. They may act as what Bakhtin describes as *centripetal* forces; they

unify, create order and draw us all into a given way of knowing and being, attempting to impose monologic consensus. In constant opposition to these, according to Bakhtin, are *centrifugal* discourses that seek change, diversity and openness (see Figure 2.1): “alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (p. 272). Our ideological becoming is, then, never a case of unlimited freedom, but a struggle; we are bound by often-imperceptible parameters of what is sayable and thinkable in our society (Foucault, 2002a).

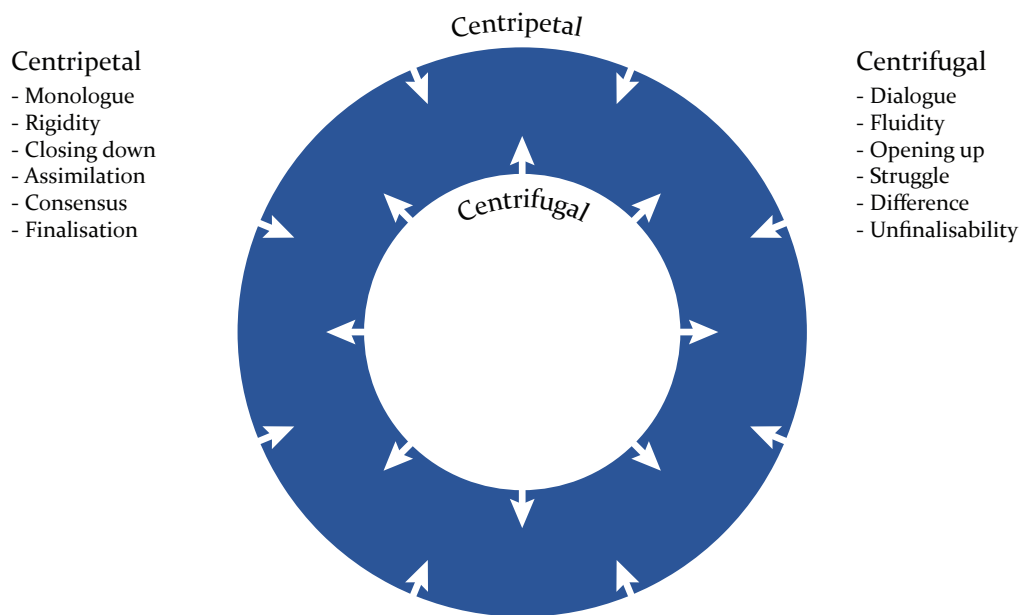


Figure 2.1 Diagram representing centripetal and centrifugal forces

Such tensions are most evident in totalitarian regimes – Bakhtin himself barely survived the Stalinist purges of the 1930s – yet Bakhtin’s illustrations of how dialogism plays out in people’s lives often came not from contemporary society but from literary works. This enabled him to avoid direct criticism of the regime which constantly threatened his and his colleagues’ existence, allowing people instead to draw their own parallels, and, I believe, to make it clear that this is not simply critique of the excesses of dictatorships. Rather, it is a wide-ranging philosophy that applies in any context; one that emphasises difference and struggle and their central role in the fabric of our lives and our ideological becoming: dialogism “permeat[es] all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 40).

My description in Section 2.1 of the keynote presentation at an armed forces charity conference illustrates how discourses become authoritative and are maintained in circulation. The speaker exuded authority. His words repeated familiar mantras and were reinforced by his professional status and personal stature, not least as a male in a male-dominated field. The conference was given gravitas by being held in a grand building in Westminster and was backed by well-known organisations. When we consider that the audience included civil servants at the highest levels of UK government along with other influential stakeholders in the armed forces community, who all took away their interpretations of his talk to their respective organisations, the very real and centripetal effects of authoritative discourse become evident, and the need for alternative ways of knowing urgent.

Another authoritative discourse I have witnessed in the making relates to service children's progression to higher education. Having received MoD funding to investigate a hypothesis that service children are under-represented in higher education, in 2016 a research team produced some findings that cautiously support the hypothesis (McCullough & Hall, 2016), albeit with a number of caveats, not least of which was the lack of relevant data available. Despite the inconclusive project, however, the findings have not only been referenced in every event about service children I have attended since 2016, but they have also translated into statements such as "research... indicates that service children are less likely to go to University than the general population" (Children's Commissioner, 2018, p. 6). Even the foreword to McCullough and Hall's (2016) research paper invites us to "ask ourselves *why* children from military service families *do not progress* to higher education at the rates we might otherwise expect" (p. 3; my italics). The research team has subsequently received substantial funding to pursue the investigation.

2.3.6 *Finalisation, carnival and third space*

As might be expected from his writings on authoritative discourses and his emphasis on the productive nature of difference, Bakhtin particularly abhorred what he termed *finalisation*, the act of defining someone. To Bakhtin, only an epitaph is final: while people are still alive, they retain the

capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 59)

In this view, to produce a definitive account of a person is akin to an act of violence, deadening the person and denying the potential for human agency and personal growth. A refusal to finalise is an ethical principle, a recognition that “not least among human freedoms is the ability to tell the story differently and to begin to live according to that different story” (Frank, 2010, p. 10). This principle underpinned the relationships I strove to develop with my research participants. Finalisation runs counter to dialogism:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170)

This is a philosophy that resonates strongly with my instinct to avoid definitions, judgements and stereotypes. To me, for example, the cartoon depictions of service children and some statements made in the DfE documents mentioned in Section 1.2 border on finalisation; they stereotype service children and subtly impose norms, rather than attending to the diversity, nuances, complexities and changing nature of children’s lives. Similarly, as in the vignette *Saying goodbye to Louisa*, reducing the complexities of a child’s life to little more than a set of statistics is an act of finalisation.

Fairclough (2003) extends Bakhtin’s thinking to propose five differentiated “scenarios” that describe degrees of dialogicality, or “orientation to difference” (pp. 41-42) against which texts, social events and interactions may be analysed. At the “most dialogic” end of this schematic is openness and willingness to explore difference, and at the opposite end, consensus attained by the suppression of difference. Between the two extremes are three other scenarios: struggle and conflict; attempts to resolve difference; and an emphasis on commonality that brackets out difference. While Fairclough takes pains to emphasise that this is not a typology, perhaps anticipating the criticism of imposing too rigid a structure on Bakhtin’s “antiformalist and antistructuralist” work (Matusov, 2007, p. 231), it does reflect a continuum implicit in Bakhtin’s thinking, from, at the one end, a radical openness to difference and coexisting points of view, to the other extreme of authoritative discourse, monologue and finalisation. It also draws out the distinction between dialogism, which focuses on the productive coexistence of any number of opposing and often irreconcilable views, and dialectics, which emphasises resolution or synthesis (Wegerif, 2008).

As an analytical device, I find Fairclough's schematic helpful, and I believe it could afford insightful self-evaluation in schools. However, it is unable to accommodate "one of Bakhtin's great obsessions" (Holquist, 2002, p. 86), the notion of carnival. Used, for example, in analysis of children's classroom behaviour, play and playfulness, particularly in early years education (see, for example, Iddings & McCafferty, 2007; Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Cohen, 2011), carnival is one of the most frequently-invoked Bakhtinian ideas in research in schools (Matusov, 2004). Initially I felt carnival might have little relevance to my project. Once the fieldwork was underway, however, I found it an increasingly helpful concept in thinking about the developing practices and relationships in the research group, and one that could also be brought into dialogue with ideas of third space (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008; Soja, 1996). In this section I briefly outline my understanding of carnival and third space, but I return to these ideas throughout my discussion of the fieldwork in Chapters 5 to 7.

Bakhtin's discussion of carnival centres around mediaeval rites that allowed for a joyful but temporary liberty from prevailing social norms. In carnival, authoritarianism, rules and ranks, reverence and even fear were overturned and replaced temporarily with folk culture, laughter, parody and profanity. In its celebration of the eccentric and inappropriate, carnival opposes centripetal forces, authoritative discourses and finalisation, allowing people of all ranks to behave in ways unavailable to them in everyday life: "The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 123). This was represented in mediaeval celebrations by the ritual "decrowning" of authority figures. Bakhtin's ever-present preoccupation with "otherness" is also evident in his descriptions of the way that carnival allowed for "a new mode of interrelationship between individuals" (p. 123.), that brings into immediate contact "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (p. 123) and moves beyond these binaries to temporarily reimagine society.

Bakhtin's ideas of carnival relate closely to his interest in space-time. Carnival might be understood as a reconfiguring of the habitual chronotopes of any society, if only temporarily. This resonates with ideas of third space (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) in which we

open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices. (Soja, 1996, p. 5)

From this perspective, we might describe carnival as a third space. It destabilises and reimagines the usual norms and practices of thinking and behaving and the binaries we often think with. We might, for example, consider carnival as a troubling of the usual division of the private and the public. Bakhtin (1984b) describes carnival as characterised by “a strongly emphasized bodily level of food, drink, digestion, and sexual life” (p. 20). Usually the province of the home, in carnival these are brought into public spaces, exhibited and exaggerated. In making visible otherwise hidden ways of behaving, then, carnival breaches and transcends these usually opposing realms; it troubles boundaries. Similarly, Bakhtin describes the echoing of laughter in the private and usually hushed spaces of monasteries, universities and schools. Carnival might also be considered to bridge “real-and-imagined” places (Soja, 1996), the “utopian ideal and the realistic” (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 10).

Carnival, like third space, offers not merely novelty, but a space for renewal and the overcoming of what holds us back. In this “festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 124), the temporary proximity of the “other” allows a reimagining of the social order.

the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One... nor the Other... but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 41)

The concerns of third space, then, are remarkably similar to Bakhtin’s dialogism in their resistance to binaries and their emphasis on imagining new possibilities for being “otherwise”. Bhabha, indeed, draws directly upon Bakhtin’s work. And in Soja’s (1996) description of third spaces as “‘counterspaces,’ spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (p. 68), I hear overtones of Bakhtin’s concerns with authoritative discourses and centripetal and centrifugal forces.

As I discuss later, and especially in Chapter 6, widening my theoretical framework to incorporate attention to space and place allows me to examine the interconnections between space/time, institutions and discourses, and to reflect on the roles played by all of these in shaping what people do and how they make sense of the world. It allows me to attend to the boundaries we construct to shape spaces and the ways that these also construct our selves. As Soja (1996) argues, “there is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes” (p. 46). Understanding the research group itself as a developing third space draws attention to the micro-level interactions through which we renegotiated ways of being and

relating in school. It also allows me to unpick the epistemological and even ontological premises that underpin how we are and how we behave, and to better understand how these premises powerfully shape our activity, our relationships and the knowledge we create.

2.4 *Foucault, Bakhtin and hope*

Another thinker whose concerns resonate with those of Bakhtin is Foucault (Draus, 2001; Frank, 2005; Gardiner, 1996; Reed, 2005). As I shall discuss in this section, the two thinkers share similar concerns, yet I find their differences in emphasis and approach helpful to think with. My affinity for Bakhtin's theories of utterance and human becoming stems from my background and my interest in language and languages, while Foucault's concern with interrogating practices and discourses, and especially of institutions, resonates with my experiences as a teacher. I find insight in reading Foucault in the light of Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and reading Bakhtin in the light of Foucault's ideas about the subject, knowledge and power.

When I started reading Foucault's work, I was struck first by how accurately his ideas reflected the institutions I had worked in, and then by similarities between Bakhtin's notions of authoritative discourses and Foucault's description of regimes of truth:

Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts is true. (2002a, p. 131)

Both Foucault and Bakhtin are concerned, then, with the "life and behaviour of discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 275) in its sociocultural context. They both attend to the local and situated, to context and contingency, resisting the temptation to think in terms of grand narratives, essentials and structures; in Bakhtinian and Foucauldian philosophy, things could always have been otherwise (Foucault, 2002b). They are concerned with the ways in which people try to control others' actions, particularly through discourse; they share an interest in interrogating how certain discourses come to be held as authoritative and true and thus have powerful effects on people's lives, and in unpicking how certain things become sayable and thinkable: "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (Foucault, 2002b, p.

30). For both Foucault and Bakhtin, power is not some immaterial force at play, but is located in a concrete situation and context:

we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes. (Foucault, 2002b, pp. 30-31)

These ideas invite us to question also whose interests are served by the discourses in circulation. Who benefits, and how, for example, from constructing service children as “little troopers” or educational success stories? Who profits from children sitting national tests? In whose interests is it to compare children against norms of educational attainment, mental health or behaviour? In an era in which education is used as a political rallying point, in which test results are harnessed as evidence of previous governments’ failings, in which, despite constituting 4.6% of the UK government’s total expenditure (World Bank, 2019), the military struggles with workforce recruitment and retention (National Audit Office, 2018a), such questions are important. By unpicking the interests at stake and the actions and discourses which further those interests, we can perhaps start to imagine how things might be otherwise.

For both Bakhtin and Foucault, then, power is not a quantifiable entity, something that the rulers possess and the ruled lack, or something that dwells within structures and institutions. Rather, Foucault (1982) explains it as a dynamic, and even often a positive force, enacted through signs and discourse every time a person tries to affect the actions or the possibilities of acting of another: “if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (p. 786). And Foucault insists that power is not unidirectional but infuses the entire social network, on a granular level. Anyone who has observed children in a classroom, for example, will recognise the signs through which power is subtly negotiated: a smile, a frown, a funny noise, a tone of voice, a tapping of the foot. While they may have fewer options for affecting others’ behaviour than teachers, and while we may try to curb their independence in many ways, as I discuss in Chapters 5 to 7, children are often far from powerless.

I also find resonances between the concepts of finalisation in Bakhtin’s work and individualisation in Foucault’s. Foucault (1977) could almost be defining finalisation when he describes “the fixing, at once ritual and ‘scientific’, of individual differences... the pinning down of each individual in his own particularity” (p. 192). However, there are also instructive

differences in emphasis between the two thinkers. While Bakhtin draws attention to finalisation as an act of objectification, the imposition of monologue and the end of dialogue, Foucault's interest is in understanding the relationships between knowledge, the subject and power, and understanding how these come about. In this he identifies the individualising effects of everyday micro-processes of surveillance, normalisation and examination (Foucault, 1977) within societies and institutions, including schools. Moreover, Foucault argues, we become so habituated to these processes that we take them as given, and even begin to apply them to ourselves. In Bakhtinian terms, we assimilate these authoritative and finalising discourses, incorporating them into our ideological becoming. I have described in Chapter 1 my aversion to the relentless generation of attainment data to classify and compare children and provide evidence for school inspectors. Yet new staff coming into the school, having themselves been brought up with tests and targets, seemed far less concerned about their effects, and accepted them simply as part of the job. Even more troubling was the way in which the children came to define themselves in similar terms – as “level 3s” or “special needs”, for example. Bakhtin's and Foucault's analyses, then, both provide insight into how the social shapes the individual, and explain and legitimate my concerns.

In a recent adult education class, my students and I were discussing constructivist theories of learning. One student raised a question which helped me understand the relationship between knowledge and power: *“If the children are constructing their own knowledge, how can you control it? What if they go off in some...?”* She waved her hands around as if to suggest deviance and randomness. Is much of our educational endeavour, our systematising activity, driven by such anxieties, I wonder? Does a fear of the unknowable and unruly child propel us to develop increasingly comprehensive mechanisms of knowledge and power, to govern against an imagined breakdown of social order? And is this not driven by a Cartesian ontology, the idea that we cannot know the inside of a child's head? A dialogic perspective, which understands the individual as social to the core, is a fundamental shift with far-reaching implications. It allows us to let go of our fear-driven centripetal impulses and reimagine a world in which the centrifugal, the unknowable and different are welcome: “prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 109).

For me, Bakhtinian and Foucauldian thinking, as well as ideas of third space, also offer a certain necessary hope. By troubling the taken-for-granted, we hold out the possibility of a

better future. We retain the ability to change and to refuse to be tied down to finalising discourses. Bakhtin's ideas allow, then, for a degree of agency, in that we are able to select from discourses, allowing some to become internally persuasive and rejecting others. And as Foucault (2002b) writes, "do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same" (p. 19). Those finding themselves enmeshed in power relations can resist submitting to their subjectifying forces:

in their actions, their resistance, their rebellion, escape them, transform them, in a word, cease being submissive... there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them. (Foucault, 2002a, p. 294)

A grand narrative that understands power as embedded within monolithic structures would require nothing short of a revolution before change is able to take place. Thinking with Foucault and Bakhtin allows for microscopic acts of reimagination and resistance: the refusal of finalisation, the troubling of borders, the "wearing away [of] certain self-evidences and commonplaces" (Foucault, 2002a, p. 234), acts that in almost imperceptible increments eventually bring about change.

2.5 *Summary*

In a research project that starts with questions about how children understand themselves, the resources they draw upon to make sense of their world, and how we can develop effective research methods with children, an understanding of children developing as meaning-makers within society is crucial. Dialogism provides a powerful explanatory framework for this, and one which resonates with my understanding of how we interact with the world and with each other. From this theoretical perspective, my aim is threefold: to understand the powerful ways that dialogism is at work in the lives and ideological becoming of a group of children; to draw attention to the contexts, conditions, policies and practices through which adults often – and often unintentionally – curtail dialogue or attempt to impose monologic consensus; and to explore what may happen if we try to open up a legitimate space for dialogue in a school.

Dialogism is a perspective that places encounters with "otherness" at the centre of human being and becoming. Interpreted through the lens of dialogism, my vignettes in Chapter 1 are

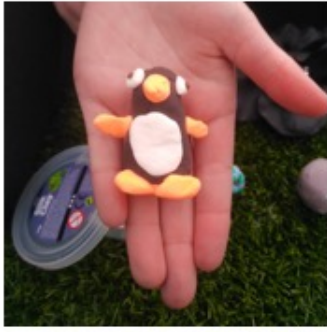
examples of dialogic encounters, critical moments in the “cracks” of school life that invited me to recognise that the official activity in a maths lesson and in an act of remembrance had quite different meanings for others involved. This led me to re-evaluate my assumptions about the children I was teaching and how we cared for them in school, and eventually sparked this research project.

I have described in Section 2.3.4 how a dialogic perspective marries with a learning-lives approach that understands learning not merely as the accumulation of knowledge and skills, but as a whole-person process that refuses to be corralled into certain spaces and times, that often eludes curriculum and pedagogy, and evades standardisation, control and measurement. In Chapters 5 to 7, I discuss what I learned from the fieldwork about the children’s ideological becoming in and across spaces of their lives. One of my key concerns is how schools can be more responsive to children’s ideological becoming. How can we attend to the learning and ways of learning that children bring into school? How can we recognise the ways in which we close down dialogue and create instead the conditions in which dialogue can flourish? What does this mean on a micro level, at the level of signs, texts, artefacts, gestures, the ways in which we use space and time? How can we go beyond the binaries that dominate our conceptualisations of education?

Central to this is the question of how we know children. Specifically, from a dialogical perspective, how can we know them without resorting to the sorts of finalising discourses I have described in Chapter 1 and to the mechanisms of examination, normalisation and individualisation that Foucault identifies as ever-present within institutions? I have argued that the mechanisms through which we attempt to “capture” knowledge of children rely on constructions layered upon constructions, any of which are contestable. And from Bakhtin’s theories I suggest that finalisation is not only unethical but also a futile endeavour, since it assumes an essential, unchanging self that is simply not there. The notions of authoritative discourses, speech genres and self-authoring point to the self as always in a state of becoming and always social. Similarly, Bakhtin’s theories of utterance, addressivity and the constitutive nature of context lead us to reject the idea of an essential truth:

Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 110).

All this, of course, has implications not only for pedagogy but also for research methodology, the subject of Chapter 4. Before that, however, I turn to the ways in which service children are understood and constructed in the UK and international literature. Who is talking about them? What are they saying, and specifically what are they saying about their learning? On what evidence are they basing this? What methodologies and theoretical premises underpin the evidence? And what is not said? By identifying the key discourses in the literature around service children, the ways in which certain understandings of the children become authoritative discourses and others are bypassed, I make a case for a study that seeks different ways of knowing.

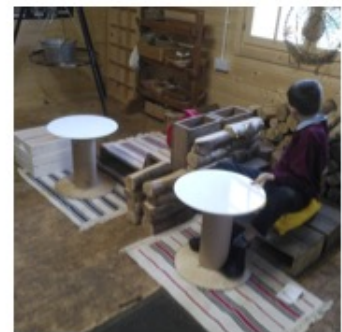
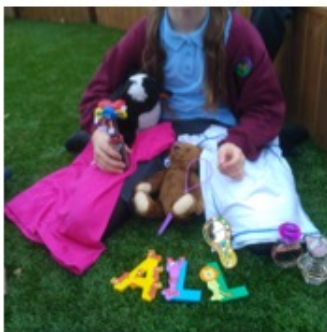
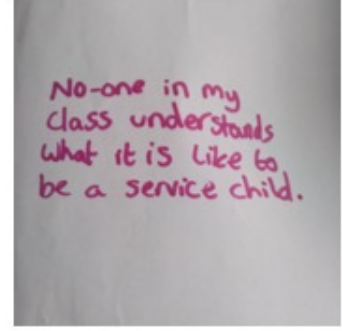


Chapter 3

Looking for

service children

in the literature



3.1 Introduction

A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based. (Foucault, 2002a, p. 456)

During my years as a primary school teacher I had assumed there must exist a substantial body of research that could help us better understand the service children we taught. I soon learned how naïve this assumption was, how little research had been conducted in the UK and how little attention policymakers had paid to service children. My initial speculative searches of the literature in 2014 found only criticisms of the paucity of research into service families and children and of policymakers' neglect of their needs (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2006; Clifton, 2007; RNRM Children's Fund, 2009; Fossey, 2012). I began to hunt systematically for recent UK educational research which might provide insight into the lives of the current generation of British service children and the policies and practices that shape their lives. From my interactions with service children in school, I also leaned towards a reflexive, qualitative project that would involve children as participants. I hoped to find studies that took a similar approach. However, research that meets all these criteria – UK, recent, educational, qualitative – is rarely available.

As Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show, recent studies are plentiful, but educational research is less so, even in the international literature on service children (Garcia et al., 2015; Stites, 2016), and very few studies at all originate from the UK (Clifton, 2004; RNRM Children's Fund, 2009; Fossey, 2012). As I describe in Section 3.2, I found abundant publications from the United States, and lots from researchers taking a psychological, rather than a sociological, approach. To my disappointment, in most of these studies, children themselves were shadowy figures, secondary to concepts such as resilience or psychosocial disorders, or concealed behind layers of data accumulated from visits to medical centres, from school exams or from questionnaires completed on their behalf by adults. These studies seemed to proceed out of the assumption that there must be something “wrong” with the children, which did not reflect the kind of children I had taught: real, precious, interesting, thoughtful, noisy children living in real places and in real time. While I had not come across Bakhtin's (1984a) concept of finalisation at that time, I also felt uneasy about the ways in which this research seemed to label and define children and assume they were a homogeneous group.

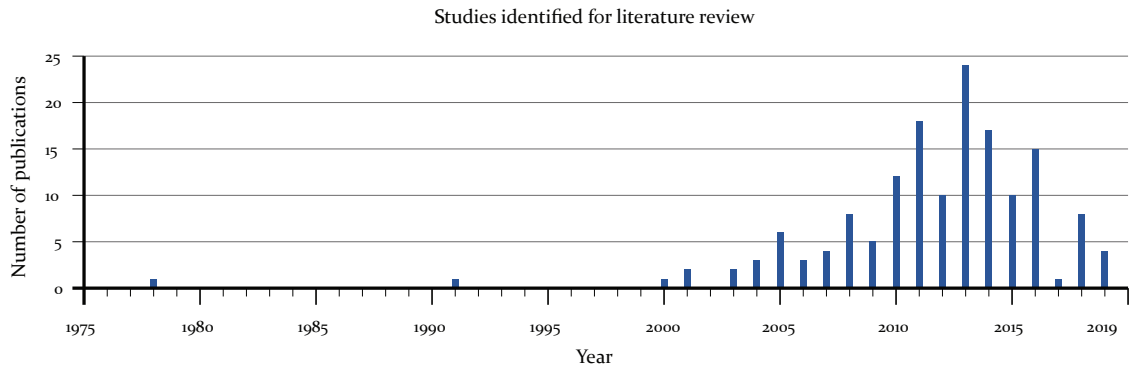


Figure 3.1 Dates of publication of studies identified for literature review

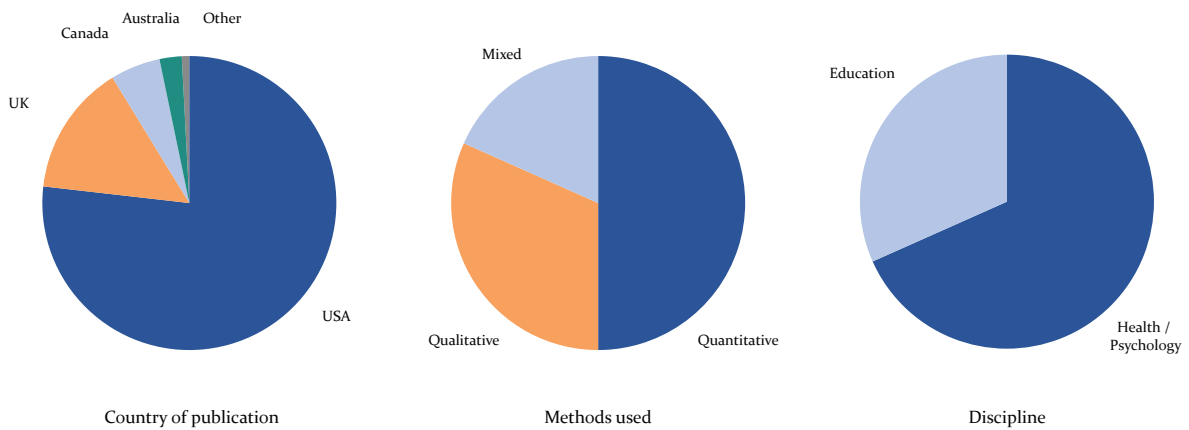


Figure 3.2 Overview of literature identified for literature review¹

Any utterance—the finished, written utterance not excepted—makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return. (Vološinov, 1973, p. 115)

I think of the literature about service children as part of a dialogue between discourses. Each time a text is created, verbally, in writing or in another mode, such as the cartoons I discuss in Chapter 1, its author takes up an ideological position within one of the discourses, whether consciously or not, and the new text contributes towards that discourse. In this literature review I identify and scrutinise some of those texts and the discourses they constitute. Whose

¹ These diagrams reflect the results of a search that already privileged UK educational research and included the UK grey literature.

interests are represented in a text? What are its underlying assumptions? What authoritative discourses about service children are circulating? How does any particular text consolidate or challenge these discourses?

In this literature review I have two aims. One is to consider how service children are constructed in the academic literature and the interests at stake in these representations. I extend the argument started in Chapter 1 to suggest that discourses of risk, resilience and sacrifice, closely related to the notions of “soldiering on” and “doing very well”, also pervade the academic literature. I argue that a concern for service children is only one of a complex set of interests that motivate research in this field. The second aim is to make a case for a methodology that seeks to know and construct children differently. This is the focus of Section 3.4. It is no surprise that much of the research reviewed attempts to provide the “hard science” policymakers demand. In this section I argue that the assumptions that underpin such demands are also the basis of much existing qualitative research about service children, even often in the rare studies that attempt to “give children a voice”. I end the chapter by discussing a small number of studies that swim against the stream theoretically and methodologically, and I illustrate the potential for rich meaning-making that such approaches afford. Before this, I briefly discuss the body of literature as a whole and explain my rationale for the texts included in this review.

3.2 Overview of the international literature on service children

The overwhelming majority of research reports and literature reviews on the subject of service children are from the US (Hayllar, 2018; Macdonald, 2017; Rowan-Legg, 2017). A UK-published review of quantitative research into the impact of parental deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq on military children, for example, identifies only studies from the US (C. J. White et al., 2011). From very few pre-2000 publications to a trickle in the early 2000s (Drummet et al., 2003), and an “enormous literature on American military families” by 2015 (Segal et al., 2015, p. 2), this research reflects a surge of attention paid to the wellbeing of military personnel, veterans and their families during and since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Cozza & Lerner, 2013). The extensive US research into service families is taken by some in the UK as evidence of the USA’s commitment to families. The authors of a charity report, for example, censure the British government for failing service children: “not a happy outcome for a nation that

purports to espouse ‘equal opportunities’ so vigorously” (RNRM Children’s Fund, 2009, p. 4). They challenge the UK government to match the US in its dedication to service children by providing research funding. Similarly, Fossey (2012) draws a link between the lack of UK research about armed forces families and the failure of policies to meet their needs. However, UK research is still sparse, comprising only around ten reports and literature reviews commissioned by government and charities, and a small number of research projects, often unpublished in journals.

Even in the UK, then, the US literature is a key source of knowledge about service children, frequently used to inform discussion and cited in publications. For example, speakers at conferences organised by agencies involved with forces families frequently refer to US research when explaining “what we know” about service children. These ripples spread widely in the small pool of interested people in the UK who attend such conferences. US literature is also cited in publications such as a combined charities report (Centre for Social Justice & Forces in Mind Trust, 2016) and the RNRM Children’s Fund (2009) report, which “draws on statistics and knowledge which has been gathered over the last 10 years in the United States” (p. 10). Even British government publications such as the “good practice” guidance document (DfE, 2010a) discussed in Chapter 1 rely on US research.

What I find problematic in all this is that US studies focus predominantly on the mental health outcomes of children and families, often using data from clinical settings (Alfano et al., 2016; Astor et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2015; Heiselberg, 2017), and are published in journals such as *Pediatrics* or *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*. Thus a key discourse in the literature is around service children’s medical and psychological health in a US healthcare context. This cannot be ignored, not least because these health-oriented discourses and their associated assumptions and methodologies seep into publications aimed at educational practitioners. We read, for example, that:

There has been little research conducted on how clinical interventions for military children have been adapted and implemented for the school setting. Furthermore, very few studies have examined the role of school social workers helping military children enhance resilience and well-being in the school context. (Garcia et al., 2015, p. S104)

Additionally, the cultures, policies and practices that affect service families differ hugely between the US and the UK (Fossey, 2012; Farrell-Wright, 2011). To translate findings from one

disciplinary context to another and then attempt to generalise them across countries is problematic. Without underestimating the importance of these studies, it is necessary to draw attention to the danger of their findings becoming authoritative discourses, imported wholesale and without reflection and used to speak for British service children.

In this literature review I include documents that exemplify common discourses about service children, and are typical in their findings, methods and theoretical premises, as well as some that make an unusual argument, or use an atypical methodological or theoretical approach. I discuss the publications relating to service children in the UK, and a number of international (mostly US) studies about military children's education. I also include examples of the large body of research conducted from a clinical practitioner standpoint in the US, as these contribute heavily to the understandings of service children circulating in the UK. In the next section of the review, I turn to what is being said about service children and the interests that motivate this research.

3.3 Key discourses about service children

Three discourses about service children run throughout the literature from different countries and disciplines. The first is risk. The military lifestyle has long been considered inherently risky to service children's wellbeing, a view that, as I discuss in Section 3.3.1, underpins much current research in both the US and the UK. The second is resilience, a notion which is used and conceptualised in a variety of ways, some vague, others more specific. Some argue that children's resilience protects them against risk, while others perceive it as a consequence of adversity. Related to risk and resilience is the third, the concept of sacrifice. Permeating the literature is the idea that we owe a debt of gratitude to the children for the sacrifices they make for their country, a notion that I unpick in Section 3.3.3.

3.3.1 Service children at risk: authoritative discourses and psychological approaches to research

During and since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, a heavy emphasis has been placed in the US on mitigating the psychological effects of combat stress on military families. Securing the health of troops and families was portrayed as a personal mission by President Obama, supported by Michelle Obama: "the President of the United States has made the enhancement

of the ‘well-being and psychological health of the military family’ a top national security policy priority” (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011, p. 2). In this context, a body of research has flourished which “has focused overwhelmingly on the presence of maladjustment and psychopathology in children” (Alfano et al., 2016, p. 216). The effect of this emphasis on disorders is to channel the very ways in which military families are to be known. Prioritising psychological health effectively closes down other ways of attending to and understanding military families.

Despite the recent high profile of the service family’s psychological health, however, this approach is far from new. The concept and terminology of a *military family syndrome* were conceived by a clinical practitioner serving a large US military base in the 1970s (LaGrone, 1978). Starting with a sense that certain problems recurred unusually frequently in the families in his care, LaGrone reported, from a review of the then sparse literature and from case files, a higher incidence of children’s behavioural disorders in the military clinic than in comparable civilian ones. He attributed these to seven factors: “the relationship the family had with the military, father absence, transiency, child-rearing methods, scapegoating, the husband-wife relationship, and resistance to treatment” (p. 1040). LaGrone’s military family syndrome has been vigorously critiqued (Davis et al., 2012; Farrell-Wright, 2011) for having “far outrun the evidence” (Jensen et al., 1991, p. 102). Yet the notion is still intertextually alive, with many studies hypothesising an association between the “military lifestyle”, or aspects of this, and a variety of disorders. Thus one doctor’s hunch has developed into an authoritative discourse, influencing policymaking and research agenda for decades (Sinor, 2003).

In his work, LaGrone (1978) set a precedent for research that assesses armed forces families for signs of abnormality and dysfunction. This continues to this day, as the first sentence of a recent NATO (2019) publication demonstrates: “Children in military families experience stressors associated with military life that may affect every stage of their lives and disrupt normal development” (p. ES-1). Although a small number of studies suggest a more mixed picture (e.g. Huebner & Mancini 2005), having a parent with a military career, and especially a parent who is deployed, is seen largely as detrimental. The US research literature points to an alarming list of potential problems for military children, including:

- increased likelihood of mental health problems (Chandra et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2010; Hisle-Gorman et al., 2015; Mansfield et al., 2011; Mustillo et al., 2016);
- increased behavioural difficulties (Mmari et al., 2009; Mustillo et al., 2016);

- increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts (Cederbaum et al., 2014; S. C. Reed et al., 2011);
- a 1-in-4 to 1-in-3 risk of “psychosocial morbidity” (Aranda et al., 2011; Flake et al., 2009);
- increased likelihood of substance abuse including alcohol (Gilreath et al., 2013);
- increased risk of parental neglect or abuse (Gibbs et al., 2007; Hisle-Gorman et al., 2015);
and
- increased headaches (Swedean et al., 2013).

Some studies conclude that longer deployments exacerbate problems (e.g. Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2010; Mansfield et al., 2011), while others suggest heightened risks for children of parents with poor mental health themselves, parents under stress or veterans with PTSD or injuries, or bereaved children (Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2010; Flake et al., 2009; Ray & Vanstone, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2011; Hisle-Gorman et al., 2015). While most of the research centres on service children’s mental health, some US studies also focus on risks to their educational performance. Some studies associate parental deployment with reduced educational outcomes (Engel et al., 2008; Lyle, 2006; Richardson et al., 2011) and “academic engagement problems” (Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2010, p. 21) although others contest these findings (e.g. Kitmitto et al., 2011; Smrekar et al., 2001).

Discourses of risk to service children are not confined to psychological studies. One key text, for example, that quotes LaGrone (1978) is *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* (M. Wertsch, 2006). Originally published in 1991, this book is still cited frequently. Describing her work as “interpretive journalism” (p. xvi), Mary Wertsch combines her own childhood stories with accounts gathered from eighty other adults who grew up in US military families in the 1960s and 70s. Her harrowing stories portray children struggling with authoritarian, sometimes abusive parents, themselves failing to reconcile their dual roles of parents and warriors and not infrequently grappling with alcoholism. Describing the notoriously brutal US military culture as a “unique and insular world... which absorbs its players into the tight-knit culture of war” (p. 11), Wertsch argues that military children are brought up in a substantially different culture from their peers, and one which threatens individuals’ lifelong wellbeing: “The Fortress put its stamp on us, and it is a stamp we continue to bear throughout our lives” (p. 349). While Wertsch acknowledges that military culture has changed since the 1960s-70s, she nevertheless argues that we may still overlook the risks that a military lifestyle places upon children.

3.3.1.1 Service children as risks to military effectiveness

Wertsch's (2006) focus on the sociocultural environment of her childhood enables her to identify some unchallenged authoritative discourses that affected how children were understood within that environment. One of these, I suggest, is still highly influential today, underpinning not only policymakers' frequent disregard of service children's interests, but also approaches to researching them:

First priority is always, always, the Military Mission. On this there can be no compromise. The second priority is the individual warrior. Third place goes to the spouse, and military brats come in last. (M. Wertsch, 2006, p. 61)

The recent NATO report on the impact of military life on children, for example, exemplifies this ranking of priorities:

If families, and in particular, children, are not able to adapt to the demands of a military lifestyle, they may not be able to effectively support the military personnel in coping with occupational demands and, in turn, negatively impact military personnel's well-being and performance. (NATO, 2019, p. 1-2)

Thus service children are required to play a support role for their serving parent and, by extension, for national and transnational military objectives. The NATO report is transparent in its aim to "enhance NATO's military preparedness by addressing the well-being concerns of military families" (p. 1-1).

In this logic, children who struggle place the military's operational readiness at risk. It makes perfect sense, then, to diagnose these struggles as flaws within the child and attempt to eliminate them as efficiently as possible. Thus NATO, the MoD and the US DoD welcome – and fund – psychological research that seeks to quantify those struggles and identify preventative factors and therapeutic interventions, research that raises no uncomfortable questions about the ways in which children are positioned and treated. As Frank (1995) argues, "society prefers medical diagnoses that admit treatment, not social diagnoses that require massive change in the premises of what that social body includes as parts of itself" (p. 113). Although the NATO report proposes a new model of military child wellbeing, this is not out of concern for children "being well" because they matter in their own right, but because they cannot be allowed to obstruct military capability.

Is it naïve, I wonder, to imagine that things could ever be otherwise? Some might fall back on arguments that the defence of the realm is in children's interests anyway, or that research into

children's psychological health can only be helpful, regardless of motivation. However, to me, the often-repeated idea that "one member joins but the whole family serves" (Park, 2011, p. 65; see also NATO, 2019; Rowe et al., 2014) is deeply unethical. It dehumanises children, denies them any prospect of not serving, of being the civilians they are, and positions them as mere appendages to their serving parent and their military duties. Perhaps there is a place for unapologetic naïvety, for uncompromisingly utopian thinking that wonders how society might change if we always placed children's interests at the heart of decision-making. This kind of "what-if" thinking might shine a light on how we limit our imagination of what is good for children.

The research discussed so far, except parts of the NATO study, was all conducted in the US, yet a similar logic also underpins some of the UK literature, as I discuss in the next section. I have already highlighted one factor in this: that in the absence of UK research, the UK looks to the US for information about service children. Another factor is the close military collaboration between the UK and the US, which leads even to the US DoD funding recent research about UK service children (e.g. Fear et al., 2018; Jain et al., 2016). Also notable are the close ties between researchers themselves. Nicola Fear, one of the authors of the NATO report, for example, has also co-authored UK studies about service children, as I discuss next. This is not to claim that all UK research about service children – or indeed US research – sees them as little more than obstacles to the functioning of the military or as flawed individuals needing fixing. Neither is it to claim that only one set of interests may animate any one research project. It is, however, important to be alert to instances of such authoritative discourses within the UK literature, as well as the presence of alternative discourses.

3.3.1.2 Service children in the UK literature

One of four UK studies co-authored by Nicola Fear seeks to investigate the "perceived impact of military stressors on children" (Rowe et al, 2014, p. 490) via parent questionnaires. In this quantitative study, published in the journal *Occupational Medicine*, the authors report that just over half of the service members perceive the impact on their children as negative. What that might mean in children's lives, however, is unexplored. Further, the study reports associations between parents' accounts and their own mental health and military rank and the length of their deployments, an unsurprising finding if we consider Bakhtin's arguments about the constitutive role of context in meaning-making. Thus Rowe and colleagues' focus is on adults' perceptions and on trying to establish what leads them to hold those perceptions,

rather than on children and their experiences. Given that surveys regularly identify the impact on family life as the predominant factor for leaving the armed forces (e.g. MoD, 2019b), this study is more informative to those seeking to improve armed forces recruitment and retention rates – such as its funders, the MoD – than to those wishing to better understand the lives of service children in their own right.

This study was followed by another quantitative project, also published in *Occupational Medicine*, which used questionnaires “to investigate military personnel’s perceptions of the impact of deployment on intimate relationships and children” (Thandi et al., 2017, p. 562). Again, while one might hope for insights into service children’s lives, the focus is instead on “home front stress” (p. 567). Anxiety about how deployment affects their families at home, the authors conclude, poses risks to soldiers’ mental health and physical safety. Thus children are once more peripheral to the research and are positioned as risks to military effectiveness.

A recent US DoD-funded quantitative study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* investigates the impact on UK service children aged 3-16 of fathers’ deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq and paternal PTSD (Fear et al., 2018). The authors cite US research, use similar methods – parental questionnaires – and compare their findings with those of US studies. In contrast with research in the US, however, the authors find no association between paternal deployment and children’s psychological and behavioural problems, although they do find a statistically significant association between paternal PTSD and “hyperactivity” in boys of certain ages, and they suggest a need for preventative interventions. While again the interests motivating this research are undoubtedly those of its funders, it offers important evidence that US quantitative research cannot be carried wholesale into discourses about British service children.

A further quantitative questionnaire-based study funded by the US DoD, co-authored by Fear, and published in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, asked adolescents, mainly from army families, to identify “the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces” (Jain et al., 2016, p. 1). The authors identify “lack of contact ... as the predominant factor negatively affecting their adolescent participants, while financial benefits and a sense of pride were most commonly reported as the positive benefits” (p. 2). I discuss the methodology of this study in Section 3.4.2.

In these four studies, then, we can see a body of psychological scholarship, funded at least partly by the military itself, that is taking a multi-pronged approach to build a picture of the “home front stressors” (Thandi et al., 2017, p. 563) thought to affect the functioning of service parents, especially on deployment. Throughout this research, children have been positioned as variables, albeit important ones, in those stressors. This constitutes a powerful discourse within the small UK literature. The next three studies I discuss also come from researchers working mainly within the fields of psychology and health.

The point of departure for one UK study – Williamson and Price (2009) – is the concern that active military service may trigger domestic abuse in military families. Through focus group discussion and online surveys, conducted with adult partners of service members, the authors investigate the nature, extent and impact of domestic abuse within army families, the reasons given for it, the kinds of support families seek, and consider interventions that may assist them. In contrast with US research which associates military families and active service with child maltreatment (e.g. Rowan-Legg, 2017), Williamson and Price (2009) do not identify high levels of domestic violence within participating service families. They do, however, draw attention to the difficulties of reintegrating as a family after one member has been away on active service and suggest that this can be a source of conflict. The authors also highlight the amount of time service members spend away from their families: nineteen out of twenty of their participants’ partners had spent over one month away from home in the previous year, and almost two-fifths had spent over six months away. The paper was an investigative pilot study¹, and, perhaps because of this and the sensitive nature of the topic, the participants were all adults. Despite families being the focus of investigation, children were represented entirely by their parents.

Similarly, in an unpublished thesis, Farrell-Wright (2011), a trainee clinical psychologist, reports on her interviews with mothers to examine the impact of fathers’ army deployments on children. She describes both detrimental effects, such as negatively perceived changes in behaviour and a sense of loss, and beneficial effects, such as increased maturity, independence and resilience, sometimes even in the same child.

¹The main study for which it was conducted is now complete (Williamson et al., 2019), but its focus has shifted away from families and children and towards developing specialist support services for survivors of domestic violence and abuse within armed forces families.

Another publication aimed at an audience of educational psychologists is entitled “Promoting positive emotional health of children of transient armed forces families” (Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2012). This reports a mixed methods evaluation of an intervention that took a multi-stranded approach to children’s “psycho-education”; the work was conducted in a Scottish school where 90% of children were from armed forces families. The main thrust of the study was the evaluation of the intervention rather than the experiences of the children themselves, which positions the children once more as variables. While the authors report no statistically significant improvement in the children’s emotional health, and note some limitations in their quantitative methodology, including small sample sizes, they suggest that a small-group intervention may provide children with opportunities to discuss their worries in a safe and supportive environment.

Two UK studies also investigate service children’s educational experiences and attainment. Both were conducted in response to the Department for Education (DfE, 2010b, 2010a) documents discussed in Chapter 1 and both point to complexities blurred over in those reports. The first, conducted by Ofsted (2011) in English schools and MoD-administered schools abroad, is not strictly speaking academic research. Its methodology, based on brief consultations with service children, is not unproblematic and is typical of much of the grey literature, as I discuss in Section 3.4.1.1. I mention it here, however, because it is influential in the dialogue about service children. The authors report that “a key impact of Service life on children and young people was one of social and emotional disturbance” (p. 15); however, they also consider the wider context of children’s lives, identifying important deficiencies in educational provision, including some of those highlighted in my vignettes in Chapter 1, such as poor information transfer and unfavourable admissions systems.

In the second study, Noret and colleagues (2014) report on their quantitative research comparing adolescents with and without parents in the army. They conclude, from surveys of young people, parents and teachers and from attainment data, that Year 10 and 11 “Army pupils” perform significantly less well in English than “non-Army pupils” and draw attention to a complex picture of educational experiences, including children’s relationships with their peers, concluding that “army children have unique educational experiences and have additional needs that warrant greater awareness and support” (p. 39). Some of their findings raise intriguing questions; for example, a higher proportion of army pupils than their peers identified their schoolwork as poor, and a lower proportion considered that they tried their

best at school, yet a higher proportion of the students considered they were reaching their academic potential. However, the survey methods used were unable to explore these apparent contradictions.

I include these studies here for several reasons. First, they comprise the bulk of the UK literature. It is important, then, that we recognise the interests of powerful international stakeholders that motivate some of these studies. Second, in alerting practitioners to potential links between the military lifestyle and the risk of negative outcomes, they exemplify a deficit discourse in circulation that positions service children as an “at-risk” population. This is not to argue against drawing attention to children’s problems; some children’s lives are extremely challenging, and an understanding of these is vitally important. It is, however, to make a case for research that refuses to reduce individuals to patterns and cohorts and seeks instead to present a rich and nuanced understanding of children’s unique and constantly changing lives.

Third, in their emphasis on the nature and prevalence of specific disorders and abuse within a population, most studies I have examined so far tend to present a fragmented and decontextualised picture of children as bearers of problems, or as cases. In focusing on only one facet of children’s lives, researchers are unable to see children holistically. They also often rely on norms against which children’s “functioning” can be assessed. Pathologising children’s behaviour is another example of what I understand Foucault (1982) to mean when he writes of individualisation:

everything that separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. (p. 781)

Understanding children instead as living in constant dialogue with others and with their sociocultural and physical environment resists such individualising discourses. This theoretical perspective invites situated research that attends to the constant micro-interactions that I understand as the key to children’s human becoming. Studies are needed in which “the explanatory locus of human action shifts from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interchange” (Gergen, 1985, p. 271).

Additionally, most of this research relies on adult informants of children’s experiences. Yet, as Rowe and colleagues (2014) argue from the findings of their project, parents’ accounts of children’s experiences are coloured largely by their own situations; thus they cannot be

considered infallible representatives of their children (see also Section 7.2.3 and Crow & Seybold, 2013). The studies also rely heavily on questionnaires. While many of these studies raise important questions, they highlight the need for well-designed qualitative research that can drill down into the complexities they identify. Finally, a glance at the participant demographics of these studies reveals that the UK literature is even patchier than it appears. Three, for example, assume the serving parent is male, leaving the children of servicewomen – 11% of the UK regular armed forces (MoD, 2019a) – underrepresented. The research is also heavily weighted towards army families, leaving children with parents in other services, whose experiences are often very different (Farrell-Wright, 2011), almost unrepresented. In the rare studies which consult children, either in the UK or in the US, this tends to be with adolescents. Younger children are almost entirely absent from the literature. There are exceptions, however. In the following section I discuss four UK educational research projects which take an exploratory approach to researching with children, sometimes of primary-school age.

3.3.1.3 Finding a few children in the research

In an unpublished ethnography of adolescents from army families in a secondary school (Clifton, 2007), the author points to the adverse effects of a service lifestyle. She argues that children find individual ways of coping with constant mobility, but that these may have a detrimental effect on their education. She finds, for example, that children may avoid forming close relationships, to mitigate the pain of the inevitable parting, but may then fail to develop the helpful relationships with their teachers that they need to succeed in an educational context that already disadvantages a mobile population. Rather than identifying the children's behaviours as pathologically abnormal, then, Clifton seeks to understand them in the context of their lives and the institution of the school. One of her key arguments is that neither the army nor the school sufficiently understands or meets her participants' needs.

Another unpublished study of service children in a school context is an MSc action research project (O'Neill, 2012) which focuses on children's transitions. Again, the researcher's holistic approach takes account of context. She investigates how seven army children settled into a new primary school, gathering data via several different methods on three occasions throughout the first year, including through brief interviews with children. O'Neill argues that it takes over seven months for service children to settle after a move and recommends that schools adopt robust induction processes.

In a thesis for a doctorate in educational psychology, Hayllar (2018) reports on semi-structured interviews with children aged 7-10, all but one with fathers in the army. She analyses her data in the light of psychological concepts of belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems, and provides a number of recommendations for home and school. She concludes that service children are

a group which faces adversity as a result of their military lifestyles, and for some children, at some times, these challenges can be overwhelming. However, my overriding reflections upon MCC [military-connected children] are that they are resilient and resourceful in terms of their coping strategies. (p. 111)

Finally, in 2018, researchers working for the English Children's Commissioner published findings from interviews with forty service children, including some aged 8-11. The report focuses on mobility, deployment and support. The researchers describe the influence of armed forces life as "all-encompassing" for children (Children's Commissioner, 2018, p. 3). While they identify many problems associated with mobility and deployment, including sadness and anxiety, they report that the

vast majority of service children we spoke to during this project were happy, resilient and incredibly proud to have a parent serving in the Armed Forces; belonging to a military family was central to their identity and sense of self. (p. 2)

These four studies conclude this section that investigates the ways in which service children are constructed as an "at-risk" cohort within the international literature. I have pointed out the dominance of quantitative psychological research from the US and the ways in which this research propels certain authoritative and deficit discourses about service children in the UK as well. I have described the powerful interests that position service children as obstacles to their parents' military duties and that drive research aimed at diagnosing and treating psychosocial disorders and other problems. In the studies discussed so far, I have found little evidence of research with actual children that explores what they understand to be important rather than the priorities of adult stakeholders. In the next section I turn to a concept that started to emerge in the last two studies I discussed: that of resilience.

3.3.2 *Service children as resilient*

Mary Wertsch (2006) is one of the first to write about the “famous resilience of military brats” (p. 390). She points out how frequently the adjective “resilient” is used in promotional materials by the DoD; however, she does not dispute the claim. Indeed, she agrees this is “entirely correct” (p. 252): “military brats seem able to cope with almost anything” (p. 395). Resilience is among the positive traits she identifies from her interviews, yet she defines resilience somewhat loosely: “bounc[ing] back from disaster” (p.252) or “adaptability”, “flexibility,” etc. (p. 395).

In an editorial in a special edition of the journal *Pediatrics*, Davis (2010) states: “the vast majority of US military children manifest considerable resilience. In fact, a colleague of mine genuinely refers to military families as ‘our heroes at home’” (p. 1215). This statement is somewhat bizarre, as Davis is referring to a study which reports an association between parental deployment and young children’s anxiety, behavioural and stress disorders (Gorman et al., 2010) and which, moreover, makes no mention of resilience. It is unclear, then, why Davis makes this unsupported claim, or what she means by resilience. I can only conclude that she intends simply to balance out the negative findings of the Gorman et al study or to pre-empt accusations of a deficit approach to military children’s wellbeing. Such caveats are not uncommon in the literature (e.g. Garcia et al., 2015; McCullouch & Hall, 2016; Park, 2011; Pincus et al., 2011). The key message is “We all know service children are resilient. BUT...”

Such juxtaposition of alarming findings and claims for children’s resilience is by no means rare within the literature. In a literature review aimed at US health practitioners (Johnson & Ling, 2012), for example, the authors claim that “despite, or because of, frequent moves and adjustments, the majority of military children are very resilient” (p. 195). It seems curious that, of all the children’s experiences, the authors identify moving home as the source of resilience even though they are unsure whether it promotes or impairs resilience. What “resilience” is taken to mean is unexplained, which is puzzling, especially as the authors are commenting on studies which find that “up to 1/3 of military children are considered “high-risk” for psychosocial morbidity” (p. 197).

Some researchers attempt to attach specific characteristics to the concept of resilience, yet base these on flimsy evidence. In a qualitative study of US adolescents with parents at war, for example, the authors describe resilience as “a sort of ‘inner peace’” (Mmari et al., 2009, p. 467).

Their evidence is that teachers perceive certain children to play a calming role in their chaotic families. The assumption that teachers are able to comment on aspects of the children's complex family lives outside the classroom remains unaddressed. In a further study, some of the same authors suggest resilience is a generalised ability to cope with stressors (Mmari et al., 2010).

3.3.2.1 Sources of resilience

Some studies, while hesitating to define resilience, attempt to identify where it comes from. Children may be endowed with resilience through their families:

Belonging to a military family and culture may bring out many protective factors that will promote positive well-being and resiliency in the child. Research has identified some of these characteristics children are born with and are difficult to change: a resilient temperament, a positive social orientation, and intelligence. (Pincus et al., 2011, p. 8).

How these inborn characteristics are "brought out" by the military lifestyle is unexplained. Others understand resilience as an outcome of adverse childhood experiences. Wertsch, for example, is unequivocal:

Repeatedly knocked off our feet by frequent moves, military brats develop an extraordinary sense of social balance. By the time we reach adulthood, we've met so many people, weathered such a diversity of predicaments, that we are unlikely to be fazed by much. (2006, p. 252)

We must remember, however, that Wertsch's account is retrospective, from the standpoint of adults, rather than of children who are still being repeatedly knocked off their feet. Wertsch's book concludes with the statement: "I am proud to be a military brat, and despite the high price exacted by the Fortress, I would have it no other way" (p. 426). Yet her assertions about the positive outcomes of a military upbringing conflict with her stories of adults still struggling in various ways with the "legacies" of their childhoods, such as alcohol addiction. What is not clear in Wertsch's account is the point at which the gains outweigh the cost, or what that cost looks like from the perspective of a child, rather than the retrospective view of an adult.

Wertsch is not alone in associating frequent house moves with resilience. For example, the authors of a focus-group study with adolescents (Mmari et al., 2010) find that moving – and particularly the accompanying educational disruption – is a significant source of stress. They

suggest that repeated exposure to stressful incidents brings about positive characteristics in young people if they are supported by their families and other groups, making them “more mature, adaptable, and self-sufficient in comparison to their civilian peers” (p. 363). Again, resilience is conceptualised here as a cluster of personality traits. Curiously, house moves are described in this study as “significant” stressors, yet also as “smaller challenges faced by military youth” (p. 353).

The notion of service children as resilient is not entirely uncontested, however. McCullough and Hall (2016) warn that children’s apparent self-sufficiency and resilience may be deceptive, a coping mechanism that masks their need for recognition and support. A mother quoted in an article on pastoral care of US military families speaks of “feigned resiliency and contrived optimism” (Moon, 2016, p. 128). Similarly, Hayllar (2018) argues that children may conceal their anxieties to demonstrate the stiff-upper-lip attitude expected of them. And in her ethnography of British army children, Clifton (2007) critiques the way that characteristics are assigned to service children by default, something I have also witnessed in schools:

A further issue evident in both schools was the teachers' perceptions of army children, considering them generally rather than specifically and attributing to them a set of behaviours and expectations that were not, perhaps, shared by all army children. An example of this could be seen in one teacher's perception that army children were "flexible and resilient". (p. 171)

Despite this critique, calls for a more nuanced understanding are rarely found in this literature (Alfano et al., 2016).

3.3.2.2 Resilience and disorders

Resilience as the absence of additional needs is another thread I found in the literature. The Ofsted (2011) report, while stopping short of a definition, implies that children who require support lack resilience, while resilient children cope without: “some children had become very resilient and needed little additional intervention and support; others coped less well with moving regularly and their changing friendship groups” (p. 24). The paradoxical assumption is that unusual challenges such as frequent house moves will produce positive outcomes; if a child reacts negatively, it is the child who is abnormal. Interestingly, the authors do not consider that in seeking support, children may be actively intervening on their own behalf, a resilient act in itself perhaps. This also raises the question of what “support” means: do not all children develop through support? How much support is normal? Can it be quantified? In

defining some children as resilient and others not, we may also fail to recognise that such judgements are highly contingent on cultural norms. According to Masten (2001), who has written widely about resilience, including resilience in military families, resilience is often detected “on the basis of an observable track record of meeting the major expectations of a given society or culture in historical context for the behavior of children of that age and situation” (p. 229).

A US study investigating the views of school staff on children experiencing parents’ deployments (Chandra, Martin et al., 2010) equates resilience to academic performance: “some children have displayed exceptional resiliency ... although there might have been a decline in academic performance when the parent was initially deployed, these children were able to organize themselves to perform well in future” (p. 221). Like the Ofsted report (2011), this study views support-seeking behaviour as problematic and fails to recognise that children may actively find ways of ensuring their priorities are attended to. A teacher is quoted:

I had one girl who was very clingy and very needy. I finally had to tell her, ‘You can have two hugs a day, and you can’t leave a class to get a hug.’ This was right after her dad left. She was just so needy. (Chandra, Martin et al., 2010, p. 222)

This recalls an incident I witnessed in school. One lunchtime I was walking through the building with Ivy, a 7 year-old service child who had moved to the school two weeks previously. Spotting her new teacher in her classroom, Ivy ran to hug her. Unseen by Ivy, above her head the teacher mouthed the words “*She’s so in your face,*” with an unmistakable accompanying gesture (hand in front of face, fingers spread). The teacher’s exasperation was palpable. Yet, to me, Ivy’s behaviour simply addressed her need to feel cared for and to belong. Thus behaviour which is inconvenient for school staff may be interpreted as somehow aberrant and associated with a lack of resilience. Chandra, Martin and colleagues (2010) take up the teacher’s word “needy” uncritically:

This neediness takes time for school staff, particularly those working in schools with large number of children from military families, to address and ultimately detract from their ability to focus on academic instruction [sic.]. (p. 219)

According to this logic, behaviour deemed resilient allows teachers to carry out the activity of academic (although not social or emotional) instruction. Seeking comfort from a teacher is abnormal behaviour and hinders the proper functioning of the class. Given their aim – to investigate how children react socially and emotionally to parental deployment in school – it

is surprising that Chandra and colleagues question neither the role of the school, nor the policies and practices which govern the children's lives. By focusing on whether children "are in the 'normal range' of functioning" (p. 222) and proposing solutions, the study promotes a discourse of individualisation.

Interestingly, the teachers and school counsellors in this study are described as "front line responders" (Chandra, Martin et al., 2010, p. 219), positioned as engaged in a battle against the challenging behaviours of service children. This is similarly the case for Horton (2005), in a paper which proposes a model for "consultation with military children" (p. 259):

The purpose and objectives are as follows: to train and support the teachers on how to handle behaviors associated with a parental deployment (i.e., acting out) in a preventative fashion, to link the parent who is at home with school resources before there are problems in academics or behavior, and to allow the child(ren) to know who and how to access help before they need it. (p. 261)

Despite the implication of dialogue in the word "consultation", it is clear here that the children are on the receiving end of this pre-emptive activity; there is no evidence that their input is sought.

In the articles considered thus far, then, resilience can mean whatever we want it to. Whether children are identified as possessing or lacking resilience depends largely on their measuring up against the academic, emotional or behavioural norms and conventions of their particular context. In short, their resilience is judged upon whether they inconvenience the adults around them. Those who fail to display the required attributes or take up more than their perceived share of adult attention are considered to present a problem that requires diagnosis and intervention.

3.3.2.3 Intervention and prevention

In the UK, there is no shortage of advice for schools about caring for service children. A webpage outlining examples of "best practice" (Directorate, Children and Young People, 2019), for example, features a school which funds a play therapy counsellor. "Building resilience" is highlighted as an outcome of this provision, evidenced by the school's in-house case studies. How the school conceptualises resilience and identifies it in pupils, however, is unexplained. While this and other best practice guidance, such as "*Supporting Service Children In School In England*" (The Royal British Legion, 2017) are full of helpful-sounding ideas for practitioners

wishing to use service pupil premium funding effectively, I find it problematic that the advice is based on adult common sense and self-reported best practice, instead of empirical research, and especially research conducted with children. More transparency is needed about how we identify best practice.

This is the case in the US also, where formalised therapeutic programmes aimed at boosting resilience in military children abound. It is disconcerting to read how few of these are evidence-based or evaluated, even retrospectively (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2015; Segal et al., 2015). Again, the lack of research involving children themselves is notable, as Sherbert (2011) notes in her work on adolescents' literacy practices: "while strategies were suggested for adolescents, the voices of the adolescents for whom these strategies were suggested were glaringly absent" (p. 2). To put it bluntly, well-meaning organisations are experimenting with untried programmes aimed at instilling some vaguely conceptualised quality into young people who are seen to need it.

3.3.2.4 Theoretical models of resilience

A small number of articles refer to theoretical models of resilience drawn from developmental psychopathology or psychology (e.g. Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013; Hayllar, 2018). These attempt to isolate the factors that promote or threaten resilience and suggest interventions that fit this theoretical model. Rather than an innate and stable characteristic, in these studies, resilience is usually conceptualised as a way of behaving that changes in response to circumstances (Hayllar, 2018). In their "ecological-transactional model", for example, Lieberman and Van Horn (2013, p. 283) emphasise context, particularly family functioning and relationships. Contrasting with the assumption that childhood adversity leads eventually to resilience, their study suggests that children develop resilience when surrounded by caring people in a secure environment.

This theoretical position invites a situated approach to research with real children within their usual social surroundings, rather than studying them as populations isolated from context. Yet few of the studies I have found pay attention to the contexts of children's lives. Astor and colleagues (2013) point out: "there is a dearth of research on how school environments and the social contexts surrounding the school (i.e., communities, peers, military installations, and societal attitudes) can promote positive outcomes, or exacerbate negative outcomes, among military children" (p. 234).

It must be noted that even studies which do attend to context often start with a theoretical model describing a set of mechanisms, rather than with empirical research; service children are often little more than a convenient population for establishing the accuracy of that model. The unit of analysis is often children's behavioural patterns or outcomes assessed against norms. Easterbrooks and colleagues (2013), for example, identify "seven Cs of positive development" (p. 103), defined as confidence, competence, character, connection, contribution, coping and control. Similarly, Saltzman and colleagues (2011) propose five "mechanisms of risk" which impair families' resilience and counter these with "mechanisms that mobilize and enhance resilience" (p. 213).

I wish to draw attention here to the striking frequency of the word "outcomes" in the literature on service children. An outcome suggests something finalised, the definitive word, and negates the possibility of people changing and developing. At what point, I wonder, do we judge a person, and particularly a child, "finished" enough to achieve an outcome? According to Bakhtin (1984a), "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (p. 166). Drawing on Bakhtin, Frank (2005) sees ethical research as "a continuing dialogue through which those participants will continue to form themselves, as they continue to become who they may yet be" (p. 967). Frank continues, "the worst implication ... is that those who are thus finalized come to expect to be spoken of in this way and ... forget to notice the falseness of the approach" (p. 967).

To summarise, a characteristic frequently associated with service children and their identity is resilience. There is, however, huge variation in how resilience is understood, and debate about who defines and measures it (Masten, 2014). In the service children's literature, resilience is conceptualised and investigated in a number of ways. Many authors sidestep any definition beyond the common-sense notion and refer to it as an innate characteristic of service children. Others use resilience as an umbrella term for certain selected desirable characteristics observable in children whose patterns of behaviour indicate that they are developing "normally". Other studies equate certain behaviours with a lack of resilience and social, emotional or behavioural disorders that require adult intervention. Some authors seek to explain resilience as a consequence either of childhood adversity or a supportive environment. Others use theoretical models of resilience from developmental psychopathology which explain resilience as an ability to adapt to adversity. They seek to

identify the positive and negative ways in which a military lifestyle might contribute towards the acquisition of these. I turn now to another frequently occurring concept, and one that relates to both risk and resilience.

3.3.3 *Honouring children's sacrifice*

The gathering of military men would be thanking their children, their fine and resourceful children, who were strangers in every school they entered, thanking them for their extraordinary service to their country, for the sacrifices they made over and over again... (Conroy, 2006, p. xxvii)

In a research field that tends towards the clinical, the theme of sacrifice is unusually emotive. Permeating the literature, from the grey literature to international journal articles (e.g. Kudler & Porter, 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2014); and memoirs such as Wertsch's (2006) is the idea that service children deserve recognition for their sacrifices and service to their country, as members of the armed forces community. The first paragraph of the UK's Armed Forces Covenant, for example, states that the Nation must "honour the commitment and sacrifice of the Armed Forces Community" (MoD, 2011, p. 10). This is not only described as a moral obligation, but appears in legislation (e.g. Armed Forces Act, 2011), and carries into a report that evaluates the effects of the Covenant: "We still feel neglected for all the sacrifices we, and our families, make for the love of serving in the RAF" (RAF Families Federation, 2013, p. 26). The RNRM Children's Fund report (2009) argues that children and spouses "are the people upon whom the long term strain is falling and whose sacrifice is overshadowed by that of the fighting forces" (p. 7).

The theme of sacrifice is echoed in the international literature: "they serve and sacrifice alongside their parents in ways that often go unappreciated" (Kudler & Porter, 2013, p. 168). Caring for military families is seen as the appropriate response from an indebted nation: "we share a responsibility to support military children and families by investing in research, services, and policies that honor their service and sacrifice" (Lester & Flake, 2014, p. 134). This "responsibility" is even put into tangible practice in the US Hero Pack initiative which invites "non-military youth" and community groups to create gift packs to "hand-deliver a salute to military children and youth for their strength and sacrifices while parents are deployed" (Operation Military Kids, 2019, para. 2). These are to include "an appreciation element, a content element and a support element" (para. 3), as well as letters that express appreciation

to the recipients, strangers identified as “military” and therefore somehow both worthy of veneration and in need of support.

The argument made, then, is that attention to service children is a moral act that honours their sacrifice. This attitude reflects the motto of the Forces Children’s Trust¹ (2019): “To help a child is an honour”. The word “honour” carries traces of duty, being honour-bound, as well as respect and military decorations for bravery, resonating with the word “salute” in the hero pack instructions. “Honour” also has overtones of remembrance. In her account of her own military childhood, Sinor (2003) describes the ritual of telling and remembering war stories: “Through the act of telling, the stories, and hence the ones behind the stories, are remembered, are honored” (p. 405).

“Service”, “sacrifice”, “honour” are highly emotive terms which set service children upon a pedestal of public gratitude and approval. What this means beyond the rhetoric is a morally complex question that is ignored in the literature, however. Individual children, whether from forces families or not, may indeed perform brave and selfless acts. Yet service children rarely have any option but to comply with the situation in which their parents’ careers place them. Sacrifice means to “surrender or give up (something) for the attainment of some higher advantage or dearer object” or to “permit injury or ruin to the interests of (a person) for the sake of some desired object” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Undoubtedly service children are obliged to surrender things they value: the presence of a parent; their homes, friends and schools when they move. They may lose their sense of safety at times, or even, all too frequently, a family member. Yet whose desired object is this for? Do the children have any choice in the matter?

To be unsentimental, there is a deal on offer: to compensate for losses and injury, children are accorded a certain heroic status, enshrined in rhetoric such as “the gratitude of the nation”. “Sacrifice” implies that the children somehow willingly shoulder the yoke. There are resonances here with the expectations carried in the cartoons I described in Chapter 1, and the

¹ This charity makes financial provision for children whose parents have died or been severely injured during service.

adage that “the whole family serves”. This is a further example of the ways in which people can be tied to imposed identities:

This form of power... categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault, 1982, p. 781)

Reiterating the ideas of children’s honour and sacrifice maintains a “truth” we dare not question, and a heroic identity the children are expected to assume. It seems cynical, sacrilegious almost, to find it problematic that children are honoured in this way. Yet by mythologising them, are we not harnessing them to this identity, and establishing norms against which we can measure them and they can measure themselves? There are hints of this in the literature: “We should always have high expectations that, despite their sacrifice and stress, military children will continue to cope, grow, and succeed as valued citizens of their communities and their nation” (Kudler & Porter, 2013, pp. 181-2). Is society not actually demanding their compliance and complicity, and framing it as honouring their sacrifice? To resist, to insist that the myth is not good enough, would be seen as ingratitude.

Furthermore, if we consider children duly rewarded for their sacrifice, there is no obligation to raise troublesome questions about the policies, decisions and actions that deprive them of what they value. And children provide a convenient rallying point, inviting public sympathy for the military family and eclipsing the violent realities of war (Basham, 2016). Few would dare contest the argument that children – and by extension, the armed forces community – deserve our support. It is, then, all the more necessary that we carefully consider the ethics of continuing to enact policies with little regard for, or understanding of, children’s interests, and considering this acceptable as long as we thank them for the sacrifices they make “for the nation”. It is also all the more important in my own research that I avoid idealising service children, something that requires reflexivity.

3.3.4 Summary

To return to my initial question “What are people saying about service children?”, I have discussed three themes that run through the literature: risk, resilience and sacrifice.

Overwhelmingly, service children are described as victims of the military lifestyle, at risk of a variety of ills. Yet at the same time this lifestyle is seen to supply, or require, a quality known as resilience, however this is defined. The third theme is sacrifice, something that again we associate with and also demand of service children.

I have identified powerful interests that underpin all three of these themes, and which rest upon the rarely problematised expectation that children serve alongside their parents, supporting them in their military duties. They achieve this by demonstrating resilience, in return for which they are rewarded with status and gratitude. In this view, children who struggle, who are unable to perform the stiff-upper-lip or little-trooper persona expected of them, somehow fail not only their parents but also the nation. A common response to this, then, is to identify such children as abnormal and in need of fixing, and efforts are made to diagnose their disorders and find appropriate interventions. Positivist research methodologies that rely on adult questionnaires designed to assess children’s psychosocial and behavioural functioning lend themselves perfectly to this approach, and it is unsurprising that these dominate the literature in this field. In the last section of this literature review I turn to questions of methodology. I argue that deductive methodologies abound even in the qualitative research in this field that seeks to “give children a voice” and describe how this affects the knowledge that can be created. This is to make the case for reflexive research that seeks to understand the interests of actual children.

3.4 Methodologies in the qualitative research literature

3.4.1 Research with children

If we are to understand real children’s interests, we need relationships with them. Yet I have found very few examples of researchers spending time with service children, in their usual surroundings, getting to know them and observing them actively making sense of their experiences: “the majority of studies have relied on the perspectives of adults such as parents when there is a replete with calls for more evidence from the child’s perspective”

(Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017, p. 655). The lack of direct involvement from children does not prevent researchers claiming insights into their lives. In their qualitative study of the views of school staff, for example (discussed in Section 3.2.2.2), Chandra, Martin and colleagues (2010) claim that their findings “provide critical insight into the experiences of children who are affected by an extended parental absence” (p. 223). It is questionable, however, whether one-off interviews with even the most sensitive adult respondents could really generate insight into children’s experiences.

When researchers consult service children themselves, this is predominantly, and often without explanation, via surveys and questionnaires. While these studies rarely include children below the age of 11, one exception exemplifies the potentially problematic nature of questionnaire-based research with children. This exception is a US project (Pfefferbaum et al., 2011) conducted with children aged 6 to 17, which aims to explore their reactions to parents’ combat deployment. These children’s parents are not regular troops but reservists, who may not have anticipated being sent to war. Thus the children may have found themselves “suddenly military” (Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009, p. e43). Pfefferbaum and colleagues (2011) describe their methods:

Safety of the deployed parent was measured at the pre-deployment and deployment phases by asking children and spouses two questions: how sure they were their deployed parent/spouse would return home safely and how sure they were their deployed parent/spouse would return home when expected. Possible responses ranged from not sure at all to extremely sure on a 5-point scale. (pp. 295-6)

To deal with such sensitive issues using quantitative questionnaire methods is problematic with participants of any age. For research with children who may never before have imagined their parents in danger, it is ethically precarious. It also precludes complex answers, failing to acknowledge that a child’s confidence about a parent’s safety will undoubtedly waver in response to a multitude of factors.

A number of studies use focus group and individual interviews with service children. These often take a deductive approach, which of course affects the knowledge that can be produced. Interview protocols, for example, are often designed to “produce the desired information” (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p. 88), and with particular theoretical models in mind, as we see from a study of adolescents’ adaptations during parental deployment:

Questions focused on determining their experience with the deployment cycle, the elements of the ABCX model, and their formal and informal support networks. (Huebner & Mancini, 2005, p. 12)

The implication here is that what constitutes desired information is known from the start. The researchers assume that children's experiences will slot into predefined explanatory frameworks. Such an approach makes no attempt to understand the experiences "in their own right rather than gloss over differences and patch them into paradigmatic wholes" (Fontana, 2003, p. 52). I have found few examples of inductive approaches in the literature on service children which take the children's lives, rather than theoretical models or disorders, as the starting point (Blommaert & Dong, 2010).

3.4.1.1 Typical methodologies with service children as participants

In several studies, and particularly those conducted for organisations such as Ofsted, Families Federations and the DfE, researchers gather children's comments at single, brief interviews or focus group meetings. I have found very few examples of ethnographic research with service children, or even of researchers meeting children more than once. In their MoD-funded study (McCullough & Hall, 2016), for instance, researchers made use of a Widening Participation outreach session, in which service children from local primary and secondary schools attended a higher education "taster" day on a university campus. Timetabled into this event was a discussion session in which groups were invited to generate "ten top tips" for caring for service children. Some children were also interviewed on film (see University of Winchester, 2016). The images in Figure 3.3 and the vignette below provide a glimpse into the consultation.

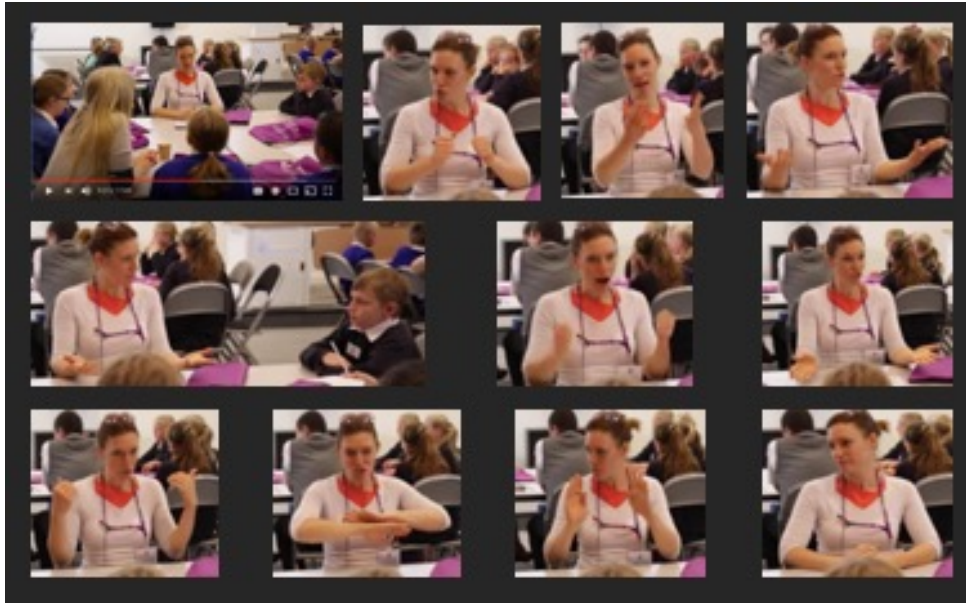


Figure 3.3 Images from Creative Forces Day¹

‘A day like this has given them a voice’

In an insistent tone, her hand gestures lending urgency to her words, the woman facing the camera addresses the children:

You have to ask questions in order to, actually, get help. Because if you don’t ask, nobody knows that you’re actually struggling. So, if you ever feel struggling in school, ask questions. Always ask the question. It doesn’t matter whether people are laughing, because they don’t understand. Purely, they don’t understand. And you, have to look after yourself. And not, don’t look at anybody around you. And nobody except you knows what you need.

During this, the children squirm in their seats, scratch their heads, rummage in their university-branded gift bags, and nod when the speaker looks directly at them.

The film cuts to a full-face picture of the film’s main narrator, saying, *‘The most important thing that we’ve learned is to listen, to what they have to say.’*

Later in the film another adult says, *‘A day like this has given them a voice.’*

We might imagine how the participants experienced this. Transported by coach to an adult academic environment, the children were placed into discussion groups around tables with unfamiliar children and adults for one session, and some were interviewed on camera by strangers in a large, empty auditorium, before being returned to their schools. I do not suggest

¹ Images reproduced with permission from University of Winchester .

the children participated unwillingly in this exercise – indeed probably the opposite – but I do question the assumption that children can clearly communicate a cohesive account of their existence to strangers in a short space of time and in an unfamiliar environment. There is no consideration of the chronotope and its constitutive role in meaning-making. And as one of the children in my MSc project commented, “*We don’t know what they don’t know.*” It is hardly surprising that, later in the film, children struggle to articulate any meaningful statements about their experiences. The words “*given them a voice*” also preclude any sense of agency on the part of the children; they have to be “given” a voice, which is somehow the adults’ to give.

The “top tips” and interviews were used as qualitative data, from which the university has created a large bank of resources, including advice, films, lesson plans, worksheets, and a blueprint for organising a similar outreach activity (University of Winchester, 2017). It troubles me that schools using these resources might be under the impression they are based on in-depth evidence, rather than a brief consultation.

This kind of consultation is by no means unusual in the literature on service children, particularly the grey literature. As I have pointed out in Section 1.2.3, the DfE’s good practice guidance document (DfE, 2010a) relies upon similar cursory encounters with children. Anyone familiar with primary schools would question the breadth and depth of understanding that might be yielded through conversations between children and adult strangers in what can have amounted to little more than 30 minutes. The Ofsted report (2011) that appeared a year later used a similar methodology. Thus some large claims are made from a minimal amount of research. That these are “official” documents lends them an authoritativeness they may not warrant as pieces of research in their own right.

In many of the studies reviewed here, the situations of research encounters are considered as variables which should be eliminated where possible. We see this in attempts to reduce the influence of individual researchers, time and place in interviews and focus groups. The use of interview protocols, for example, ensures all participants answer the same questions (e.g. Faber et al., 2008; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). In very few studies of service children do the authors describe interviews or focus groups as sites of knowledge production. Rather, they are seen as an opportunity to access the required information. This methodological approach has been critiqued for an absence of dialogue about the complexities of meaning-making (e.g. Scheurich, 1997). Within the research conducted with service children, there is also little

evidence of reflexivity. Few authors write about their positionality and how this affects their understanding of the field or their relationships with participants, or indeed about the ethical or epistemological appropriateness of methodologies and methods used.

3.4.2 Deductive analysis of qualitative research

Deductive approaches to qualitative research with service children also extend to analysis. Researchers frequently employ processes of “coding, collating, collapsing and refining” (Macdonald, 2017, p. 59). Often by research assistants using software, data are coded, categorised and placed into matrices that enable them to be mapped against pre-existing explanatory frameworks. Several studies mention cross-checking between analysts (e.g. Huebner et al., 2007; Faber et al., 2008; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017), intended to ensure the reliability of the analysis. This privileges findings that unambiguously fit into coded categories and implies that the researchers have no influence on the knowledge created. Quantitative analysis may also be used; for example, to establish the percentage of focus groups in which a particular theme was mentioned (e.g. Chandra, Martin et al., 2010). According to Scheurich (1997), this sort of approach “simply serves to hide the overwhelming absent presence of the researcher and her/his modernist assumptions” (p. 63).

Beyond emphasising the reliability of their methods of analysis, or describing participant recruitment and consent procedures, researchers in this field rarely explain their choice of methods, why certain participants are consulted and others not, or the theoretical frameworks they have adopted, the affordances and constraints of these. In a study I have mentioned in Section 3.3.1.2, for example, adolescents were asked to identify “the best and worst thing about having a father in the UK armed forces” (Jain et al., 2016, p. 1) in free online written responses. Yet where participants gave more than one “best” or “worst”, only the first answer was coded and the others discarded. This study is perplexing in many ways. The methods used, in conjunction with inductive content analysis, have the potential to generate nuanced and complex knowledge. Yet where complex answers are given, the authors ignore them, without explanation. Presumably the rationale is that there can be only one “best” and one “worst” thing, yet this is an imposition of the researchers. Asking children to define these once and for all restricts the understandings gained.

3.4.3 *Interpretive studies*

Interpretive studies are rare in research that involves service children as participants, and hardly less rare in the field of research about service children as a whole. Yet if we wish to understand their diverse lived experiences, interpretive studies that can generate nuanced, thick description (Geertz, 1973) of children's activity are powerful. Such description is a feature of Wertsch's work, which attends to and presents minutely-detailed insiders' narratives, enabling her to depict "a world of many-layered complexity" (M. Wertsch, 2006, p. xviii). Her challenge to civilians is to "break down your stereotypes of military people that imprison us in simplistic cartoon figures speaking in balloons" (p. xviii). Such stereotypes are prevalent. For example:

When opportunities for peer interaction are confined to other military children who also tend to be aloof, it drastically limits the emotional outlets that children crave. Considering that their parents and siblings are generally aloof as well, emotional exchange for military children is likely to be infrequent. (Sories et al., 2015, p. 210)

In this section, I examine three studies that aim to look beyond stereotypes and attend instead to participants as individuals.

An interpretive phenomenological approach is used in a Canadian project that investigates family relationships of veterans healing from trauma (Ray & Vanstone, 2009). The participants in this study are veterans, rather than children, but I include it as the authors use an unusually reflexive, empathetic and holistic approach. The authors, nurses themselves, argue from personal experience that "diagnostic labels and stage models of healing or recovery are representations that fail to grasp the totality of the being before us" (p. 840). This contrasts strongly with studies discussed previously, in which participants are viewed as little more than vessels bearing specific characteristics, diagnoses or needs. Ray and Vanstone reject such knowledge organised around norms and abstractions. They argue instead for a recognition that knowledge is situated and cannot be isolated from the physical act of living in space and time:

human knowledge is relational, temporal, and present in the world, as opposed to being objective, static, and independent of the questioner. By viewing the human subject as embodied and the body as a body-subject, healing from trauma is understood as a composite and complex whole that is experienced in the world in a concrete way. (p. 840)

The presentation of the findings in this article also contrasts with other studies. The participants are represented as named individuals and their interactions described in their own language and using their own definitions, both in lengthy quotations and in the discussion section. The authors draw attention to the complexities and diversity of the veterans' and their families' ever-changing experiences of healing from trauma. To the reader, this refusal to define and categorise suggests a sense of deep respect for the individuals involved and time taken to understand their experiences.

A small number of doctoral theses pay attention to child participants as living, complex human beings. A phenomenological study from 2011, for example, investigates the out-of-school literacy practices of five US military adolescents experiencing parental deployment (Sherbert, 2011). As a teacher with a military background herself, researching in her previous school, Sherbert's situation is similar to mine. Her approach to this differs, however. Consistent with phenomenology, she argues the need to bracket her own experiences from the data through creating a written account of these. While acknowledging that this practice is not unproblematic, she considers that it allows her "a fresh perspective" (p. 61) and curiosity towards her participants' experiences. She uses semi-structured interviews and draws from the data the themes of ambiguity, responses and roles. Using this inductive approach, the author builds a complex and detailed account of the young people's narratives, which contrasts sharply with the mental-health-based research previously described.

Nevertheless, some of the claims Sherbert (2011) makes are somewhat problematic. For example:

By "tuning in" to what these adolescents had to say about their lived experiences with deployment and their perceptions of their literate identities, I allowed their innermost thoughts, reflections, and lives to guide me to an understanding of how they, themselves, perceived their life-worlds. (p. 193)

The metaphor of "tuning in" suggests it is possible somehow to gain access to some core of the participants' selves, from which they transmit the unmediated truth of their existence. This implies that the researcher, research setting and activity are irrelevant, a departure from the arguments the researcher makes elsewhere about situated research practices. I am also dubious about some of the insights Sherbert claims to have gained from this position of shared subjectivity; for example, that her participants are characterised by "resiliency, a trait that ran deeper than emotions or feelings about these experiences" (p. 196). How can one

measure the depth of a perceived trait against an emotion? There is a sense here that traits and emotions dwell in an inner space and are accessible with the right methods. This essentialist notion does not sit comfortably with the anti-dualistic sociocultural theories the author has adopted.

The final study I consider here is an ethnographic account of the effects of Danish soldiers' deployments on their families' everyday lives (Heiselberg, 2017), drawing on the author's doctoral research. The article starts with a letter from one soldier's partner, which not only provides a sense of her as a real, living person and introduces the issues the author wishes to discuss, but also grounds the research in an ethos of care rarely evident in this field.

Heiselberg touches critically on similar issues to those I have begun to explore, describing for example "militarization as a subtle, yet profound, process resulting in a legitimization of military presence in the lives of 'ordinary' people" (p. 82). This resonates with my thinking about the many ways in which service children have military identities and norms imposed upon them.

Heiselberg (2017) also brings space and people's space-making into her consideration of families, using the idea of "relational spaces". These, she explains,

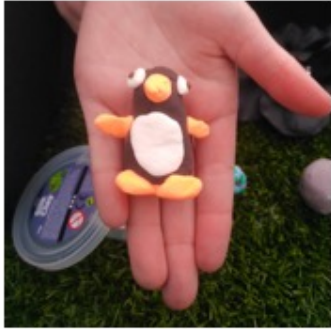
emerge when ordinary family space and time is expanded to include the non-present soldier in everyday family situations, and when the soldier's daily life is made comprehensible to the family members at home. (p. 75)

Heiselberg (2017) does not discuss third space as such, but her discussions of spaces that bridge home and war zones, civilian and military life, explore similar ideas. She also discusses objects that families use as means of connecting emotionally across distances and as enablers of those relational spaces, ideas I discuss in Chapter 7. Of all the studies I have come across in the field, Heiselberg's research resonates the most closely with mine, with her critical ethnographic approach, embedded in an ethos of care, and with her interest in spaces and objects.

3.5 *Summary of review*

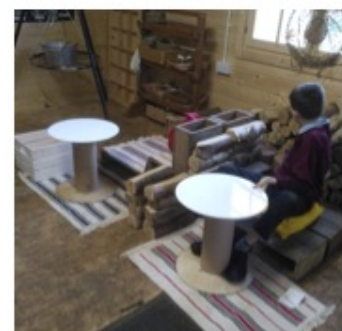
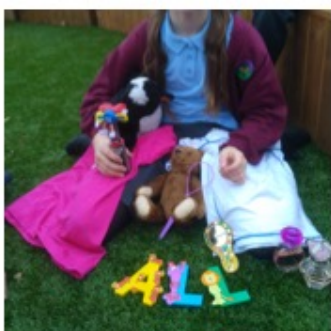
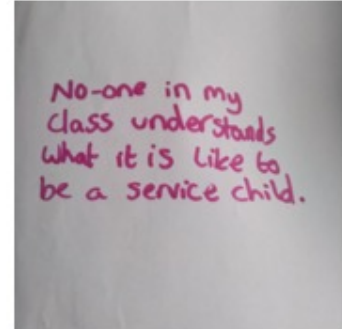
In this literature review I have identified a remarkable homogeneity in research with service children. I see a link between the knowledge constructed and circulated within the literature, the methodologies employed to construct new understandings, and the opening up or closing down of opportunities to question the status quo and effect social change. The literature is dominated by psychopathology, which effectively means that researchers usually work from a positivist epistemological perspective. This posits that we can discover the truth about the inborn characteristics or needs of the “military child”. This stance shapes the methodology and methods used. It matters little from this standpoint whether adults or children are the sources of that truth. The person of the researcher and the situatedness of the research are considered immaterial; indeed, these are seen as contaminating variables to be controlled for through large data sets, standardised measures, triangulation and cross-checking. Children are represented by academic attainment, by data sourced from health or academic records, or from questionnaires, often analysed quantitatively. The focus is thus on diagnoses and norms, rather than on children. The studies almost always conclude that practitioners should be aware of the children as an “at-risk” group, susceptible to academic, emotional, social or behavioural abnormalities, and many studies recommend programmes aimed at improving their outcomes. Hence, researchers deal almost entirely in abstractions: data, cohorts, norms, systems, needs, outcomes. The sociocultural context of children’s lives is taken into account only as a set of mechanisms that contribute to, or detract from, behaviours considered to represent successful functioning, often conceptualised under the umbrella term “resilience”.

I am interested in what is invariably bypassed in this literature: the concrete, embodied, affective, relational activity of actual living children. Within this literature I have found very few studies that use a reflexive ethnographic approach. We lack studies that take place through and within relationships with actual children, and within their familiar surroundings, studies that aim to understand their interests and learn how they wish to be understood and cared for. We also lack research that can account for complexity and ambiguity and recognise that dialogue is more than simply a means of transmission of some essential truth. In the next chapter, I argue for a methodology that shifts the emphasis from tidy, big-picture cohorts to the messy, ever-changing here-and-now of children’s lives within the cultural, social and historical contexts that provide the settings for their developing selves.



Chapter 4

Developing the methodology and methods



4.1 Vignette: “I’ve got news!”

“I’ve got news!”

I check my watch; time to collect the children. I slip in at the back of the classroom. Five of them are waiting in a line by the door. Mr Grayson, the teaching assistant, is standing at the front, clipboard in hand, marking the attendance register. Amelia waves. I mouth “Hello” as I join them by the playground door.

“I dunno where Imogen is,” whispers Archie. I know she’s here because she almost toppled me with a bear hug as I arrived earlier.

The other children are seated in rows at desks, some slumped in their seats reading paperbacks, elbows out; a couple of children are fidgeting with an unseen object on the table, glancing up watchfully to see if they’ve been spotted. The air is stale in here. Blinds cover the closed windows and despite the harshness of the strip lights in the ceiling it’s quite dim.

“Good afternoon, Maisie B.” Mr Grayson is using his “teacher” voice. In the staff room he sounds quite different.

“G’d afternoon.”

“Good afternoon, Harry... Harry?”

“He’s gone to guitar.”

“Thank you Jake. Good afternoon – Lauren and Maddie, will you PLEASE stop talking? This is the second time I’ve had to ask you. You’re meant to be doing silent reading.”

Imogen walks in from the cloakroom, rucksack over her shoulder. She crosses to join us by the door.

“Imogen, why are you five minutes later than everyone else? What have you been doing out there all this time?” A raised eyebrow and a hard stare. Imogen doesn’t meet his eye, shrugs slightly, no reply.

A nod to us as Mr Grayson finishes the register: we can leave now. I check whether the children want to come and remind them they can stay in the classroom if they choose.

“They’re probably gonna do a spelling test anyway,” says Jessie. The children open the door and we’re out.

Opposite is Ella’s classroom.

“Can we get Ella?” Without waiting for an answer, a few of the children clatter up the ramp and through the door, emerging seconds later with Ella. *“Are we going in the cabin today?”*
“If you want to, or we could have the science lab.”

“Cabin!” They race each other across the playground and propel themselves across the grass, towards the cabin among the trees.

Keira and Imogen walk with me. We skirt the field, following the tarmac path.

“They’ll get told off if Mr Hopgood’s there,” observes Imogen. *“He don’t like them going down there without a teacher.”*

“They don’t seem too worried,” I reply.

“Miss Lee, I’ve got my Stage 5 now. At swimming,” announces Keira.

“What did you have to do for that?” I ask.

“You have to swim sixteen lengths. But I’m not doing Stage 6. Have you brought biscuits? Can we do the play?”

The others are already in the cabin by the time we get there, except Archie, who is hiding behind a tree. *“I’m not here!”* he shouts as Imogen switches on the lights and Jessie checks the radiators are on. Ella hands me a basket with a set of painted pebbles; this is how we decide who gets the proper wooden chair today. It’s my job to pass it round. They ostentatiously screw their eyes shut and choose a pebble.

“Don’t look till everyone’s got theirs!” says Dylan.

Dylan gets the “lucky pebble” this week. *“Yessss!”* Jessie joins him in a celebratory floss dance. This, they have told me, they learned from Backpack Kid on YouTube.

“I never win,” says Imogen. *“It’s not fair.”*

“How’s it not fair?” says Ella. *“Course it’s fair.”*

The rest of us set about making ourselves seats using logs, wooden blocks and the cheap cotton rugs I’ve provided to cover the muddy floor. The children tussle over who gets one of the two cushions, use the rugs to soften the hard wooden edges. The seats and benches they make become more elaborate each week. Amelia has brought her baby blanket which she drapes over her knees, and a fluffy unicorn which she sits on her lap and strokes.

“I’ve got news!” announces Ella.

“Me too!” says Dylan.

“It might sound boring to you, but it’s not,” starts Ella. She takes a breath, pauses for dramatic effect: *“We’ve applied for our mortgage.”*

4.2 Introduction

In this project, I spent one afternoon a week between May 2017 and July 2018 with a group of seven children in a primary school, trying to make sense of them making sense of their social worlds, attending to the texts – linguistic, material, visual and embodied – through which they told their stories and explored their worlds. We met mainly in a cabin at the bottom of the school field, a third space in which we developed routines, practices and relationships that differed in many ways from those of the classroom. In a fourteen-month-long dialogue about

“what it’s like to be a service child in this school”, we talked, wrote, drew, painted, improvised drama, danced, sang, and made things.

Unlike the other vignettes in this thesis that recount isolated incidents, this one is a composite of real interactions and verbatim quotes from several weeks of fieldwork. I include it here for several reasons. First, I hope that a brief glimpse into the research space may help to contextualise the methodological discussion that follows. Second, as an “other”, more evocative means of telling the story of the research, and one that contrasts with my later, more theoretically-oriented discussion, the vignette is intended to allow a dialogic “back and forth’ between stories and readings, experience and analysis” (Clough, 2002, p. 7). For this reason, I leave the vignette to stand alone, without any commentary, until the coda to this chapter. This, I hope, also allows dialogue between the reader’s interpretation of the vignette and the discussion that follows. Third, so far I have been talking about service children in general, and I do so for a while longer. Yet this feels almost as though I am keeping my real participants at a distance; I imagine them demanding to know when they will make their appearance. The vignette is a chance to bring the children and the research space into view before I introduce them with a few bare facts in this chapter, and then in more depth from Chapter 5 onwards. Finally, the vignette evokes, I hope, the affective flows and messy reality of our research project.

The rest of this chapter is structured in four parts and a coda. First I describe my aspirations and values for the project and the ways in which my positionality and my theoretical stance suggested certain methodological and ethical principles: a critical methodology of dialogue and democratic fellowship with children positioned as co-researchers rather than as participants. In Section 4.4 I discuss practical aspects of the fieldwork – the opportunities my teacher-researcher positionality made available, and the challenges this brought. This section includes matters of informed consent and access to participants, research spaces and time. In Section 4.5 I situate my work within debates about participatory, arts-based research with children. I outline the methods we used in the fieldwork and how these drew upon my previous experience as a teacher. I discuss the idea that researchers can access children’s voice and perspectives and that participatory research empowers children, problematising these from a dialogic perspective. Following a discussion in Section 4.6 of my approach to analysing the children’s multimodal texts, I explain how events in the fieldwork prompted me to rethink my assumptions about children as co-researchers. In the coda to the chapter, I return to the

vignette to illustrate my approach to analysis and the playing out of power relations in the research.

4.3 *Positionality, aspirations, values and power*

The most apt labels for the methodology I used in this project might be critical ethnography, participatory, arts-based research, or dialogic inquiry. However, labels suggest order and linearity, neat pigeonholes I am keen to avoid. They conceal not only the “wild profusion” (Foucault, 2002c, p. xvi) of our everyday activity, but also the inseparable mix of aspirations, ontology, epistemology, ideology and ethics, as well as the practicalities, opportunities and constraints that combine in the methodology.

Spanning these is my positionality. By this, I mean how I understand myself to be in relation to the people I encounter in any given position, as well as to theories, histories, discourses and values, temporal rhythms, spaces and artefacts. As Giampapa (2011) states,

in “being and becoming” researchers, our histories, social and linguistic forms of capital, and our identities position us in particular ways in relation to participants and the communities in which they are embedded. This includes the ways in which researcher identities are assigned and constructed through discourses within one’s discipline and the processes and procedures that are imposed on researchers through institutional discourses. (p. 133)

Reflexivity on my positionality is not an attempt to identify and eliminate bias, nor to claim or attain full consciousness of all my intentions and motivations (Holt, 2004). Rather, it is to acknowledge the impossibility of positioning myself outside the interpretive process and to recognise the role my positionality plays in co-constructing knowledge. Pelias (2004) reminds us that “to speak is to always be located in history, to always be positioned and partisan” (p. 12). We can only process another’s utterances within our own “conceptual horizon” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). To attend to researcher positionality is not only the avoidance of a negative, however. Indeed, reflexivity is key to the meaning-making process:

Reflexivity ... induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions. A more reflexive and flexible approach to fieldwork allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork almost inevitably raises. (England, 1994, p. 244)

I understand reflexivity as a dialogic endeavour in itself, a back-and-forth between my positionality and the knowledge that is being constructed.

Key to the child-centred, ethnographic methodology is my teaching background. Having been immersed in the world of a primary school, in daily interaction with service children, and having witnessed the diverse ways in which children responded to circumstances and opportunities at different times and in different places, it seemed natural to me to work with children as participants. Hammersley (2015, 2017) argues that few researchers justify their decision to research with children beyond asserting what he describes as less-than-robust children's-rights or competence-based arguments. For me, involving service children in research was a matter of urgency, given the glaring gaps in the literature I have highlighted in Chapter 2. As a good deal of the existing research is also generated with military efficiency in mind, rather than children's interests, it was also an ethical imperative, a matter of respect, care and responsibility, to spend time with children learning about their priorities and the way they deal with the everyday joys and challenges of life. This also aligned with my open-ended research aims. Rather than centring my project around a hypothesis or theory of resilience or risk, I wanted to start with the children. This suggested an ethnographic approach, which "works from empirical evidence towards theory, not the other way around" (Blommaert & Dong, 2010, p. 12).

Beyond this, I also saw a need for different ways of knowing children beyond the current default in English schools of pupil attainment measures, "internationally comparable standards, which bear little or no relevance to the lived realities, practices and knowledge of the children and young people who they purport to assess" (Flewitt et al., 2018, p. 384). I have witnessed individual children's performance in tests becoming the focus of their own, the school's, and their families' ambitions, anxieties and activity. I have also experienced the evolution of KS2¹ tests and the ways in which testing drives not only the curriculum (Marshall, 2017) and everyday classroom activity, but also the children's estimation of their abilities and failures, which bears on their dignity and sense of self. Having observed the disengagement of children whose many and often wonderful abilities remain unacknowledged – and undervalued – within the school system and its narrow and standardised methods of assessment, I wanted to develop wiser, more sensitive and more human ways of knowing. I

¹ Key Stage 2: ages 7-11

would need to find methods and mediational means that were ethically appropriate for children and that would enable us to develop a rich understanding of their lives. These, then, are matters of ethics, epistemology and professional expertise.

As Spyrou (2011) argues, “social research with children is, if done well, a time-consuming enterprise” (p. 156). We would need time to get to know and trust each other, to listen and ponder, to revisit and deepen our ideas. In my MSc project, which took place over five weeks, I learned the value of taking our time. The children raised a number of ideas in the first session, particularly around parents’ deployments, and revisited these repeatedly in the following weeks, with increasing self-understanding and nuance, discussing their pride, fears and uncertainties, their understandings of war, its causes and effects on people. The children were clearly undertaking a good deal of “cognitive activity” (Kress 1997, p. 42) between sessions. Had I expected to “capture” their views in a single interview, as most research with service children does, our discussions would not have progressed beyond the superficial level of the first week.

The much lengthier period of fieldwork in the PhD project also allowed me to attend to the children’s handling of changes in their lives, something that became highly important in an unpredictably eventful year for them all. Hammersley (2006) points out that lengthy ethnographic fieldwork allows the researcher insight into the temporal cycles of any situation. By being alongside the children for over a whole school year, I was able to witness how they responded to such events as festivals, birthdays, SATs preparation and changing class, as well as the repeated deployments of their parents and, in some cases, preparing to move home and change schools.

A child-centred, ethnographic approach also resonates with my ontological stance. The Bakhtinian idea that deep within us is “not the Id, but the other” (Todorov, 1984, p. 33) suggests a methodology of encounter, one of dialogue and of democratic fellowship (Fielding, 2012). Such a relational approach to research requires reflexivity, mutual openness and responsiveness, sympathy and a recognition of our common humanity (Martin, 2007). Underpinning the project from the very start, then, was my desire to develop a methodology based on caring relationships with children. I was keen that these should be different from usual teacher-pupil relationships. I know from experience how deeply teachers care about their pupils, yet, as I discuss in Chapter 7, the pressure of an outcomes-driven system can

often lead to performative relationships based on obedience and on constant scrutiny of the child's attainment; to relationships in which the teacher "holds" knowledge and parcels it out to the pupils. Instead I wished to develop relationships in which we could explore together whatever mattered to the children:

Research is ... an ongoing dialogue between participants' meanings; the meanings that researchers attribute to their words, their actions, their lives, and their stories; and how participants change in response to researchers' responses. No one's meaning is final, and no one meaning is final. What counts is two's meaning, which is enacted through a process of those two creating meanings as expressions of their relationship. In a dialogical framing, no one can ever take him- or herself out of relationships with others. (Frank, 2010, p. 99)

Bakhtin's dialogical principle emphasises encounters with otherness, and that implies the meeting and coexistence of differing ideologies and points of view. Sympathy and dialogue are about recognising our differences and limitations as well as what we have in common (Pelias, 2004). We were also, then, going to need safe spaces, for disagreement and uncertainty as well as consensus, spaces in which we could interrogate authoritative discourses and recognise that truths are situated, partial, plural and ever-changing. In a school setting, and particularly one in which enormous effort had gone into creating and reinforcing a strong, shared ethos, creating such a space required careful reflection.

Understanding, in Bakhtinian thinking, is a dialogic, rather than an intersubjective process. As Vološinov (1973) explains, when we struggle to understand others' utterances, we attempt to mentally rephrase these in ways that make sense to us (see also Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). This is not, then, a claim for shared subjectivity, a dualistic notion that we can access someone else's perspective, "tune in" to children's voices or get "under their skins" (Glazzard, 2012; Sherbert, 2011; Warming, 2011), notions I discuss more fully in Section 4.5.1. For this reason, I use the word sympathy (feeling "with") rather than empathy, a translation of *Einfühlung*, "in-feeling" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 326), a concept that implies we can get inside another's feelings. Noddings (2010) describes sympathy as "an attitude of solicitude toward the cared-for and a willingness to listen and be moved" (p. 392). I sought to create a dialogic space of caring, sympathy and solidarity, in which we would seek resonance, becoming sensitive to the ways in which we all go about our lives and tell stories about them.

An aim of this project was to develop ethical and appropriate methods of researching with children in school. Mindful of what Clough (2004) calls “the conscious theft of glimpses of people’s lives in the interests of research” (p. 376), I adopted the key ethical principle that the children should always have control of what they chose to bring to the group’s attention. While, as I discuss in Section 4.5, arts-based and participatory methods are not a panacea for research with children, I learned in my MSc project that these methods did, importantly, afford the children time to think through what they might present to the group, or to me privately. They could make choices about the modes of representation they used to make meaning, drawing on their fluency with visual design and their enjoyment of physical movement. They could also explore, rehearse, refine or abandon ideas as they spent time thinking about and shaping artefacts and other texts. By following the children’s lead, rather than expecting them to answer probing questions, I intended that the children would never feel tricked into utterances they might later regret.

It is almost a truism to say that research with children requires close attention to asymmetrical power relationships. How much more so, then, research in a school where I had once taught? As I reflected on the ways in which power relations were negotiated and enacted within school, I became increasingly alert to ways of being and behaving, expectations and discursive practices that the children and I took for granted. The vignette that starts this chapter draws attention to some of these and ways in which they configure adult/child, teacher/pupil positions within the school. It highlights some of the signs and practices through which adults choreograph children’s activity, time and use of space, including auditory space, and assert and maintain their authority. These are even embodied: physical size, a smile, a nod, a stare, a raised eyebrow or a loud voice may be powerful tools of control.

This is not to accuse the teachers of taking pleasure in their ability to dominate. On the contrary, they act out of a deep sense of responsibility towards the children, their learning and the school’s reputation. By exercising control, they ensure the smooth and efficient running of the school. Foucault (2002a) argues that we should not consider power only as repressive:

it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body. (p. 120)

Taking the register and explaining the afternoon's activities are accomplished efficiently if the children are quiet and seated, saving time for more interesting activity. A calm moment also allows children to change gear mentally between the hurly-burly of the lunchtime playground and the lesson to come. Yet I began to question some of these practices. Was all that de-energising, choreography and control necessary? Could some practices be unsettled and things be done differently? Did everything need to drive towards a predetermined – and adult-determined – outcome? I was struck by a question posed by Foucault (2002a): “Why must one punish and reward in order to teach something to someone? That system seems self-evident, but if we think about it we see that this self-evidence melts away” (p. 83). I saw the research as a rare opportunity to create a third space (Soja, 1996) in which we could explore alternative ways of negotiating and enacting power relations within the school. This involved unsettling rules and routines, discursive practices, curricular and school/non-school boundaries and our uses of time and space, as I discuss in the coda to this chapter and further in Chapters 5 to 7.

Another aspiration for the research project was to involve the children on a meta-level, to find ways for them to do some analysis and help shape the evolving research direction. This was partly a reaction to the lack of participation by service children in the existing research, and partly because I was influenced by the argument that the main obstacle to children conducting research is not their youth but their lack of research skills, something easily remedied (Kellett, 2005). From my experience with my MSc participants I reasoned the children could learn to undertake activities such as thematic analysis without difficulty. The reality, however, turned out to be quite different, and, as I describe in Section 4.6, I learned the salience of the observation that “researchers may have to set aside their methods and assumptions about what should take place when doing research with children” (Semenec, 2018, p. 67).

Having observed ways in which children's interests were often overlooked in decision-making, policies, everyday practices and even in research, I was also adamant that this should be a critical project. According to Madison (2012), critical ethnography

takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control [moving from] ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’. (p. 5)

I wished to understand the children's learning lives in the context of the policies and practices that had powerful effects on them. By attending to local micro-practices and utterances – the everyday, banal-seeming interactions in the research group – I wanted to understand the authoritative discourses that shaped the children's experiences, to unpick some of these and imagine what might change if we placed children's interests at the centre of our thinking. In this my in-depth knowledge of policies and practices and their histories in this school was invaluable. Not only did it provide me with a shortcut to understanding when children talked of specific practices, events and people, but I often had different knowledge of these from the children's. I knew where and how these fitted into the complex sociocultural and historical environment of the school.

So far, I have described some of the aspirations that inclined me towards a critical, arts-based ethnographic project based on relationships of democratic fellowship. I turn now to more concrete matters: the opportunities afforded me by my background in the school. I discuss access to participants, matters of ethics, and the spaces and times in which the fieldwork took place. In Section 4.4.1 I introduce the children and briefly outline some of their family characteristics.

4.4 Practicalities: access to participants, research spaces and positionality

Central to many practical aspects of the research project was my relationship of trust with Maggie Stanford, the head teacher of "Bridgeton" Primary School. Maggie fully backed my research and had even written a persuasive letter to support my funding application. With a personal as well as a professional interest in service families, she felt the project would help inform the school's practices. She also recognised that my project could contribute to her goal of the school becoming a "research-rich" environment, something she was keen to promote following a report that advocated research becoming part of school culture:

Teachers and students thrive in the kind of settings that we describe as research-rich, and research-rich schools and colleges are those that are likely to have the greatest capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement. (British Educational Research Association and Action and Research Centre, 2014, pp. 3-4)

Within the school Maggie encouraged teachers to conduct classroom-based action research (albeit without training). My project would contribute another activity to the school's research

culture, providing helpful evidence for inspectors of the school's commitment to self-improvement. The school was also rated "good" by Ofsted. Thus Maggie was sufficiently confident in the school's status to permit the risk of a research project that would not neatly fit the categories of an Ofsted inspection framework.

Few researchers are granted the opportunity to simply remove a group of children from their classroom one afternoon a week for more than a year, without any checks on how they spend that time, or on the aims, objectives or outcomes of each session. This is particularly the case in the UK today, where schools' teaching and learning and safeguarding practices are under constant scrutiny. Yet this is what I did. I was granted access to a group of children, a weekly time slot and a choice of spaces in which we could meet. I was to pick them up from their classroom after lunch on Wednesdays and deliver them back at the end of the day. I even had my own key to the building. Beyond that I had no instructions.

Of course, nothing is ever that simple, and my apparent freedom was not really freedom at all. The degree of trust I was granted was determined by the degree to which I understood the expectations of the school. I was an insider, not simply because I was known, but because I had internalised an entire ecology of rules, practices and boundaries; I had even been involved in the development of many of these. No one checked up on me because they knew that I knew the micro- and macro-politics of the school; how things worked, what was allowed, and why. Foucault (1977) makes an analogy of this kind of self-governance in his discussion of the Panopticon, originally a design for a prison in which prisoners were separated in cells around a central observation point. The idea was that they could not know when they were being watched, so would always behave as if under scrutiny. Foucault argues that this is how power works in society:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principal of his own subjection. (pp. 202-203)

Having spent our entire lives surrounded by the signs and texts that indicate how we should be and behave, we monitor and constrain our own behaviour, even our thinking, accordingly; thus we have no need of stringent mechanisms of control and surveillance.

As far as the school was concerned, in my fieldwork I was still a teacher, although one with a looser remit than most. I was not required to map our activity against specific curricular objectives, for example, but an unspoken expectation of a certain quality of work still existed. The children and I were unsupervised, but still expected to adhere to the school's values and policies. We had no tests or outcomes to work towards, yet I understood that we should produce some concrete evidence of having spent our time productively. At the same time, I was a researcher, seeking to develop democratic, non-hierarchical, exploratory and slow ways of working together in an institution that was fairly undemocratic, decidedly hierarchical and highly oriented towards attaining predefined – and often Ofsted-oriented outcomes – as rapidly as possible. The tensions between my teacher and researcher positionalities and the sets of values I had inscribed into myself (Foucault, 1977) required constant reflexivity, and were both challenging and helpful in the research.

My insider knowledge of the school coupled with my understanding of research ethics, for example, alerted me to potential problems. One example is the matter of children's informed consent. In my school, as in many, children's activity is highly adult-directed. When outsiders, such as peripatetic music teachers, work with children within the school, the children are allocated their slot and told where and when to go. Even when children join after-school clubs, they cannot simply drop in and out at whim, but are expected to commit to attending regularly. Research, of course, operates differently. It is a principle, not only of ethics, but also of democratic fellowship, that children are invited, rather than obliged, to participate in research, and moreover that their consent and ongoing participation is a genuine choice. The potential for manipulating children in subtle and less subtle ways is very real:

it is invariably a very brave act to say “no” in an institutional context. Under such circumstances, “consent” may be based on little more than a desire to please, or a fear of the consequences of not being seen to be cooperative (S. Heath et al., 2007, p. 413; see also Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

My insider status made arranging access to the participants straightforward. Following my MSc fieldwork in the school in 2014-15, Maggie and I had discussed the possibility of a longer project. Once I started my PhD, we agreed the dates of the fieldwork. There were seven service children in years 4 and 5 (ages 9-11), a suitably sized group of participants, and as I was familiar with children of this age group from my teaching, we decided I would invite these children to take part. While there are arguments that children should be able to give their consent independently of their parents (Wiles et al., 2007), this would have been unthinkable

in this school, so I first obtained the parents' consent to invite their children to participate (See Appendix 2 for information provided for parents and children). As many of them knew me already, they readily agreed, although, as I discuss in some detail in Chapter 5, I met with a certain resistance from the school secretary. Once I had received the parents' permission, I could invite the children.

At this point the complexities of informed consent with children became evident. Before I even finished explaining the project fully, some children started telling me about their parents' deployments, while others agreed on the spot that they would participate. Knowing primary school children's eagerness to volunteer for anything, I had anticipated this and had prepared leaflets explaining the project, with photos of artefacts made by my MSc research participants as an illustration of the kind of things we might do. I asked the children to take them away, consider whether they wanted to take part, and let me know two weeks later. At this point, Jessie said, "*We'll take them away if you want, but we're still gonna do it.*" All this raised uncomfortable questions. Could I say that the children had given their fully informed consent? Bearing in mind the impossibility of ever knowing exactly how a project will develop (Etherington, 2007), can children ever give it? By speaking for all the children, had Jessie indirectly influenced the others' decision? Or was she asserting her independence by resisting my suggestion? I dealt with this uncertainty with discussing ethical matters overtly with the children and by offering them the choice of coming or staying each week, as I describe in the vignette. Yet what happened before I arrived? Did their teacher ask them to line up and wait for me? And was the opportunity to get out of the classroom indirect coercion? Were biscuits bribes? To what extent were the children just complying with yet another adult-directed activity and trying to please? These are not easily resolved questions.

Towards the end of this chapter, I return to the vignette to illustrate some of the complexities around positionality that I have raised here. Now, however, it is time to introduce briefly the children, the research space and the methods we used. I start with a timeline intended to provide a broad overview of the key events of the fieldwork and the telling moments I refer to in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

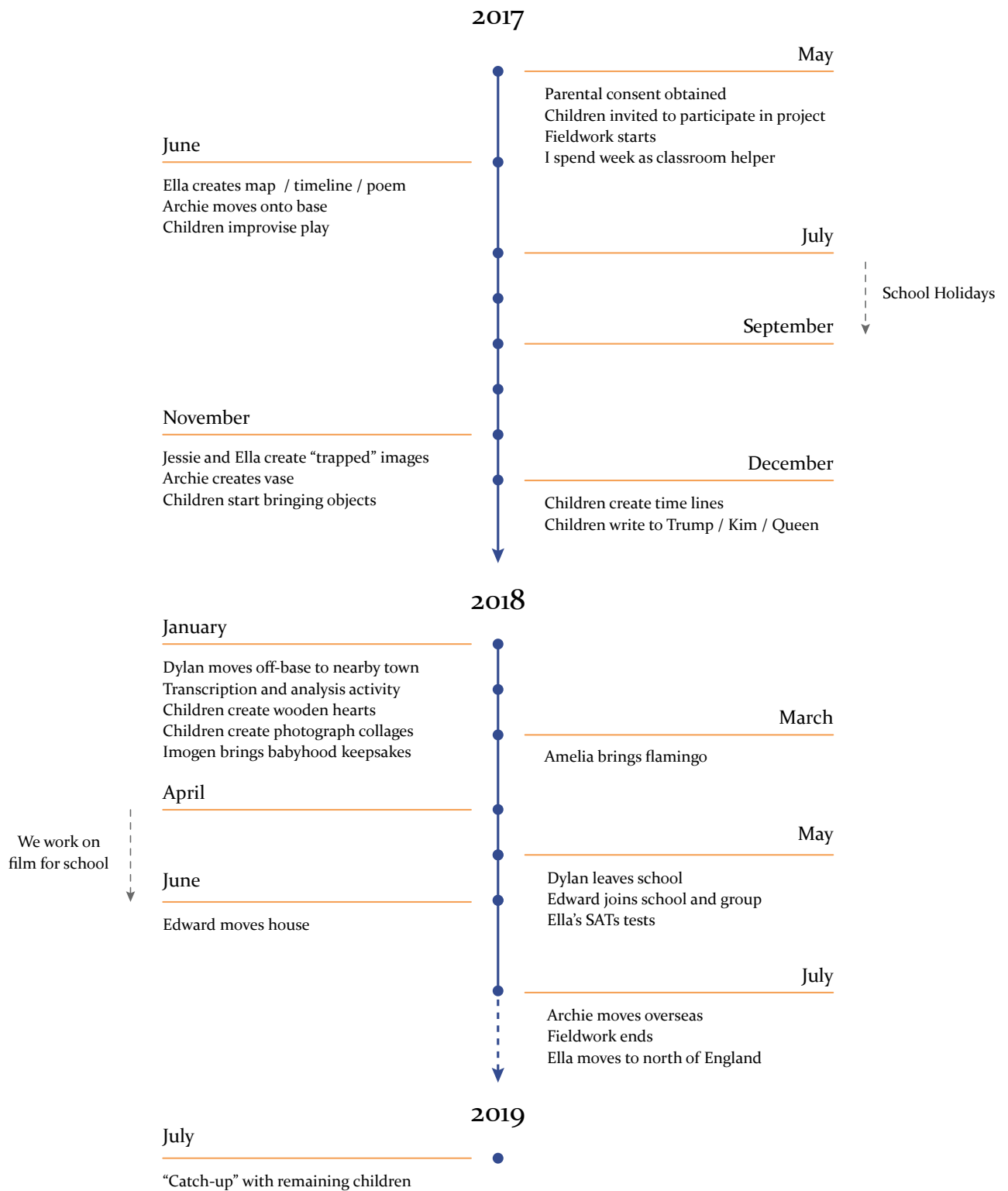


Figure 4.1 Research timeline showing key events and telling moments

4.4.1 *Introducing the children*

Whatever their motivation, all the children I invited chose to take part in the research, and they stayed for the duration of the project or, in some cases, until they left the school. At the start we had seven children in the group. These were Amelia, Imogen, Keira, Jessie, Ella, Dylan and Archie. Edward, the eighth child, joined the school and the group towards the end of the project, while Dylan left the school at around the same time (see Table 2 and Figure 4.1). In Year 5 and then 6, Ella was the only service child in her class, an unusual situation for this school and one she often said she found difficult. It may be that for Ella, coming to the research group satisfied her desire to be among children with similar experiences. The other children were all in Year 4 at the start and moved into Year 5 during the project.

Table 2: Children, dates of involvement in project and year groups

May 2017 to July 2018

5 Images redacted
for anonymity

Amelia	Imogen	Keira	Jessie	Ella
Y4-5	Y4-5	Y4-5	Y4-5	Y5-6

May 17 to May 18 May 17 to June 18 May 18 to July 18

3 Images redacted
for anonymity

Dylan	Archie	Edward
Y4-5	Y4-5	Y5

While only a small group, and not selected as a representative sample, my participants had differing experiences of service family life. They all had at least one serving parent or step-parent, and all lived with two parents, a mother/stepmother and a father/stepfather. Ella, Dylan, Archie and Edward all had a father in the RAF and a civilian mother or stepmother. Both Amelia's parents were in the RAF. Imogen had "two dads"; she lived with her step-father, who was in the RAF, and her civilian mother, but also visited her civilian father some weekends. Jessie's mother was in the RAF and her father was an army veteran. Keira's father was in the army, and, unlike the others, she also had a wide extended family living locally. Except Jessie and Edward, all the children had siblings. Most also lived in RAF accommodation on a high-security base a few kilometres from the school, although this changed during the year for some, as I discuss in Chapter 6. All were white British. As I explain in the literature review, children from RAF families and children with a mother or both parents in the armed forces are under-represented in the literature; thus my project is unusual in including these children.

4.4.2 Introducing the space

The choice of Wednesday afternoons for the research group was mainly a matter of school timetabling. This slot was allocated to teachers' Planning, Preparation and Assessment time. Teaching assistants covered classes, usually teaching subjects such as art, or design and technology, for which the school was not required to submit assessment data. There was an unspoken understanding, then, that it did not matter unduly if the children were out of the classroom on Wednesday afternoons, and perhaps also that as an "enrichment" activity, the research project would be equivalent in value to those second-tier subject areas. For the children, taking part in my project meant missing those subjects, which troubled me, as I knew how little of the school week was devoted to "the arts". I raised this issue with the children on several occasions, but they always insisted they would rather be doing the research. This had some bearing on my choice of arts-based methods in the research group, as I felt this might partly compensate for the lessons the children were missing. Interestingly, during most of our sessions, the children kept a vigilant eye on their class, one usually finding a pressing reason to go back into the classroom, to use the toilet, for example, or fetch something, and then reporting back on what their peers were doing in their absence. On a few rare occasions, one of the children did decide to stay in the classroom, which reassured me that they felt able to exercise their right to opt out.

Serendipity also played its part in some practical aspects of the research; for example, the lack of spare indoor rooms on Wednesday afternoons. A visitor working with a group of children would usually use the school hall, but I wanted a more intimate, less public space. Knowing there were two rarely-used outdoor spaces, a log cabin at the bottom of the school field, designed for outdoor education but used mostly for storage, and a nearly-finished transparent dome which was to become a science lab, I arranged to use these when available. This meant spending a weekend clearing out the cabin to make it habitable. As the children had spent little time in either of these, to an extent they were blank spaces which we could make our own, and this had a profound effect on the evolution of our research activity. We literally occupied a marginal place, in school and yet far from its nucleus, a third space (Soja, 1996) in which we could develop relationships, routines and ways of being that blended aspects of school and non-school, but, as I describe in Chapters 5 to 7, became in the end something quite unique.

Some might suggest that for a learning lives approach, with its emphasis on learning that spans the artificial borders we place between formal and informal, in-school and out-of-school learning, it might be more informative to conduct a multi-sited project, researching across various places in the children's lives, perhaps using walking or mapping methods. I chose to research in school only for various reasons. One is that learning lives was more of a direction than a point of departure for the research. I had originally intended to focus more closely on the children's in-school experiences, but the children made it clear this was not their priority. As the research evolved, I learned a great deal about their learning in and across the other spaces in their lives, and this became an unexpectedly important part of the project. A second reason is that in this rural area, with almost non-existent public transport, the sites the children frequent are very far apart, and accessible only by car. In a city, it might be more feasible to invite the children to walk me through some of their favourite places. A "day in the life" study might have been extremely informative and would be a potential interesting future project, but it would have required considerable organisation with the families, and I would have needed to build this into the research design from the start.

Another reason was that, for the children, it might have felt strange, invasive even, to be followed around their play areas, hanging-out spots and into their homes by me, a teacher who had taught some of their siblings and older friends. While we developed less hierarchical relationships from the usual teacher-pupil ones, the children still positioned me to a certain

extent as a teacher (evident, for example, from their calling me Mrs Lee, despite having assigned me the pseudonym Lizzie at the start of the project). Had I been a complete stranger, we might well have established a multi-sited project. As it was, I did not attempt to push our relationship onto uncomfortable ground. Gutiérrez and colleagues (2007) describe a similar reluctance to “going ‘outside’ to young children’s practices and then colonizing these” (p. 69). Had the children invited me to the military base on which they lived, I might have accepted the offer (although this would have taken me into notoriously tricky MoD ethics territory), but they never did. This in itself is interesting: the base occupies a space somewhat outside Bridgeton. Enclosed by barbed wire and armed guards, it is, as I discuss in Chapter 6, a hugely important space in the children’s lives, one that is constructed as a space apart, with a culture of its own, and inaccessible to outsiders. I suspect the children were simply happy to leave it that way.

In this section I have described some practical aspects of the research and how my insider position provided access to participants and a time and space for the research. In the next section I describe my rationale for using creative methods. I start by outlining the influence of my previous teaching and researching experience, describing the methods we used, and then critique some of the claims frequently made about participatory and arts-based research with children, and problematise notions that these are necessarily empowering to children. I examine ideas of children’s authentic voice and perspective, and the idea that they are experts on their own lives.

4.5 Participatory and creative methodology and methods

In designing the methods used in the research group, I drew initially more from my teaching experience than from research methods literature. I had learned from teaching 8-11 year-old children that some of the richest and most reflective classroom dialogues happened when I provided a range of arts materials with which children could explore and represent aspects of their lives. I found that children who stumbled in school literacy lessons over obstacles of handwriting, spelling and vocabulary, and who often took a back seat in classroom discussions, were able to make profound and complex meanings when provided with a choice of mediational means and time to reflect on what they wanted to “say” through these. According to Pahl and Rowsell (2011), “multimodality is the understanding that we express

meaning in different modes, that is, through gesture, visual media, oral media, and writing” (p. 130). Many children often considered “less able” or “below expectations” revealed communicative abilities and understandings of metaphor, genre and audience using multimodal literacies that were not evident when restricted to verbal, and particularly written, meaning-making. I had also run after-school clubs in which, over the course of a year, we collaboratively explored themes of interest to the children, eventually turning some of these into musical productions, complete with script, musical accompaniment, scenery, costumes, choreography, props and front-of-house work. My role in this was to facilitate an inductive process of meaning-making, by providing resources and by teaching skills and knowledge as the need arose – a reversal of our classroom roles, in which I planned and delivered certain predefined knowledge and skills and the children were simply required to provide evidence that they had learned these. I had observed these clubs becoming reflective meaning-making spaces in which children, positioned as decision-makers, authors, composers and designers of multimodal texts, could explore their priorities.

Sensing the potential of such methods for research, and following my research methods training, in which I developed an interest in ethnography, narrative, writing as inquiry and participatory methods, in my MSc project I invited the children to tell me about what was important to them as service children, using a variety of modes of representation, such as clay modelling, poetry, song-writing and painting. We recorded their activity using audio- and sometimes video-recording and photography. The children produced remarkably evocative artefacts; however, the making process was equally informative. As they manipulated the clay or paint, the children discussed aspects of their lives and some of the things that puzzled them, trying out ideas on each other, recalibrating their own, holding up each other’s lives as mirrors to their own, perhaps, and understanding themselves more deeply in the process. The making itself was, then, an informative social practice. The children also often chose to interpret their finished artefacts to me formally, describing their design choices and explaining what the artefacts represented. Thus, through working with the materials and shaping their artefacts, the children also mediated their understandings and explorations of who they were, where they belonged in their social and cultural milieux and what mattered to them in that space and time. These methods had worked even better than I had imagined, and this five-week project became a pilot for the PhD.

The methods we used in the PhD project ranged from drama improvisation, song-writing, choreography, poetry, diary and letter-writing, making photo-collages, stop-motion animation, maps and timelines, and a good deal of drawing and painting, to making puppets and three-dimensional artefacts using a variety of media, such as wire, silk clay, air-drying clay and “junk”. Sometimes the children decided as a group the materials I should bring the following week; sometimes they individually chose the mediational means they needed to explore ideas that had arisen in their discussion of their news, and sometimes I introduced games or activities, such as photo elicitation or card-sort activities, that I devised to help explore further ideas we had been discussing. Additionally, the children often brought in toys and other objects from home, something I discuss in Chapter 7. As in the MSc project, there was an enormous amount of talk. We decided together to audio-record the discussions and photograph the artefacts and aspects of the making process. Sometimes we also used video. The children often initiated this, wanting to film themselves explaining their artefacts formally, in the style of self-recorded confessionals on reality-TV.

All this provided an enormous number of multimodal texts to analyse. I hesitate to describe these as “data”, a term which seems to me too decontextualised, disembodied and impersonal, too suggestive of extraction and reduction. It seems more faithful to the project to analyse them instead as utterances within a fourteen-month-long dialogue, elicited and mediated through the meaning-making processes and the artefacts; a dialogue about relationships, families and friends, places, injustices, incidents and conversations, the children’s pasts and immediate and longer-term futures, play, sport, school, myths, social media trends and news reports, and, throughout, their developing sense of self: how and where they positioned themselves within all this. I discuss my dialogic approach to analysis in Section 4.6. Before that, I turn to discourses around participatory and “voice” research with children and locate my work in relation to these. I problematise the idea that meaning is fixed in texts that speak for children across multiple contexts, and examine claims that researchers can access children’s voices or perspectives as experts in their own lives, considering ontological assumptions about children that underpin these claims. I also question the notion that visual methods empower children and illustrate my arguments with examples from the fieldwork and the vignette.

4.5.1 *A dialogic approach to participatory research with children: problematising voice, empowerment and “being/becoming”*

Bragg (2011) suggests that visual methods can fulfil various purposes: for example, they are often considered inclusive; they may be used to address research questions, to elicit dialogue and reflection, to document and illuminate processes and carry an argument, and to allow children to explore ideas that they might find difficult to articulate verbally, such as their sense of self and relation to place. However, she also warns of the limitations of participatory methods and points to the need for ethical and methodological reflexivity. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) similarly argue, “what matters is not so much the methods used, but the ways and the spirit in which they are used: the methodological *attitude* taken” (p. 513). Participatory research with children can rest upon very varied theoretical positions about children’s development, competence and agency (Komulainen, 2007).

In their “Mosaic method”, for example (Clark 2001, 2005, 2011; Clark & Statham, 2005), Clark and Statham employ methods similar to mine. In one project, for instance, they use observations, interviews, photography, book- and map-making, walking methods and photo elicitation with children. Yet my methodological orientation is quite different from that of these researchers, who emphasise that children are “experts on their own lives” (e.g. Clark & Statham, 2005, p. 45), a phrase I have also heard frequently used in conferences and a summer school focusing on participatory research. This perspective often underpins Childhood Studies research (see also Clark, 2010; Hill et al., 2004), and positions children as *beings* rather than *becomings*, with a right enshrined in the UNCRC¹ to participate as co-researchers (e.g. Hill et al., 2004; Kellett, 2005). James (2007) describes such a position as “a radical epistemological break, not only with developmentalism but also with traditional assumptions about children’s incompetence and inarticulateness” (p. 265). Clark and Statham (2005) also describe their method as “the bringing together of different pieces of information or material to make a picture from children’s viewpoints” (p. 47) and talk of triangulating findings obtained through the various methods. While the word “mosaic” suggests an inductive, constructionist approach (Nind, 2014), inherent in this work are assumptions that children “have” viewpoints

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989)

that they and the researchers can access, and that when pieced together these will create one coherent and valid picture. My dialogic approach works from very different premises.

Participatory methods with children are “almost universally lauded” (Gallacher & Gallagher 2008, p.12; see also McGarry, 2016; Hammersley, 2017) for their promise of empowerment, democracy and ethical appropriateness and the idea that they can access children’s voices or their authentic perspectives. Grover (2004), for example, describes such an orientation to research with children as “authentic research ... which gives power and voice to child research participants and which provides insights into their subjective world” (p. 81; see also Warming, 2011; Sherbert, 2011). Implicit in such claims, however, are a number of problematic epistemological and ontological assumptions (James, 2007; Komulainen, 2007; Spyrou, 2011; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hammersley, 2017). James (2007) suggests that in their reaction against past exploitative research *on* children, and in their eagerness to portray children as social actors in their own right, childhood researchers may have adopted an uncritical attitude towards the representational process. The assertion, for example, that research with children provides a vehicle for children’s voices raises questions about what voice means, whether and how voice can be accessed, and whether children’s words can be taken as a window into their authentic reality. Policymaker-initiated publications about service children, for example, are often liberally sprinkled with quotations from interviews with children. Yet, as I have previously discussed, the assumption that these represent the truth about service children’s lives is largely unexamined.

In the literature on service children we rarely find reflexive accounts of the situated activity of the research itself. In an interview or focus group meeting there is an expectation of the kind of “serious” talk that should yield the nuggets of truth about children’s existence that adults are searching for. These are then embedded into reports as the children’s “voice”, abstracted from any discussion of the spatial, temporal or relational context. A critical approach to voice, however, requires us to acknowledge the research as a site of knowledge production itself, rather than a neutral place for extracting information (Fontana, 2003). Vološinov makes the point that “It is not experience that organizes expression, but, to the contrary, expression that organizes experience, that, for the first time, gives it form and determines its direction” (cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 43). That is, we come to know our experiences in the situated activity of sign-making itself. In my fieldwork, I learned that the chronotope – where we were, and when, who was present, what had just happened, the mood people were in and the modes they used

– all affected what was and was not said, or even sayable. Thus what an experience or an utterance means may differ greatly from one context to another. And as Bakhtin (1981) reminds us, “one can bring about fundamental changes even in another’s utterance accurately quoted” (p. 340). We also need to acknowledge that children’s “voices” are interpreted and selected by adult authors to illustrate the points they wish to make, and for the new audience they have in mind. Such critical reflection is rarely evident in research studies with service children.

Spyrou (2011) points to the danger of assuming that children’s voices represent an essential truth, and argues for a recognition of “the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in ‘stories’” (p. 162). A dialogic approach to voice makes no attempt to smooth over the contradictions and ambiguities that are inevitable in research with people whose lives are never coherent, static or finalised. As Järvinen (2000) points out,

Human life is incoherent; it consists of elements standing alongside each other or following each other, without necessarily being related. It consists of confusion, contradictions, and ironies, and of indecisiveness, repetition, and reversion. (p. 372)

A danger in participatory research, and particularly projects using visual methods, I suggest, is that there is something solid and finished about artefacts and voice that may tempt us to “fix” meanings in them, using them to reify and finalise children’s experiences, rather than considering them as mediational means situated in time and place. Children’s affective responses to any aspect of their lives inevitably change across differing timescales as their circumstances and their understandings of these alter. This is particularly so for service children, for whom, with frequent parental deployments and postings, change is a constant. In my analysis I am constantly wary of creating finalising accounts of the children’s meanings in a particular text.

On two occasions during my fieldwork, for example, Imogen talked about a particular T-shirt. In one of her accounts, her “real” dad had had it specially designed for her with a pattern she liked (“*because my dad knows me*”); in her other account she had decorated it herself. I understand these contradictions not as falsehoods; rather, I believe, they complement each other and provide a glimpse of the complexities of Imogen’s truths. Fontana (2003) recommends that we “attend as much to how participants assemble their respective communications as to what is asked and answered” (p. 56). Only one of Imogen’s two

accounts can be strictly “true”, but rather than dismissing them for this reason, how much more do we learn from their contradictions about her relationships, desires and the ways she wants others to understand her? Does the meaning not lie in the dialogic tension between the two?

I have also needed to reflect on the limitations of the mediational means children use in participatory research. The argument that “experiences are constantly out of reach of language and discourse and on the borderlines of consciousness and awareness” (Denzin, 1997, p. 61) applies, I suggest, to any text, whether visual, embodied or artefactual. My approach makes no assumption that the children’s words or artefacts represent a known, comprehensive and coherent account of their reality as experts in their own lives. Rather, they may represent inchoate, fragmented and exploratory ideas about an aspect of their life at one particular moment; they may invoke authoritative discourses the children have never questioned, or a reaction to something they have just encountered, and may be as much about how the children wish to present themselves to the group as anything else. As Bragg (2011) points out, “it cannot be assumed that those who produce images will automatically be able to articulate or even recognize the insights and understandings implicit in them” (p. 92). Thus the interpretive role of the researcher is crucial. Yet Bragg also argues that researchers often fail to problematise the visual artefacts produced by participants and may assume that these can speak for themselves (or even for the researcher’s preconceived ideas) without analysis.

Another problematic notion I have encountered in childhood research literature is that adult researchers can access not only children’s voices but even their perspectives. In her research in a day-care centre, for example, Warming (2011) describes “adopting the least adult role” (p. 45) by behaving in child-like ways, even crawling under a climbing frame to hide from a teacher. She asserts that she can access children’s perspectives, “getting under their skins” (p. 39). Similarly, Grover (2004) advocates an approach in which researchers try to “escape their adult perspective and listen so as to give power and voice to the child subjects they are studying” (p. 90). These arguments suggest a dualist separation of the inner and outer selves. They imply the existence of a pure and authentic perspective, or voice, held in the inner being, and propose that we can escape our own subjectivity and share another’s perspective. Likewise, Glazzard (2012) and Sherbert (2011) use the metaphor of “tuning into” children’s voices, suggesting an ability somehow to be on the same wavelength as children. Such attitudes are at odds with dialogism. Drawing on Bakhtinian theories of voice and meaning-making as

dialogic and embodied, inseparable from situated, social activity, Komulainen (2007) critiques the notion of “view” or “voice” as a property of the inner individual. She argues:

“voices” are processes rather than locations: they never exist in social isolation. “Meanings” come into existence when two or more voices come into contact: there has to be a speaker and a listener, an “addresser” and “addressee”, and there will also be multiple voices and “multivoicedness”. (p. 13)

Voice and perspective cannot be found, then, within the individual; they are responsive and distributed, relational and plural, rather than essential: “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 110). I find no hint in Bakhtin’s work which indicates that we can share others’ minds. Dialogism thoroughly rejects the idea of an essential inner self:

To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another. (p. 287)

Such a view invites us to problematise the debate about whether to understand children as beings or becomings, summarised by Lee (2001) as the division between “the complete and independent and the incomplete and dependent” (p. 5). Taking the view that children are beings emphasises them as self-knowing, sovereign individuals and implies a static, discrete identity. Understanding them as becomings, on the other hand, suggests a destination – by definition, adulthood – at which children might attain completeness and self-knowledge. A Bakhtinian view is that no one – neither adult nor child – is ever finalised or atomised: our ideological becoming is a never-ending, and, furthermore, thoroughly social process. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, not only do we develop our conscious self through assimilating the signs and texts of our social worlds, but we come to know ourselves not from looking within, but from seeing ourselves reflected, as it were, in others (Bakhtin, 1986). A dialogic perspective, then, invites us to move beyond the being/becoming binary and find a third proposition: that adults and children alike are never-finalised becomings.

Lee (2001) reaches a similar conclusion, although by a different route. He points out that the changing social and economic conditions of the 21st century have destabilised established

notions of adulthood and childhood, and suggests that “we might instead develop concepts that allow us to see all humans, adults and children alike, as fundamentally dependent and incomplete” (p. 103). One of these concepts is that none of us are autonomous, atomised individuals, because we are all extended by the tools (themselves socially constructed) that we use to achieve any task. This idea of incompleteness aligns with James Wertsch’s (1998) description of the individual always “operating-with-mediational-means” (p. 26). Digital technologies, for example, extend our abilities in innumerable ways, and are redrawing previously assumed divisions between adults’ and children’s competences, their connectedness and even their interests. Matters previously considered of concern to adults only are now freely accessible to children.

Recognising adults and children alike as incomplete becomings is not to claim, however, that they have equal agency. According to Davies (1990), people’s roles and positions and the possibilities for action these afford are discursively constituted, rather than essential: “it is not a *necessary* element of human action to be agentic, it is a *contingent* element, depending upon the particular discursive practices in use and the positioning of the person in those practices” (p. 344). Lee (2001) makes a related point when he describes the differences between adults and children as configured by the differing “patterns of supplementation, mediation and extension” (p. 113) which surround adults and children. I interpret these ideas to mean that practices within institutions make different cultural tools or mediational means available to adults and children, and that we also differ in our mastery of these, and thus in the extent to which we can affect others’ behaviour. Davies (1990) points out the many ways in which in schools, even with the most democratic of intentions, power disparities are inescapable. She suggests:

The question is not then whether individuals can be said in any absolute sense to have or not have agency, but whether or not there is awareness of the constitutive force of discursive practices and the means for resisting or changing unacceptable practices. (p. 359)

4.5.1.1 Methodological implications

The implications on my project of these ideas is profound. Seeing the children as complete beings would require me merely to attempt to “mine” their expert knowledge or to try somehow to share their subjectivity, something I have suggested is impossible. Understanding

us *all* instead as *becomings* invites attention to the ways in which we imagine, construct, negotiate and perform what it is to be children and adults; to how we are positioned, and to the institutional practices and sign systems that shape how we are, what we do and even how we understand ourselves. It is also, I believe, an ethical position: if we teach children that adults are complete and finalised beings, what happens when the adults around them show signs of uncertainty or vulnerability? What happens when they reach the promised land of adulthood and find it does not live up to its promises? These are practical as well as theoretical questions, as my discussion of the “empty chair” display in Section 5.2.2 illustrates.

Without denying differences between the possibilities for action available to adults and children, understanding us all as *becomings* in my research project also requires a conscious attempt to trouble taken-for-granted adult-child, teacher-pupil binaries, and position us all as learners and meaning-makers. Such a view calls for sensitivity to the ways in which the children and I negotiate and exercise power and to the mediational means which offer different possibilities to us. It invites acknowledgement that none of us knows exactly what we are looking for in the research.

We might think of this as a *thirding* (Soja, 1996) that seeks to explore and enact alternative discursive practices and power relations from the customary ones in the school. For example, from transcribing recordings of our sessions I learned that the most fluent, interesting dialogues occurred when the children did most of the talking. Thus I consciously tried to position myself as participating in the dialogue, rather than directing it. I tended to intervene only if I sensed that some children were dominating the talk and silencing others, or that anyone was uncomfortable with the topic, bored with talking or wanted to do something practical. I avoided discouraging certain topics as inappropriate for discussion or frivolous, trusting that the children had reasons for whatever they brought to our attention which would become evident as the research progressed. Neither did I “correct” children’s reasoning or stipulate outcomes as I would be obliged to do in the classroom.

I also tried to disrupt traditional patterns of classroom talk, remaining silent or responding through gesture rather than activating the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) pattern of teacher-child turn-taking (Alexander, 2018; Calcagni & Lago, 2018; Iddings & McCafferty, 2007; Samuelson, 2009; Skidmore, 2000; J. V. Wertsch & Smolka, 1993). As MacLure and colleagues (2012) point out, “by participating in IRE sequences, the participants display their orientation

to differentials of power, status and knowledge. They ‘make happen’ the asymmetrical roles of teacher and pupil, and assemble the instructional order of the classroom” (p. 451; see also J. V. Wertsch, 1998). In Chapter 5 I describe how the talk in the research group took on a collaborative nature as it evolved away from the I-R-E pattern. I also avoided asking the children direct questions, often responding instead by repeating some of their own words. In the classrooms in this school, teachers constantly enforced turn-taking and insisted on children raising their hand to request permission to speak, another practice I deliberately avoided in the fieldwork.

We also related to the space and objects within it in different ways from in the classroom, breaking down the habitual routines which signal it as the teacher’s territory, as we see in the vignette. By sitting at the same height as the children, for example, rather than on the “teacher’s chair” above them, I signalled that I would avoid dominating the activity. Neither did I expect the children to remain seated; they lay on the floor, rolled around, stood and were constantly on the move. Yet changing habitual ways of being is far from straightforward, and I often felt I got it wrong. In this I was not alone. Holt (2004), for example, notes that she sometimes caught herself “reproducing dominant discourses of adulthood and childhood” (p. 16; see also Gallagher, 2008; Christensen, 2004; Warming, 2011).

Foucault (2002a) argues that power “needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (p. 120). This, then, is a very different orientation to power relations from the often-claimed ideas that participatory methods are inherently empowering (e.g. DCSF, 2008; Grover, 2004; Kellett, 2005; A. White et al., 2010; Worley, 2008), and that the greater the degree of participation, the better, an idea prompted by such devices as Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation or Shier’s (2001) pathways to participation (e.g. S. Holland et al., 2008; Holt, 2004; Todd, 2012). Arguing that the term “empowerment” is over-used but under-problematised, Bragg (2011) points to the danger of complacency that might follow from such assumptions, suggesting that claims of empowerment “may even obstruct critical reflexivity about the larger contexts and power relations at play in ‘participatory’ practices” (p. 97; see also Hunleth, 2011). S. Holland and colleagues (2010) similarly argue for a shift from assumed binaries of powerful researcher and powerless participant towards a more complex, “dynamic and relational” conceptualisation of power (p. 363). I understand power, following Foucault (1982), as dynamic and complex:

something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. (p. 788)

Rather, then, than conceptualising power as an entity that I have and the children lack, and attempting to transfer some of mine to them, I understand attention to power relations as a process of attending to our micro-actions, the practices and mediational means that we employ to influence each other, to take up positions as agentic or compliant.

To summarise briefly, in this section I have brought my methodological stance into dialogue with claims made about research with children and the use of participatory and visual methods. I have questioned whether researchers can access children's authentic voices or perspectives, and problematised the unidirectional model of power-as-entity that underpins the idea that participatory methods empower children. Following J. V. Wertsch's (1998) ideas of mediated action and Lee's (2001) approach to the being/becoming debate, I align myself with the idea that we might understand adults and children alike as incomplete and in a never-ending process of ideological becoming. All these positions have a profound effect on my approach to analysis, and I discuss this next. I then provide examples of my analytical thinking that also serve to illustrate the ways in which power relations played out in the fieldwork and forced me to rethink some of my earlier assumptions about children as researchers.

4.6 Transcription and analysis

I see the act of "interrogating' the data" (Hammersley, 2008, p. 2) not only as a dialogue between my researcher self and the research activity and texts created, but also as a way of bringing texts, created at different times and in different modes, into dialogue with each other. In line with my theoretical framework, in my analysis I made no assumption of direct correspondence between text and external reality; neither did I claim to read the children's minds. Rather, I interpreted their texts in the light of theory, my positionality, my growing relationship with the children and knowledge of their lives, the discursive practices we employed and the social context of the school within its wider policy context.

A question that came to mind frequently was “What was THAT all about?” The children bantered and bickered, wrestled and snuggled up together, sang, danced, brought in objects, and were constantly on the move. If we consider all these as texts created by the children, they were often elaborate, performative and carnivalesque, leading me to ponder why it was in their interests – as it surely was – to create certain texts at a certain time and for a particular audience. Why did they use particular mediational means on certain occasions? How did they position their audience? What power moves were the children making and what could I learn about their social positions? MacLure (2009) speaks of methodologies that pay attention to, rather than ignore, seemingly “idle, frivolous things” (p. 97) such as “laughter, mimicry, mockery, silence, stuttering, tears, slyness, shyness, shouts, jokes, lies, irrelevance, partiality, inconsistency, self-doubt, masks, false starts, false ‘fronts’ and faulty memories” (pp. 97-98). Rather than dismissing these as trivial or as distractions peripheral to the serious business of the research, I took the view that these aspects were as worthy as anything else of attention.

I found transcription an early and valuable interpretive activity in itself, as it allowed me to focus intently on the children’s words (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). Listening to audio-recordings often felt like re-experiencing the dialogic encounter with the children. In our sessions the children often spoke at once, or sometimes two conversations were running simultaneously. Unpicking these to decipher individual voices required intent listening and the following through of children’s arguments and narratives. Producing and annotating the transcripts (see Appendix 3) was also an opportunity to listen to and reflect on what I had missed in the midst of responding to individuals. While transcription inevitably reduces the dynamic and intense hubbub of the fieldwork (Scheurich, 1997), I found it helpful to spend time making sense of utterances that in the field took split seconds to utter.

In my analysis I attended not only to the content or themes of the texts, but also to the children’s situated, embodied utterances: the words and speech genres they used, as well as elements such as tone of voice or gesture and the children’s interactions with each other and the space. Drawing on visual analysis methods used by Janks (1997, 2018) and Rowsell (2006), I also paid attention to aspects of the children’s artefacts such as the media used, colour, line and angle, style, gaze and the ways in which these portrayed the object of each image and positioned the audience. The children’s physicality also infused their three-dimensional artefacts, seen in their textures, their finish and the force with which the children had carved lines and shaped materials. However, my approach to analysis was not an attempt to seek

meaning within the texts alone, or to treat the elements of these as units within some inert linguistic or visual grammatical system. Rather, following Bakhtin, I sought meaning in the texts within the concrete act of communication, in all its contextual complexity. J. V. Wertsch (1998) notes that a fundamentally Bakhtinian question is “who is doing the talking?” (p. 26). This was a question I kept in mind as I transcribed the recordings and pored over the transcripts and images. How did the children invoke others’ utterances? What discourses, and particularly authoritative discourses, were evident in the children’s texts? What texts were they engaging with in their lives? I also spent a good deal of time reflecting on the methodology and methods and our positionings within the research group.

In any one session we explored a plethora of ideas, from wedding cakes to dogs to international politics. As the analysis proceeded, I began to find that an image created on one occasion would recall, enhance or conflict with something someone said or created on another occasion, or with something I had read in the literature. Meaning-making also happened inter-modally (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) and intertextually. The children would frequently combine mediational means to make meaning. Often, for example, they would create a visual metaphor or representation – such as a timeline – of something they were thinking about, which might combine modes of colour, font, words and lines, and then supplement this with another text, as they explained their design decisions and meanings, sometimes using my laptop to film themselves holding up their artefact to the camera. Some also chose to create written accounts, perhaps because they liked writing or were influenced by schooled literacy practices in which the written text holds greater currency than the visual (Flewitt, 2005; Kress, 1997), and images are rarely allowed to “carry” meaning alone (Millard, 2006). I also sensed that the children found writing allowed them to inscribe into their texts how they wished them to be interpreted. Thus the children demonstrated an understanding that mediational means and modes have both affordances and limitations (Flewitt, 2011; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; J. V. Wertsch, 1998). The planning time for a spoken text, for example, is limited by the speed at which it is produced. Written texts, while allowing time for planning and editing, represent meaning in a linear way, and may lack the richness of an oral text (Mario & de Souza, 2015). Images present meaning spatially (Mills & Comber, 2015), and can have immediate affective impact. So can sculptures, which also enter into a tactile relationship (Kress, 1997) with their audience. In the research group the children created multiple texts, some consciously designed and redesigned and others more spontaneous, which I could examine alongside and against each other.

As the fieldwork progressed, certain moments stood out as particularly worthy of analytical attention. Like those in the vignettes in Chapter 1, these were moments that lingered in my mind. Sometimes they surprised me, struck me as telling, or related to ideas I had been thinking about. I often also used writing as an analytical tool, putting to paper reflections and vignettes that helped me understand what was going on. Often I needed to bring what I observed into dialogue with theory and discourses from the literature, presentations and comments made at conferences, things teachers had said to me, or my knowledge of the school and its practices. Sometimes I discussed what was puzzling me with my supervisors, and they pointed me towards literature and theories that helped make sense of it. Spending many months immersed in the children's dialogue, I was able to make links across narratives and texts, to puzzle over just why someone had said or made something at a specific time, and began to understand how the children were making sense of their worlds¹. In this way I brought a degree of coherence to what seemed initially to be disparate utterances. This non-linear process of meaning-making is reflected in the structure of Chapters 5 to 7, in which I describe some of the "telling moments" and themes from the fieldwork.

Analysis, then, is an effortful and immersive endeavour, a complex combination of positionality, theory, hermeneutics, epistemology, some intuition and a great deal of time. Both my experience of analysis and the children's responses to my early attempts to involve them in the process led me to question the assumption that children could play a meaningful part in analysis (e.g. Kellett, 2005). From the very start I had been clear with the children about the purposes of the research, and had considered how I might involve them at a meta-level, positioning them as co-researchers and including them in analysis and in revising the focus of the research. Yet most of the children resisted this, seeming to prefer the meaning-making process itself. When I tried to discuss with them what we were learning from the project, they simply agreed with everything I said and indicated their desire to "get on with" making and talking. S. Holland and colleagues (2008) report similar passive assent and marginal interest in analysis from most of their adolescent participants.

On one occasion, seeking to go beyond this, and feeling it was only ethically right that the children should know what I did with the recordings I took home with me, I invited them to transcribe a short section of recording and then see what they could find within that section

¹ See Appendix 3 for examples of analysis activity: annotated transcripts, fieldnotes, reflective writing and concept mapping

that told us something about what it was like to be a service child. What fascinated and disturbed me in equal measure was that the children immediately began to enact positions I had not observed before in the group. Some began to belittle their own spelling and handwriting skills and the speed at which they worked. One created a key and did some thematic analysis:

Orange is... who we'd talk to if we need help, green is how we want help, er blue is some of us don't like showing our emotions in front of people, yellow is we think we're different and purple is what we think teachers need to know.

Noticing this, another child used different coloured pens to highlight my words in one colour and hers in another, while another child highlighted every other line of the transcript, signed his name with a flourish and “handed in” the “work” to me. Someone else opted out of the activity by disappearing to the toilet. Asking the children to operate at this level of abstraction with a written text seemed almost to invite a degree of performativity of competence (or incompetence) and competition that had not been evident before. This I decided was unhelpful to the inclusive ethos of our research group and even potentially disempowering to some. Not wishing to impose participatory methods some children clearly did not want to take part in, I abandoned such activities. It was more important, as Motta (2012) argues, that

“we” as embodied, feeling and thinking beings can recreate transgressive spaces of becoming other in which we replace a logic of competitiveness and hierarchy by a logic of horizontalism and solidarity. (2012, p. 90)

The children’s resistance problematises the ideas that children can simply be taught research skills and that taking a leading role in research is empowering (e.g. Kellett, 2005).

Undoubtedly children can learn skills such as thematic analysis, but to expect them to deal with the quantities of text produced in ethnographic research, or to spend the time needed to gain any more than superficial description of a small number of texts may be unrealistic. They would need preselected and already reduced texts, which amounts then to tokenistic involvement or an interesting classroom activity, but not research. Also, adult qualitative researchers may be far more equipped to analyse data in their social, cultural, historical and theoretical contexts than children who may have little or no knowledge of these. Hammersley (2015) makes this argument: “Given that carrying out research is a demanding task that is hard to do well, it is irresponsible to insist that those (adults or children) who lack much of the

knowledge and many of the skills it requires should control it” (p. 577). Also, if we take the view that any research, whether we are aware of it or not, is underpinned by theories of knowledge, do we expect children still in an early stage of their ideological becoming to reflect on their epistemological and ontological stances, or do we just assume that they are seeking the “truth” or collecting data in certain ways without needing to know why? This is, I believe, a matter that requires ethical reflexivity.

I return now to the vignette in a coda to this chapter that brings together a number of the ideas I have been discussing, foregrounding my dialogic and reflexive approach to analysis – in this case of embodied and verbal texts – as well as matters of positionality and the interpersonal dynamics in the evolving third space.

4.7 Coda: Returning to the vignette

The vignette begins by contrasting the controlled, quiet environment of the classroom, in which the children’s movements and speech are tightly regulated, with the relative abandon and energy with which the children move to the research space, many of them enjoying the feeling of speeding across the large school field. It also describes the children quite literally making spaces, collecting items from the cabin to construct their seats. In choosing to do this, the children establish a certain control over their time and surroundings that contrasts sharply with the practices in their classroom. In this school, teachers manage the layout of the rooms and allocate seats to children, which enables them to control the direction in which the children face (towards the teacher and the board at the front), their movements, and the peers they can talk to and even make eye contact with. When children move from the classroom to the playground, hall, or dining room, they line up, sometimes even in a “lining-up order” prescribed by the teacher (hence the children lining up by the door when I arrive).

In many ways, the contrast in the vignette between the classroom environment and the research space reflects my teacher/researcher positionalities and the tensions between them. The metaphor of uncaging often sprang to mind as the children burst from the classroom, and I felt a sense of relief myself as we moved out of sight of the teacher, especially when I had witnessed troubling incidents such as Imogen’s telling-off. Yet I was also mindful of the productive as well as the constraining effects of teachers’ control practices, and the ways in

which the children themselves employed a range of power tactics (Gallagher, 2008), seen in the vignette in the tension between Mr Grayson's insistence on silence and the classroom "underlife" (Gutiérrez et al., 1995, p. 445): the smuggled object, the whispering, perhaps even Imogen's lingering in the cloakroom. I also found it difficult to avoid still feeling the weight of the panopticism to which I had been subject – in both senses of the word – in my years as a teacher. The sense of looking over my shoulder was something I had hated as a teacher, yet found hard to shake off. It did not help that a long-awaited Ofsted inspection was due and I knew that our lack of "pace", objectives, success criteria and overt teaching and learning in the research group would not pass muster with inspectors. Knowing how much was riding on this inspection, I was anxious to do nothing that might jeopardise its outcomes. Of course, I was also aware that I was *in loco parentis*, both responsible for the children's safety and aspiring to create an accepting, nurturing, third space in which we could build relationships of trust and conduct our fieldwork. This might require me to reassert my teacher positionality and exercise a certain control over the children – but doing so would then reposition them as pupils rather than as research participants, and upset the delicate balance I was trying to establish.

Decision-making moments in the vignette illustrate these complexities. Before leaving the classroom, for example, I ask the children whether they would prefer to stay there this afternoon. By offering them a choice, and attempting not to pressurise them to come with me, I position them as research participants and myself as a researcher. Yet Jessie's reply, "*They're probably gonna do a spelling test anyway,*" implies that escaping the test motivates her more at that moment than participating in the research. Gallagher (2008) describes his participants' "tactical use of the focus groups to avoid classwork and indulge in a fun activity" (p. 143). Perhaps this is the case here. Similarly, Keira quizzing me about whether I have brought biscuits suggested that her motives are not entirely research-oriented. I decide not to question the children's motivation: on plenty of other occasions Jessie has been vehement about the importance of the research. Her word "*anyway*" also suggests that she has weighed up her options and considers the research group a better use of her time than a spelling test. I also continue to bring biscuits, somewhat guiltily after learning that the school has decided to impose a ban on sweet things. Sharing food is, I believe, a nurturing act, and also differentiates the research space from the classroom.

When the children ask me where we are meeting, positioning me as a teacher, I deliberately resist, handing the decision back to them. To suggest that actions such as this "rebalance" the

power relations between myself and the children would be an oversimplification, however. In this case the children make the decision not via the democratic process an adult might suggest, but by accepting the loudest proposal, perhaps because we are on the playground and the children are mobilising the discursive practices that operate here. It could be argued that my deference to the children allows the more assertive of them – those who have learned that being loud is an effective mediational means – to take control, thus denying agency to the quieter children. It might also be that the children allow the choice to be made in this way because they simply don't care much either way.

This interpretation is supported by the lottery routine the children enact to decide who occupies the “teacher's chair”. For this they have repurposed one of the objects in the cabin – a basket of pebbles – as a mediational means, suggesting they desire an impartial decision and an equal chance of having the chair. Imogen's complaint about the fairness of this system also suggests the chair's importance to the children. As it is no more comfortable than the seats they build themselves, perhaps they feel it gives them status. Imogen's complaint is rejected emphatically by Ella, who asserts her dominance, perhaps, as the oldest child, and Imogen does not pursue her objection. Thus we also see the children exercising power over each other. I need to be reflexive about this and ensure this doesn't lead to marginalisation. When in later weeks, the children decide that previous “winners” may not enter the draw, it seems they have reflected on Imogen's dismay and have adapted their practice accordingly.

Finally, Dylan's and Ella's announcements that they “*have news*” signal their desire to occupy the auditory space and our time and attention. In doing so they request permission from me or from the group, demonstrating their social competence. We might also interpret this practice as an attempt to create a more “lesson”-like structure on the proceedings; they may be signalling the start of the business of the session, something almost always achieved in the classroom by the teacher. It also suggests they have been waiting for the forum to share important news that they rarely have the opportunity to discuss with a group of their peers. Certainly mortgages are an unusual topic of conversation in the classroom or on the playground. In this way they bring cultural material (Dyson, 1997) into the collective; they examine, rework and make sense of it – and through it, themselves and their lives.

These are complex negotiations, then, that both depend on and reconfigure learned social, cultural and historical practices, sensitivities, relationships and mediational means, including

gestures (such as screwing up eyes to denote not cheating), material objects (such as pebbles and chairs), and spaces. In many ways the children and I were still operating with the set of discursive practices we had learned in other settings, including in the school. Although at times the fieldwork felt uncomfortably chaotic, it was far from a free-for-all. Yet, as we offered each other opportunities and challenges, accepted or resisted these, gauged one another's reactions, made and countered suggestions, obtained clarification, attempted to convince or reassure, and used a variety of mediational means to do so, we constantly renegotiated and reimagined practices and power relations, each micro-action chipping away at the taken-for-granted, and building up, little by little, the third space of democratic fellowship to which I aspired.

4.8 *Prologue to Chapters 5, 6 and 7*

In the chapters to follow, I continue to discuss some of these themes, describing in some detail telling moments and ideas from the fieldwork. This project has taken research with service children into new theoretical and methodological directions, and adds to our understanding of their learning lives in, I believe, important ways. I hesitate to describe these as “findings” chapters, however. This would suggest there has been some entity to find, something that existed before we started, that I have captured or excavated and hold up for examination. Instead of information-seekers, I position us as meaning-makers; I discuss the knowledge we created, and some of the ways in which we did so. To recap from Section 1.4, my aims were threefold: to add to our understanding of the learning lives of service children, their priorities and interests; to better understand the children as meaning-makers; and to make visible a research project that seeks to create a third space within a primary school, and to examine its methodological, ethical and pedagogical potential. Rather than dealing with each of these in separate chapters, each chapter addresses them all, although with different emphases (see Figure 4.1). While there is not a strict chronological progression through these chapters, I start with telling moments from early in the fieldwork; I move through the children’s preoccupations that emerged throughout the project, and end with a chapter that reflects upon the relationships and the third space we developed. An important part of the meaning-making process was bringing incidents and texts from the fieldwork into dialogue with theory. These chapters also narrate the way in which my analytic attention shifted over the course of the research, in response to the fieldwork. I describe how I sought out and brought together theories and concepts that might enrich my understanding of those incidents and texts.

In Chapter 5, I present three telling moments in a vignette and two contrasting sections of dialogue. Through these I discuss the physical and imagined boundaries we construct around “school” and “non-school”, which control what belongs within or may move between each of these categories. I argue that these both construct and are constructed by our understandings of childhood, and serve to open up or close down possibilities to children. My research suggests that moving beyond such boundaries and allowing for children’s affective stances, their curiosity and their engagement with matters important to them can promote rich learning experiences that allow them to imagine new possibilities for being “other”. In this

chapter, I take a mainly discursive approach, unpicking sections of spoken dialogue and multimodal texts.

In Chapter 6 I turn my attention to space and place, which reflects how the increasing prominence of space and place in the fieldwork led me to broaden my analytic approach. I discuss my search for conceptual resources that helped enrich my understanding of the children's interests and changes in their lives, expanding on the ideas of third space I introduced briefly in Chapter 2. I then discuss one particular space in the children's lives, the military base, providing evidence that it acts as a space of development, community and support, but is also a space in which tensions around children's freedom and safety play out. I then address these themes in the context of children's use of online spaces. This chapter includes several multimodal texts and sections of dialogue that I suggest provide compelling evidence for children's need for connection and belonging.

The themes of Chapter 7 are relationships, objects and affect. I start by presenting artefacts and dialogue that speak of the children's omnipresent concern with their parents' deployments and the emotional effects of parental absence. I consider the families' use of material objects to mediate love across distances. I then discuss the ways in which the children use objects, not only to represent, but also to develop, their self-narratives, and suggest that our insistence on abstract thinking may actually get in the way of children's learning. Following this I discuss relationships in school, and present important evidence of the ways in which these are bound up with institutional demands and performativity, as well as space and place. In the final section of the chapter I reflect on the ways in which loosening these binds allowed us over time to develop a third space not only of nurturing and democratic relationships, but also a space of profound learning.

A brief explanation about tense is in order here. After some experimentation, I have settled on using a combination of the past tense to tell the story of the fieldwork and the present tense when "zooming in" on specific moments. This is intended to evoke, or share, those moments, rather than report on them. To me, the past tense can have a distancing and closing effect, whereas the present tense leaves open a space for the reader's own interpretations. I hope in this way also to position the children as active contributors to a continuing dialogue, rather than as objects of a completed study.

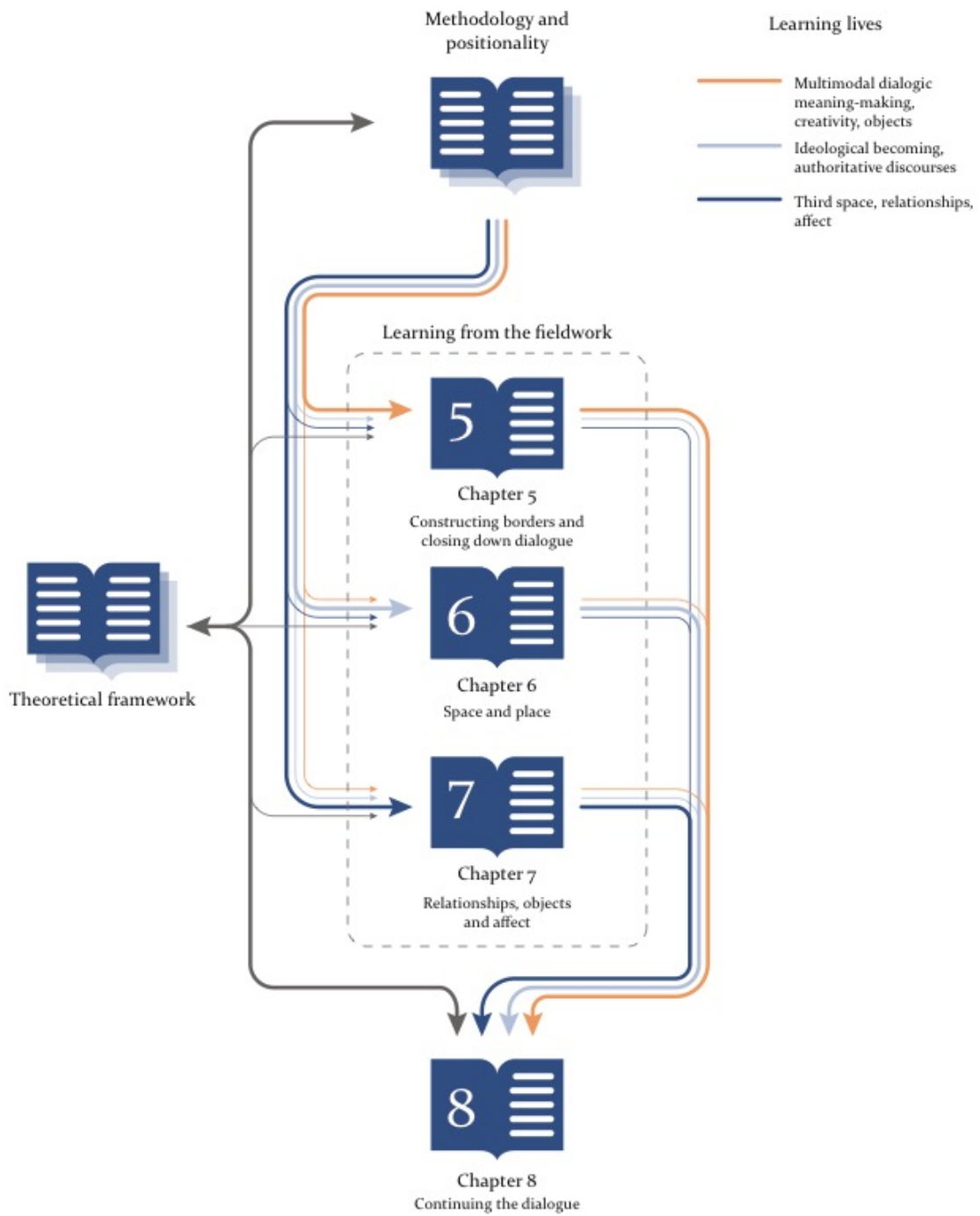
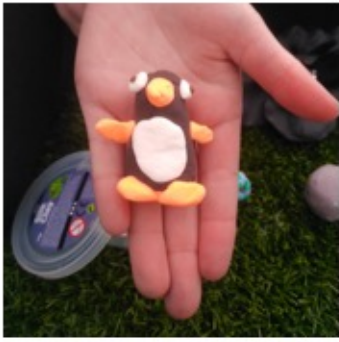
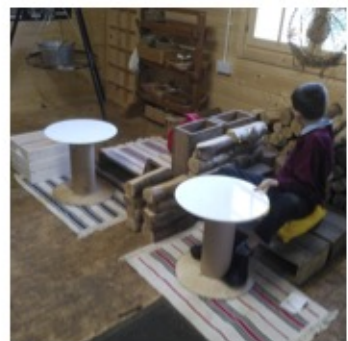
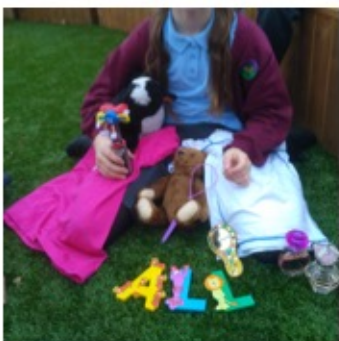
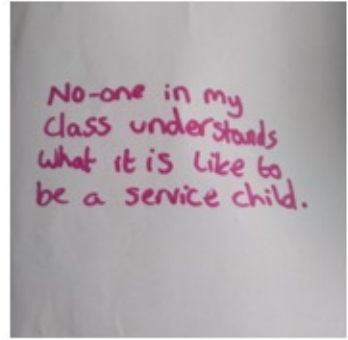


Figure 4.2 Map for chapters 5 to 8



Chapter 5

Learning from the fieldwork: Constructing borders and closing down dialogue



5.1 Introduction: Vignette

“I don’t think you should push it with him.”

I’ve come into the school office to pick up permission slips. I’d like to invite the children to a planning session next week, so I hope they have written permission from their parents. I’ve spoken with a few parents and am optimistic.

The office is a busy place with three desks piled with paperwork, a photocopier and the reception hatch. This is where visitors go to be “buzzed through” into the building. There’s a lot of coming and going. Caroline, a teaching assistant, is at the photocopier. Dawn, the secretary, is seated at her desk, working on her PC between frequent phone calls.

Dawn has already told me I need to deal with any communication with the children’s parents myself. I was expecting to do that anyway. She has bundled up the permission slips, however, and hands me a plastic wallet. I shuffle through them. I realise that Archie’s is missing. This is a surprise: both Archie and his father have told me they are keen on Archie taking part in the research. I mention this to Dawn. She looks up from her paperwork. *“Archie Johnson? Oh, I don’t think you should push it with him at the moment. His dad’s just going away on det. They make a really big thing about him going away.”*

What does she think I’m going to do? I try to explain the open-ended nature of the project, the ethical reflection that has gone into its design, the way the children’s ability to control what they say is central to that design.

Dawn interrupts me, sits a little straighter, crosses her arms. *“I just don’t think you should push it.”* She looks around at Caroline Evans for agreement. Caroline doesn’t meet her eye. A little later she tells me – and at a volume intended for Dawn to hear – that she thinks taking part in the research would be *“good for”* Archie.

This vignette is based upon field notes written immediately after I called into the school to check which children had their parents’ permission to participate in the fieldwork. I suspect Dawn may have quickly forgotten about this brief interaction, but I mulled over it for a long time. Initially I was puzzled about Dawn’s opposition to Archie taking part in the project. This then started me thinking about how we construct and reinforce boundaries around institutions but also how these boundaries construct people and their activity. The vignette thus introduces ideas of boundaries and binaries, spaces and border crossings, ideas I explore in this chapter and expand upon in the two to follow. Leander and colleagues (2010) argue that the notion of the bounded “classroom-as-container” dominates educational research and

practice (p. 329). In my analysis of this interaction I suggest that Dawn was enacting this discourse, constructing and maintaining boundaries around school and non-school as “real-and-imagined” spaces (Soja, 1996, p. 6). I argue that such boundaries also serve to reinforce certain constructions of children, their safety, their spheres of interest and the spaces which shape their lives. I want to unsettle those boundaries and question authoritative discourses around norms, policies and practices, children and their activities and concerns; “to show that things ‘weren’t as necessary as all that” (Foucault, 2002a, p. 226).

As the first person whom “outsiders” usually encounter in the front office, Dawn is literally a gatekeeper. Her actions, and the mediational means, both cultural and material, with which she acts – discourses, policies and documentation, reply slips, the door release button, the hatch through which she speaks to visitors – permit or deny entry to both people and objects. However, I argue in this section that she also manages less tangible things, such as emotions and norms of behaviour. In doing so, she not only reinforces the boundaries of the school, but helps to construct them, determining what is allowed “in” and what must be kept “outside”. In their research project investigating the “invisible labour” of women working in school offices, Thomson and colleagues (2007) describe the knowledge and skills they bring to their roles, including their “community intelligence” (p. 156) and, often, mothering skills. In picking apart this short dialogue, I am interested in how Dawn positions herself as a mediator between parents, community, school, and me as a researcher. I examine traces of previous utterances and wider social discourses that permeate her speaking, and how she reinforces the boundaries between the dangerous “outside” that my research represents and the “inside” of the school, in which the children are to be protected from such dangers. This analytical approach also illustrates how bringing together ideas of spatiality and discourse have been helpful in my analysis of the fieldwork, something I discuss further in Chapter 8.

Dawn and I know each other only slightly; she started at the school soon before I left after over a decade working there. To her I am an outsider, whereas others still describe me as “*part of the furniture*”. Although the school has changed hugely since I worked there, and I no longer feel like I completely belong, I still often join my ex-colleagues for a chat in the staff room. I even have my own set of keys and know the door entry code: material and cultural tools that mediate my relationship with the school. The very act of entering the school is for me one in which trust, privilege and responsibility are enacted. Perhaps my ambiguous role explains the jostling for position detectable in the vignette.

Dawn seems keen to position herself as a holder of both inside and community knowledge. By emphasising this she subtly positions me as an outsider who may be overstepping her status within the school, hinting that through a lack of knowledge I risk harming a vulnerable child. In Dawn's first utterance she invokes previous discussions with or about Archie's family, demonstrating her knowledge that Mr Johnson is about to go on detachment and that the family "*make a really big thing about him going away*". Although she has no family connection with the armed forces, by employing elements of the "speech genre" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 65) of service life, such as the term "detachment", abbreviated to "*det*", she suggests an insider status and a familiarity with the service community, which may come from her relationships with the families in the school.

What Dawn leaves unspoken is that, having lost his mother to illness at a young age, Archie has had tougher experiences to deal with in his life than most of his peers, or even many adults. This almost certainly motivates Dawn's objection to involving Archie in the project. Yet, having discussed at length which children might take part, neither Maggie, the head teacher, nor I feel he should be excluded from participating should he wish to – and he does: he has asked me more than once when we are going to start. Dawn knows very little about my research methods; she has not been involved in my conversations with Maggie or teachers or my presentation to the school governors. I want her to know that the research has Maggie's approval, has met the university's ethics requirements and has been designed around care for the children. I start to explain, but she cuts me off. This leads me to consider why Dawn so opposes Archie's participation in the project. She does not actually know what I am proposing to do with the children, as her use of the vague "*push it*" suggests; however, she frowns upon it, whatever "it" might be.

One of Dawn's many tasks is to enable communication between parents and the school. Complying with the school's procedures, I had written to the potential participants' parents explaining the research project, requesting permission to invite their children to take part, and including a reply slip for them to sign and return. All incoming mail arrives at Dawn's office; she has previously warned that she will pass on any letters addressed to me but other than that, I am to expect no assistance from her. Knowing her workload, I have been careful not to add to it. However, she now positions herself as a gatekeeper. The unequivocal nature of "*I don't think you should push it*", reinforced by her posture and gaze, suggests she feels strongly that she is acting in Archie's interests, as does her appeal for support from Caroline. In an era

in which serious attention is paid to the safeguarding of children, and in which schools can fail inspections if their security systems are deemed inadequate, Dawn's reactions are hardly unexpected, and yet I sense that this is not simply a matter of "duty of care". After all, this is my fourteenth year in the school; I have completed the necessary checks, and my safeguarding training is up to date. There is something else going on here.

5.1.1 Policing the boundaries

"Today we live in a climate of heightened risk awareness coupled with a nostalgia for an imagined past in which children played safely throughout a carefree innocent childhood" (Jackson & Scott, 1999, p. 87). These words were written a generation ago, and our risk consciousness has only intensified since then, with "*Every Child Matters*" (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003) and high-profile cases of child abuse and suicide. Over the past two decades terms such as *cyberbullying* and *safeguarding* have found their way into public discourse¹. Children are "incorporated into a discourse of fear" (Altheide, 2002, p. 230), in which the world and the people within it are constructed as threats. Much has been written about the restrictions parents of the "bubble-wrap generation" (Malone, 2007, p. 513) place upon their children's independent mobility and outdoor play (e.g. Jackson & Scott, 1999; McNamee, 2000; Fotel & Thomsen, 2004). We cloister children into spaces we consider safe, such as homes, schools and after-school care (Facer, 2012; Fotel & Thomsen, 2004; Malone, 2007; Skelton, 2009), thereby reinforcing the ideas, both problematic, that children are unsafe "out in the world", and that they are safe indoors. We construct both a discursive and material distinction between spaces accessible to the public, seen as a threat to children's safety, and private spaces, which we increasingly fortify. I have observed this first-hand in this school, in which the entrance has evolved from an open door fourteen years ago to its current system. Visitors must now enter details onto a screen and tick a box to declare they have read the school's safeguarding policy, then ring a bell; the office staff then allocate them a visitor badge and "buzz" them into the school.

Not only do we fortify private spaces for children against potential wrongdoers, but we also filter incoming information to ensure only "suitable" information reaches children. Thus we construct a division between what we consider children's and adults' concerns. Manchester

¹ A LexisNexis search of UK newspapers for *cyberbullying* has 0 results in 2000-2001 and a peak of 1408 in 2016-17; *safeguarding + school + children* has 17 results in 2000-2001 and 1228 in 2018-19.

and Bragg (2013) point out how a primary school may be constructed as “a ‘safe’ space insulated from the inequalities of the wider society, and children’s worlds as small or even trivial, their problems always amenable to resolution by adults” (p. 818; see also Cross, 2004; Jackson & Scott, 1999; Pain, 2006; Facer, 2014). Thus we position children as defenceless, reliant on adults’ protection and expertise (Facer, 2012). Dawn’s attitude towards Archie’s involvement in my research reflects these discourses. She positions Archie as an at-risk child within a cohort of service children who are often considered an at-risk group, and within a construction of childhood as a space that ought to be safe but is increasingly under threat. She also positions herself as Archie’s protector. I sense that Dawn is both literally and metaphorically policing the boundary between the safe space of the school and the unpredictable outside world.

Quite what dangers Dawn fears my research would unleash is unclear, yet she seems to fear that I am “pushing” the borders of the school, letting in uncontrollable elements from beyond the gate. A clue to this is in the tone of disapproval in her words “*They make a really big thing about him going away*”. She seems to be hinting that Archie’s family practices damage Archie’s tranquillity and may provoke painful feelings best left undisturbed. They should play down the father’s deployments. I sense that to Dawn, talking about painful issues is inherently dangerous. Opening up such centrifugal (Bakhtin, 1981) dialogues is unpredictable – who knows what might happen? Her impulse is to avert potential danger by closing off the dialogue to Archie. The risk of excessive emotion is bad enough in the family; it has no place in school. Dawn’s criticism of Archie’s family’s practices suggests a certain centripetal normativity: the “right” way of dealing with painful issues is to avoid excesses, to keep emotions tightly bounded. (This also resonates with the kind of “little troopers” discourses I discussed in Chapter 1.) Holzman’s (2017) argument that “structurally...schools relate to emotions as problems” (p. 45) seems to be borne out on this occasion. The implication is also that school professionals, including Dawn herself, somehow have better knowledge of a child’s needs and interests than the family. Thus she draws boundaries both between “expert” and “inexpert” ways of dealing with children, and between the school as a place where emotions are reined in and the world of free-ranging emotion beyond the gate. The problem is, though, that, whether we acknowledge it or not, parental deployments are an overwhelmingly important part of service children’s everyday lives, and, as I discuss in Section 7.2, children cannot simply switch off their powerful affective reactions to these at the school gate.

I am not suggesting here that the school's boundaries are fixed once and for all. That they constantly shift is seen in Dawn's appeal to Caroline for support. Perhaps she feels that Caroline, herself a "military wife" with three children and a husband who is frequently away from home, will lend authority to her point of view. Yet Caroline takes an opposing stance, stating that the project would be "*good for*" Archie. She has already granted permission for her own child, Dylan, to take part in the project. As Dylan's elder sibling was also one of my MSc participants, Caroline knows the kind of dialogues the research may open up. She also knows about the everyday realities of dealing with deployment. Caroline even offers to ask Archie's father about the missing permission slip; thus placing herself in an alternative gatekeeper position, opening up boundaries that Dawn is keen to close.

This interaction is a reminder, then, that boundaries are never finalised; they are spaces of dialogic encounter, and are also porous spaces across which people, objects, knowledges and values flow. Schools are not contained microcosms of society but are embedded within society, situated in networks that extend beyond physical boundaries: into homes, communities, all manner of services and institutions – local, national and global – and the discourses that flow through and within these (Erstad, 2012; Gutiérrez et al., 2007; Manchester & Bragg, 2013; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2017). Children's learning does not start when they step across the school threshold, nor does it stop at the end of the school day; neither are their learning and ways of learning constrained to what is prescribed by schools, curricula and educational policies. Nor are schools internally cohesive places: within any one school, or even classroom, children navigate a variety of "complex social worlds" (Dyson, 1994, p. 21). In this project, I have learned that attending to border spaces and the activity within and across them leads to fascinating insights. As Bhabha (1994) argues, it is on boundaries that we negotiate cultures and communities. Attention to boundaries has enabled me to consider some of our imagined binaries of "school" and "non-school" – safe/unsafe, private/public, emotion-free/affectively-charged, expert/non-expert spaces – and the ways in which these reinforce certain understandings of children which may not be appropriate or desirable, "saddle them with our nostalgias" (Kress, 1997, p. 5), and even close off to them possibilities of making sense of the world and ideological becoming. Attention to boundaries and binaries also leads, of course, to reflection on what happens when we cross boundaries or "third" binaries. These ideas I explore further throughout the remainder of the thesis.

I turn now to the children's use of the research group as a third space to which they could bring concerns that were not usually considered children's matters. I start with a section of dialogue in which the children are trying to make sense of news reports they have accessed at home, concerning threats made between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. The children are considering the implications of these threats for their safety and that of their parents – imagining their parents in the front line of any potential hostilities – and discussing their affective responses to the news. Thus the research group is acting as a space through which knowledge and affect flow into school, and as a space situated in, rather than impervious to, the world in which these events are taking place. It is also a space in which the children learn to understand and deal with their affective reactions to such perceived threats, as I discuss in Section 5.2.

By also presenting images created by the children as part of this dialogue, I discuss the multimodal means the children used to mediate meaning, and illustrate how the research group also thirded ways of meaning-making in school, and indeed in research with service children, and acted as a rich site of learning. I then present a contrasting section of dialogue from the same session, in which Maggie joined us briefly. I argue that Maggie acts to divert the children's focus inwards, towards matters usually considered the remit of primary schools and children. I discuss a moment of dialogic tension, or attempted border-crossing, in which one child, Jessie, provides an alternative to an authoritative discourse Maggie is reinforcing, and I show how Maggie closes down the attempted challenge, reinstates the authoritative discourse and tightens the borders around what is sayable in school. In doing so, I argue, she also denies the children an opportunity for ideological becoming that the dialogic encounter offers, but I point also to the constraints under which she is acting. The contrast between the two sections of dialogue brings into relief the evolving discursive practices within the research group as a third space.

5.2 Dialogue: “If Donald Trump sent a bomb”

This afternoon our usual meeting spaces are unavailable. We have squeezed into a small corner room within the school building, used for one-to-one and group interventions and storing support materials. We are sitting on chairs, some of which we have brought in from elsewhere, around a couple of tables pushed together. The children are discussing recent threats made by Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un and widely reported in the media.

(1) Amelia: *If, if um Donald Trump sent um a bomb that flew over England, um, it could land here, and [quiet dramatic voice] then we could all die. Bleugh!*

(2) Talking together: *We're gonna diiiiie!/We'd probably get a new [inaudible]*

(3) Archie: *That's not really gonna... So basically, are you basically saying that if America or Korea launch a bomb, you're saying that it might land around anywhere that you saying it goes over it might land around, the UK?*

(4) Amelia: *Yeah.*

(5) Archie: *Cause it might land in the Celtic Sea, North Sea,*

(6) Amelia: *Like if you were at the beach or something it could land in the sea.*

(7) Me: *Did you want to say something Ella?*

(8) Ella: *I know what I'd say to Donald Trump. I'd say that um*

(9) Archie: [squeaky voice] *You're dead!*

(10) Ella: *You're, you need to, like, cause like at the moment he doesn't like kind of like let people into his country, like he doesn't let like*

(11) Archie: *Mexicans*

(12) Ella: *Yeah, like he said he's gonna build a wall and things, I don't think he should do that because if he wants to become like a great president, he could take over like where like Mexico and like Brazil is as well, if he's not building a wall and if he's, if he's not, if he lets like everyone in because then more people are gonna like him and then when like four years comes and they get, you get to like vote for your next president he'll get voted again.*

(13) Imogen: *Well, when Dylan said about when one of the exiles*

(14) Archie: *Guy Fawkes*

(15) Jessie: *No.*

(16) Imogen: *Exiles*

(17) Archie: *Oh.*

(18) Imogen: *come over, if it lands on*

(19) Me: *Hang on, wait a minute, missiles, yeah?*

(20) ?: *Bomb.*

(21) Imogen: *If it lands somewhere in like the Atlantic, or somewhere near our seas, um, when it lands in, cause obviously it's really heavy, it can make, it can create a big wave and when*

(22) Archie: *Tsunami*

(23) Imogen: *it can come over and flood our city and then we can all die.*

(24) Amelia: *Tsunami*

(25) Archie: *Tsunami.*

(26) Ella: *We live far from the water.*

¹ The indentations show interruptions

(27) Me: *How likely do you think these things are?*
(28) Archie: *No, no,*
(29) Ella: *We don't live anywhere near the sea.*
(30) [Laughing]

My analysis of this transcript draws on Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, ideological becoming, authoritative discourses and carnival. This analytical framework allows me to attend to the constant, almost imperceptibly fleeting power moves at play from moment to moment, something almost impossible to do in the clamour and confusion of the fieldwork. This provides insight into the social dynamics of the situation and the wider social discourses at play within it. A better understanding of and sensitivity to these micro-processes of power is vital; it is such actions, after all, that open up or close down possibilities for children to make sense of their lives and develop their personal ideologies. Drawing links between children's utterances on various occasions and in various modes also allows me to comprehend the layers upon layers of situated utterances, discourses and power moves which all feed into a child's ideological becoming.

The children's discussion of the threat of missile attacks in the vignette is typical of the conversations in our research sessions. These encompass everything from Donald Trump to Peppa Pig, homelessness to sleepovers, aircraft fuelling systems to gendered clothing, war to YouTuber pranks, and sometimes all of these in one session. Many of these discussions touch on subjects traditionally thought of as "adult" business: international politics, terrorism, death, parental separation, mortgages. Primary school teachers may well discourage discussion of such topics for fear of frightening children and displeasing other potential audiences, such as their parents or inspectors. In their discussion of a classroom in which young children were learning about sexuality, for example, Gutiérrez and colleagues (1999) quote the teacher's first reaction to the children's eruption of questions: "District! Parents!" (p. 292). Yet they also describe how this teacher went beyond fear of disapproval; she recognised both the children's curiosity and their emergent knowledge as rich resources, and used these carefully to develop her classroom as a third space that legitimated such curiosity and knowledges. The school I taught in took such risks only rarely. We used the national curriculum, with its parcels of neatly testable, predetermined, static knowledge, subdivided into subject areas, to develop the long-, medium- and short-term plans which drove our teaching. Yet the eagerness and

frequency with which the children brought their concerns to the research group suggests that discussing these was a priority for them, and the dialogue here provides evidence that, whether teachers acknowledge it or not, children are already actively building knowledge about topics that we may deem adult business. My research supports arguments for a dialogic approach to education, which seeks “to support the students’ authorial voice in their critical examination of life, self, the others and the world, including education itself” (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2019, p. 68). Rather than closing down dialogue, we might provide spaces in which children can legitimately learn about such intergenerational concerns and about themselves in the process. Otherwise we leave children to seek alternative ways of learning about the things that spike their curiosity, and provide a curriculum that is disconnected from their interests.

5.2.1 “Are you basically saying...?”: Collective meaning-making

Although my research project was not designed as a pedagogical intervention or experiment, I could not fail to notice the rich, collaborative learning that was going on. In this transcript, for example, I am struck by the sophisticated way in which the children actively pool aspects of their knowledge, imagine scenarios, and evaluate and rework their own and others’ hypotheses, assumptions and concepts. It is interesting that the children at no point call on me as an arbiter or expert adult who can supply correct answers. I suggest that because the traditional, I-R-E classroom script has been disrupted, the children listen intently to each other, rather than simply trying to produce correct answers for the teacher. These are rich, exploratory interactions, through which the children constantly test out and develop their meaning-making abilities:

Exploratory talk is that in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas. Statements and suggestions are sought and offered for joint consideration. These may be challenged and counter-challenged, but challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered. In exploratory talk, *knowledge is made publicly accountable* and *reasoning is visible in the talk*. (Mercer et al., 1999, p. 97)

The meanings the children are making here are distributed, then, rather than individual (Leander et al., 2010). At the start of the transcribed dialogue, for example, Amelia puts forward the hypothesis that a bomb aimed by Donald Trump at North Korea might go astray and land in the UK, “*then we could all die*”. Archie offers a challenge to Amelia: “*That’s not really gonna...*”. While his initial intention is to discount Amelia’s suggestion outright, he

changes tack, avoiding the finalising statement he was about to make, and instead tries to better understand her, encouraging her to probe her own claims: “*So basically, are you basically saying that if America or Korea launch a bomb, you’re saying that it might land around anywhere that you saying it goes over it might land around, the UK?*” Archie does not simply accept or reject Amelia’s idea, then, but translates it into his own words (Vološinov, 1973), weighing it up for himself, a perfect example of the “active, responsive understanding” (p. 102) that Vološinov argues is how meaning is realised. When Amelia stands her ground, Archie cautiously presents an alternative hypothesis: that a bomb could land in the sea, with the implication that it would land safely. He deploys a speech genre of geographical knowledge – “*the Celtic Sea, North Sea*” – to boost his authority. Amelia defends her point with the idea that this would be dangerous for anyone on the beach. Following my interruption (lines 7 to 12), Imogen returns to the topic, synthesises the two arguments and suggests that a bomb could trigger a giant wave – for which Amelia and Archie supply the name “*tsunami*” – and could flood “*our city*”. As the children live in an inland, rural area, this suggests they have moved the argument onto a more abstract, less personal level, that they are playing creatively with the dialogic activity. Ella then finds a down-to-earth argument – “*We live far from the water*” and “*We don’t live anywhere near the sea*” – that disrupts the dialogue and provides a space for laughter and a sense of perspective.

It is noteworthy that the children use “we” and “our”, rather than “I” and “my”, throughout this dialogue, the only exceptions being in lines 8 and 12, my interruption. They also demonstrate a remarkable attention to and sensitivity towards each other and the group. In line 2, for example, they pick up on Amelia’s dramatic cues to provide the reaction of mock-horror she seeks. We see their commitment to the co-construction of meaning clearly in lines 13 to 20, when understanding breaks down briefly due to Imogen’s use of “*exiles*” rather than “*missiles*”. The children take turns to make suggestions until I identify the problem and someone supplies the synonym “*bomb*”. Similarly, in lines 22 to 25, the children assist Imogen and show their understanding with the word “*tsunami*”. These are more examples of the kind of active responsiveness which leads to understanding: the children engage dialogically with one another’s meanings, remaking them with their own signs (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Vološinov, 1973), or supplementing them, and extending their collective understanding and critical reasoning abilities. The children are seeking neither unanimity in this dialogue, nor a monologic, finalised “truth”. Allowing conflicting ideas to co-exist but holding each other

responsible for their ideas, they are learning to participate in dialogue rather than appropriate given knowledge (Matusov, 2009).

As well as providing rich opportunities for exploring ideas that matter to them, this dialogue also shows the children developing their mastery of mediational means, in this instance spoken language and argumentation. Later in this chapter I discuss how these verbal mediational means were interwoven with written text and visual imagery. Heath and Roach (1999) draw attention to the complexity of young people's language use in their study of learning in youth organisations, which they describe as "fertile contexts for cognitive and linguistic development" (p. 20). Similarly, in a study of young children's disputes, Church (2009) suggests that oppositional talk motivates children to use far more complex and creative language than traditional pedagogic practices. I see parallels in the language of my participants, in the high number of if-then statements and modal verbs, for example, with which they prompt each other's thinking, demonstrate attentive listening, provide counter-arguments and critique them. The literacy curriculum and SATs tests require children to demonstrate their ability to use and identify such grammatical structures. I have spent many hours scrutinising children's written work for these, as well as trying to find meaningful ways of teaching the grammar and terminology. Here the children are using such structures in a naturalistic way, for a purpose beyond demonstrating linguistic competence. As Wegerif (2011) argues, dialogic learning is "not about cognition in the abstract but about thinking as an aspect of relationships in context" (p. 189). The children are collectively articulate, rather than individually demonstrating their articulacy or aiming towards a target on which they will be judged: joint achievement rather than individual performance (Swain, 2001).

According to J.V. Wertsch (2007), "becoming more expert means being socialized into an existing social order, characterized by an existing set of cultural tools, and expertise is reflected in the ability to use these tools flexibly and fluently" (p. 190). In the interactions I discuss here the children are demonstrating flexible and fluent use not only of the elements of language, but also of social and cultural aspects of communication, such as awareness of their audience and speech genres, and the ability to listen, critique, synthesise and so on. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, J.V. Wertsch (2007) describes how "the material form of sign vehicles allows us to function at a level that is "out ahead" of our current mastery" (p. 188). Leander and colleagues (2010) also make the argument

that thinking is distributed not only among people, but across mediational tools as well, and even sites of learning.

Thus our research space acts as a site in which the children support and challenge one other to develop cognitively and linguistically, as well as emotionally, which I discuss shortly. We see this in the way children supply each other with vocabulary, challenge and build on one another's ideas and complete each other's utterances. The act of meaning-making in the group is not only distributed, but is also successful for all, a situation that was by no means always the case in the classroom for some of these children. Having spent some time helping out in several classrooms before the fieldwork started, I knew, for example, that teachers had identified Keira as "special needs" for literacy; her spelling, punctuation and handwriting were below the norm for her age group. The response to this was to remove her from the class for frequent, individual "catch-up" interventions devised to accelerate her writing progress. In the research group, in contrast, she was no longer expected to operate as an individual, and was also able to make meaning using whatever mediational means she chose. She often chose to film herself reflecting on her life in the manner of reality TV confessionals. In this she skilfully combined self-deprecating humour as well as reflectiveness, linguistic ability and an appreciation of genre and audience that she struggled to show in written texts. Thus in the context of the research group I observed her acting "beyond" her perceived individual capabilities in the classroom context.

Through such dialogues in the research group, then, I witnessed how the children actively, collectively, and increasingly expertly, drew upon and used social resources and cultural tools – news reports, geographical knowledge, language and speech genres – as they sought to make sense of their world. I believe that they also collectively developed their understanding of their emotions and their ability to manage these, as I shall discuss in the following section.

5.2.2 *"Nobody feels my pain": Affect and emotion*

In my research I observed the children using the group not only to explore matters important to them but also as a space in which the affective responses these provoked were legitimate. Spaces in which children could take part in such dialogues were scarce in this school with its predetermined curriculum and crowded timetable; however, I detected also an underlying unease among certain staff with affect and its unpredictability. Holzman (2017) speaks of a "cognitive-emotive divide" (p. 45), asking, "how often do classroom teachers not stop

infectious laughter and silliness? Or linger with a student's momentary happiness? Or share their own excitement about something?" (p. 46). This was illustrated on one occasion when Archie's teacher, Tim, approached me with a concern about Archie's behaviour; he wondered whether I had also noticed anything "off" about him. He recounted that he had been explaining an activity to the class, and Archie had jumped up and punched the air with excitement. My response was that these were entirely routine ways of behaving in the research group; perhaps Archie was simply excited by the activity. Tim's worry about Archie's embodied response to exciting news reminded me of Dawn's concerns about the family's response to deployment. It is unsurprising that, of all the children, Archie was the subject of both Dawn's and Tim's concerns, and this reflected their care and compassion for him. I wonder, however, whether they were not almost expecting or fearing some kind of "disturbed" behaviour from him, which might destabilise the controlled and predictable environment of the school.

It would be unfair to argue, however, that this school fails to attend to or address emotion. Sadly, like most schools, this one has experienced the death of members of its community, including children. Staff and children alike have needed to make sense of and respond to this. With its links to the church, the school has a religious framework with which to do so. However, I believe this brings with it both gains and losses. On the one hand, the school can draw on a language of emotionality, and a repertoire of images, metaphors, literature and other mediational means that generations of people have found a source of comfort. In the entrance to the school, for example, is a three-dimensional display entitled *The Empty Chair*. It comprises an ornate, upholstered chair (clearly not a school one) draped in a starry satin fabric. The text on the wall above invites the children to write the name of a missed loved one onto a label and attach it to a "tree" that stands beside the chair: "*Say a quiet thank you for the good memories that you have of them. If you want to, you can talk with God about your sad feelings too*". Such a cohesive framework guides practitioners' and children's responses, providing a sense of belonging to a stable, unified and supportive community. On the other hand, it also establishes a powerful authoritative discourse that there is only one way of dealing with loss – or for that matter, any life experience (prayer before lunch, home time or even before SATs exams, for example). While my personal positionality as a non-Christian inevitably influences my thinking here, it is, I believe, seriously problematic to teach children that any religious text has the authoritative – and correct – answer to any question in life. Such a monologic discourse implies that there are simple answers to complex and painful

problems and, moreover, that adults have those answers. What happens, I wonder, when children see adults close to them struggling with loss? What are they left with when they grow older and that certainty seems to have evaporated? I suggest also that the emphasis on quiet prayer, within an ensemble of power relationships and disciplinary practices, helps construct the “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 138) of children, in which excesses of visible, embodied emotion are to be avoided.

Gutiérrez and colleagues (1999) argue for classrooms as third spaces in which “affective stances can not only be displayed, they are also welcomed additions to classroom ethos and official knowledge” (p. 295). In the research group, I was always alert to the presence of painful feelings and handled these carefully. The group was small enough for me to be attentive to any sign of distress among the children; and as the fieldwork progressed, the children became increasingly sensitive and trusting towards one another, which perhaps created a space that could safely “contain” painful feelings (Bragg & Manchester, 2017; Manchester & Bragg, 2013). I did not seek to deny or attempt to channel children’s emotions in the way that some argue is common school practice (e.g. Harden, 2012; Holzman, 2017). Instead I took the view that affect is part of being human. As Bakhtin (1986) describes, emotions are embedded within the very words and signs with which we learn to understand who we are, with which we author ourselves: “everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality” (p. 138). If, as a dialogic perspective maintains, we grow as humans through responding to otherness, how can we do so if we try to deny the emotional aspects of our responding selves? In this view, feelings should be treated as precious, rather than ignored or bracketed out of ways of being and knowing in school. The whole range of emotion was evident in the research group, from delight to anger and grief.

The conversation discussed above is part of an evolving dialogue; the children have brought up the subject of missile attacks before, although the earlier discussions revolved around their parents’ safety, rather than their own. Three weeks before this, for example, Archie talked about “*North Korea shooting missiles at a plane my dad would be in. And they all fall, plummet to their death*”. He told us this had been on his mind since he had heard reports of the first North Korean missile tests. For most children in the UK in the 21st century, the death of a parent is a remote, if terrifying, possibility. Sadly this is not so for Archie, who describes the

memory of his mother's death as "*always there, for all the time*". Archie knows parents can be fragile. The other children are well aware of this, and are also conscious that their own parents' work can be dangerous at times. Aggressive threats by Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un prey on their minds, and the two names recur frequently in our conversations in the early months of the research. The levity with which the children conduct this discussion should not be mistaken for unconcern, therefore, and I am careful not to underestimate their fearfulness. This is not to claim that such matters affect service children more than others; however, I suggest that service children may be alert to certain news items, and have a personal "take" on the news they hear, coloured by their fears for their families. Geopolitics have a tangible impact on their lives in ways that may not be the case for their non-service peers.

5.2.3 "*Trumpy*" and "*Kim Jong Fun*": *Carnival and fear*

There is perhaps nothing, in Western cultures at least, that people relate to in language and thought as more fundamentally individuated and less social than feelings. Feelings are the bottom line: "These are MY feelings. That's how I feel". Beginning and end of story. What this understanding and way of speaking does is leave people isolated and alone with "possession" of their feelings. (Holzman, 2017, p. 36)

Holzman argues here that the idea that children "have" certain fears rests upon inherently dualistic and individualistic assumptions. A dialogic approach brings these into question, emphasising that everything we do is responsive (Holquist, 1983), rather than produced from within the psyche. Taking the position that fear is a response allows us to focus on the act of responding rather than on the "inner child"; on sociocultural activity, rather than pathology. Rowsell and Shillitoe (2019) define affect as "an embodied, felt experience that cannot be labelled or even named and emotion as a cultural and social effort to make sense of feelings in some way" (p. 1548). In the research group I often observed the children working together to make sense of their affective responses to media discourses, as in the dialogue I discuss above, or to conflicts, changes or expectations placed upon them.

A dialogic conceptualisation of affect and emotion opens up questions about the sociocultural and historical context of the child's affective stance: What utterances and sources of information is the child responding to? What are the interests and agenda of those who provide these? How do children learn to respond to a world of information which is in the main provided by adults and serves their interests, and how do they make sense of their affective stances? How do we help them with "the work of answering and authoring the text of

[their] social and physical universe” (Holquist, 1983, p. 318), of which affect and emotion are inseparable parts?

The research project was designed as an inquiry, not as a therapeutic or pedagogical intervention. However, it is difficult to draw boundaries between these, to identify at what point, for whom and in what ways relationships, dialogues and creative activities become sites for therapy, learning or both. The interactions in the transcript point to ways in which the project legitimated feelings that children were often expected to suppress or hide in the classroom. One of these is hilarity. The laughter following Ella’s statement “*We don’t live anywhere near the sea*”, for example, is partly due to Ella’s comic timing, but also, I suggest, contains elements of self-mockery and relief, allowing the children to laugh at their own fearfulness. As Bakhtin (1984b) tells us, “laughter... overcomes fear” (p. 90).

A Bakhtinian approach to analysing the dialogue draws attention to the carnivalesque aspect of the children’s interaction that is remarkable in the research group. Carnival, according to Bakhtin (1984b), “is the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter” (p. 8). Carnival is a temporary unsettling of the usual hierarchies and practices within a community, a third space in which:

what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 123)

In contrast to the classroom environment, where docile behaviour was expected, our research sessions were affectively charged, noisy and playful. Leander and colleagues’ (2010) remark that “children seem most exuberant and alive outside in the boundary zones beyond the classroom” (p. 339) resonates with my experience in the fieldwork. This is less evident in the session transcribed above, however, than in others. Instead of our usual space at the edge of the school grounds, where we had ample room to move and could make as much noise as we wished, on this occasion we were inside the school building. Yet, despite the physical and discursively-produced constraints of this space, glimpses of the usual laughter, banter, drama and tomfoolery are still observable. Classroom etiquette, in which the teacher indicates who may speak and the children request the floor by raising their hands, is abandoned; the children interrupt each other, complete each other’s sentences, sometimes talk over each

other and me, and rarely defer to me as arbiter of the conversation. They talk about matters that would be taboo in the classroom, and in language that might draw disapproval.

Ella's idea about giving Donald Trump some advice interests me. The idea that a child could do so suggests the suspension of hierarchical barriers that characterises carnival. Archie, adept at finding opportunities for comedy, takes this a step further, finishing Ella's sentence (line 9) in a squeaky voice. The idea of saying, "You're dead!" to the US president delights the children with its impudence. Bakhtin describes decrowning rituals in medieval carnival; here, Archie is perhaps decrowning an otherwise threatening figure. Such audacity characterises many of the children's frequent mentions of Trump. A plane flying over the school one day, for example, prompts them to shout that "Trumpy" is coming to visit them. Amelia tells us of the Trump pumpkin her father made at Hallowe'en. Keira, rarely vocal about political matters, talks of slamming the door on a trick-or-treater in a Trump costume.

Kim Jong-un is similarly an object of "carnivalistic debasings and bringings-down-to-earth" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 133) to the children, again reflecting licence to be disrespectful. This time they take their cue from YouTube. (This in itself is interesting, as YouTube is blocked by the school's internet server; but the children find ways nonetheless of allowing social media to flow into school.) Ella talks of a film clip about "Kim Jong Fun":

I was trying not to laugh, it was like this baby, and he has like, he has a really similar face to Kim Jong-un; it wasn't like a face-off or anything. Like, and then he was like a little toddler, and he was like, [gets up], he was just like stood up and he's like got his nappy on and stuff and then he's just like, do do der, do do der [dancing].

While she talks, Ella re-enacts the baby's dance and song, again in contrast to usual classroom practice in which singing and dancing have their timetabled slots. Ella represents Kim Jong-un with base humour as a grotesque giant baby in a nappy. Another aspect of carnival is profanity, a focusing on the "bodily lower stratum" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 20), hence the nappy and the implicit suggestion of a loss of control. Presenting Trump and Kim as absurd caricatures exemplifies "the defeat of fear presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside out" (p. 91).

These were just some of many occasions on which the children used humour as a mechanism to manage difficult feelings. This was not always through speech; they used many other mediating means: gesture, song, dancing or funny drawings and models. On one occasion, for

example, Archie talked eloquently about grief. He then held up a cartoon he had been drawing, to general laughter: “Don’t worry, I’ve got a dancing rhino to help me ... I call him Bobby Boy”. Holland and Valsiner explain (1988) how “through signs and words children learn to talk about, compare, classify, and thus manage their own emotions” (p. 250). I suggest that expressing, discussing and playing around with their emotions, turning fear into hilarity, for example, allows the children to explore ways of turning the focus onto the objects of fear or ridicule rather than dwelling on the sensation of anxiety, thereby developing creative ways of responding to frightening ideas as an alternative to fearfulness. By putting a name and a shape to their fear – preferably a funny one – they can turn it into something they can examine. Thus the objects act as mediational means that the children use to manage their own affective states.

Apart from their use of humour, I observed other ways in which our activity provided the children with opportunities to explore and address anxiety, and I developed a better understanding of how I could respond to the kind of fearful talk I had struggled with as a teacher. I was concerned, for example, that the children’s preoccupation with the idea of nuclear missiles landing in the UK could compromise their sense of safety. I hesitated nevertheless to step in and “correct” their thinking. I could have pointed out flaws in the children’s ideas, but rather than my processing knowledge and parcelling it out, making sense of it on their behalf, I saw the importance of them learning to make sense collaboratively, engaging in “the riskier, more taxing, but more fulfilling enterprise of formulating and being answerable for their own thinking” (Skidmore, 2000, p. 295).

A key thing I had learned from my MSc research project was that the children were not necessarily seeking resolutions to their fears. In one session of that project, for example, the children had brought up the topic of parents being “killed in action”. This had alarmed me, and I felt I had not rounded off the discussion adequately on that occasion. I spent some time carefully preparing sensitive and accurate answers, should the subject crop up again, yet when this did happen, the children dismissed my attempts to reassure them, saying “Yeah, yeah, we know that’s not true now”. I sensed that bringing their anxiety to the group had been sufficient for those children, and indeed they talked about “getting things out of their chest”. Rather than feeling alone with their anxiety, they were developing what Holzman (2017) referred to as “a relational understanding and language of emotionality” (p. 36). We might say they were learning to gain an emotional purchase on their embodied feelings. It may also be the case

that children recognise the impossibility of easy solutions. Giving children unequivocal “answers” might provide temporary comfort from a specific fear for the children; on the other hand, they might see through the well-meaning intentions. Either way, it may not help children develop a lasting ability to gain a sense of perspective themselves.

At the time when Archie had brought up the scenario of a bomb hitting his father’s aeroplane, I had responded with the question “*How likely to happen do you think that is?*” From the children’s reactions, I realised this provided them with another mechanism for addressing their fears. The question prompted the children to draw upon their maths knowledge to estimate the probability of Archie’s scenario being actualised. They started at 30%, and following discussion about what 30% meant in practice, lowered their estimate to “*zero in three, zero in zero ... It’s not going to happen*”. Interestingly, they then went beyond that to explore the difference between knowing and worrying: “*For me, it’s basically, very likely. In my mind. For real life it would basically be, mini*”. Thus I witnessed them starting to gain not only a perspective on the perceived dangers, but a meta-level understanding of their own sense-making and the distinction between imagination and “*real life*”, which might eventually help them to assess and manage frightening ideas. Bringing their assumptions into dialogue with other ways of thinking, then, provided the sort of ontological learning that I observed happening in the history lesson I discuss in Section 2.3.4. By using the same question in the transcribed session (line 27), I remind the children that they have options, hint that they might question their assumptions.

5.2.4 “*Dear President Trump*”: *Activism as a response to frightening news*

Ella’s utterance “*I know what I’d say to Donald Trump*” steered the activity that followed the transcribed discussion. The children talked of questions that, given the chance, they would put to Trump. This led to me suggesting they might write to him and offering to post their letters. This they took up eagerly. Most decided to make Christmas cards with messages inside, while two chose instead to write to the Queen, and one to Kim Jong-un. They took great care over their texts, drawing on persuasive writing techniques they had learned in class and asking me for help with punctuation and spellings. I had not planned this activity in advance, but on reflection I realise it provided the children with an opportunity to take up positions as social actors contributing to a dialogue that crossed boundaries of age, status and geographical location. Thus it presented them with activism and agency, rather than passive

fearfulness, as an alternative response to anxiety-provoking news. Interestingly, following this session, some of the children reported taking up other activist positions in their communities. Amelia, for example, announced that she had written to the council to request smaller ramps in the local skate park, thus engaging in a dialogue about the design of public spaces. Similarly, Keira created a poster offering support, friendship and fun to younger service children in the school. In this she positioned herself not as a passive recipient of adult assistance; rather, she recognised the skills she possessed that she could draw upon as an agent of change herself.

Making the cards was also intrinsically motivating, as the children were dealing with real-world matters important to them and communicating with real audiences. This was reinforced for most of them when replies arrived some weeks later from the Queen¹. It is telling, however, that Archie was initially suspicious that I had forged the Queen's replies; he could still not quite accept that children could genuinely participate and be taken seriously in an adult-controlled discursive environment. Despite a longstanding emphasis on writing for real purposes in the literacy curriculum, it suggests that Archie's experiences had been limited to "artificial" writing, thus removing dialogism from communication because there was no real audience for his texts beyond the proxy of his teacher. In the next section I discuss some of the children's Christmas cards and the ways in which the children used these for multimodal meaning-making.

¹ Unfortunately neither Trump nor Kim replied, but the children's excitement when I handed them the envelopes from the Queen was visible.

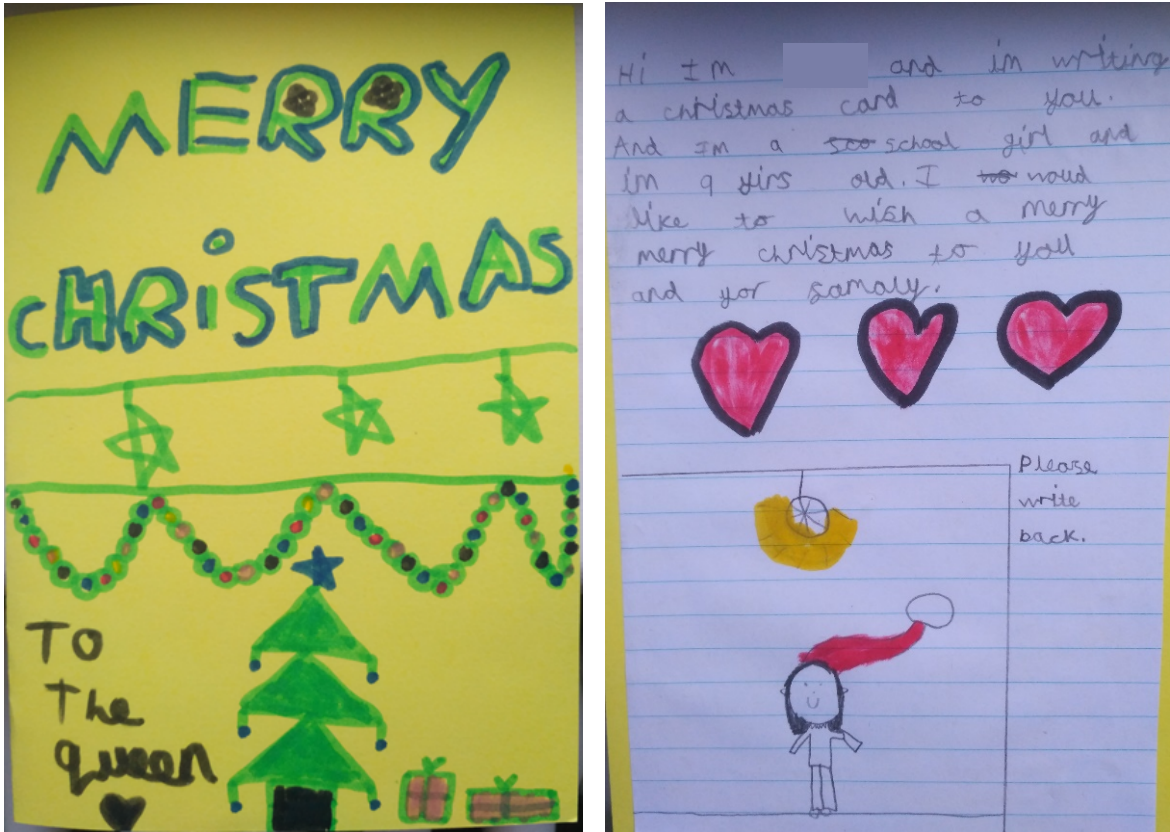


Figure 5.1 Keira's card (front and inside)

Keira chose to make a card for the Queen, rather than Trump, which pleased me, because it suggested she felt she could pursue her own interests. In her design (Figure 5.1) she draws from the traditional genre of Christmas cards, depicting a lavishly decorated room, with multicoloured fairy lights, a tree, hanging stars and gifts. She has carefully combined image and text, ensuring the word “Christmas” fits neatly in the space available, and using a two-tone font to emphasise her greeting. She captures the Queen’s attention by writing *To The queen* on the outside, with a heart that suggests her friendly intentions. Perhaps in this she has drawn on digital technologies that allow personalised cards; however, in this session we have no access to digital devices, and so the children’s are all hand-drawn. On the front of her card Keira has created an image, then, of a welcoming home, decorated to create a joyful Christmas atmosphere. This continues inside with a picture of herself, wearing a festive hat, standing under a warm light and smiling directly at the viewer. Three red hearts, edged in black felt tip, stand out in the centre of the page, symbols of her affection for the Queen. There is a congruence between her images and written text, which combines friendly informality (*Hi Im*

Keira) with the formal genre appropriate for addressing the Queen (*I would like to wish a merry merry Christmas to you and your family*).

Keira's card ties in with what I have learned of her in the research group. She has a large extended family who live nearby, and often describes dancing at weddings and birthday parties, telling us of her ambition to be a party planner one day. Her images often depict smiling children, her home and flowers. Keira also talks frequently of the wider community of which she is a part, and events such as fun runs and a Kindness Rocks game, in which people paint pebbles and hide them for others to find and re-hide. She also describes her mother's baking and cake-decorating skills and how she uses these in family celebrations, as well as to support others from the community. Thus Keira understands and depicts herself as surrounded by the generosity of a close-knit community and a caring and supportive family, a generosity she is extending to the Queen.

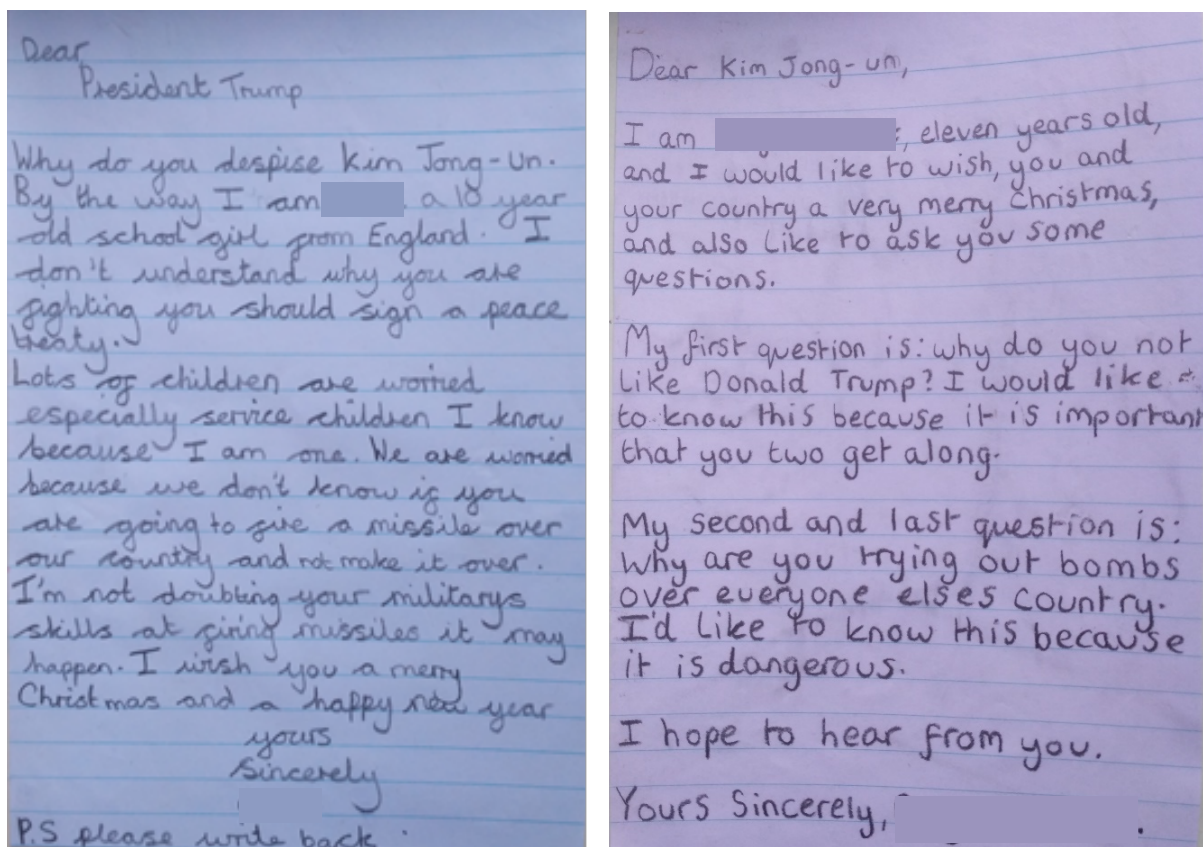


Figure 5.2 Jessie's card text (left) and Ella's (right)

While the fronts of Ella and Jessie's cards depict similar traditional scenes, with Christmas trees and decorations, unlike in Keira's card there is little congruence between these and their

written messages (Figure 5.2). These cards to Trump and Kim are hybrid texts, both Christmas greetings and polite, but overt, critique. Jessie explains that her interest in the Trump-Kim relationship stems from her position as a service child, while Ella makes her case less personally, her phrases *it is important that* and *it is dangerous* lending authority to her argument. Both Ella and Jessie ask direct questions and also offer advice for the two leaders, and both state their expectation of a reply. By choosing to write to Trump and Kim, they are exploring new positions as activists on a global level, thus this space becomes an “affective and intellectual space ... of possibility where imagining ‘other’ becomes possible” (Motta, 2012, p. 96). The importance they attach to their messages is clear from the care they have taken over positioning themselves as critical friends, through a combination of formal and informal language and structures. This is a conscious design process: during this activity, there is much discussion about the registers the children will use for their readers. They also take pains with their handwriting and spelling.



Figure 5.3 Archie's card, front

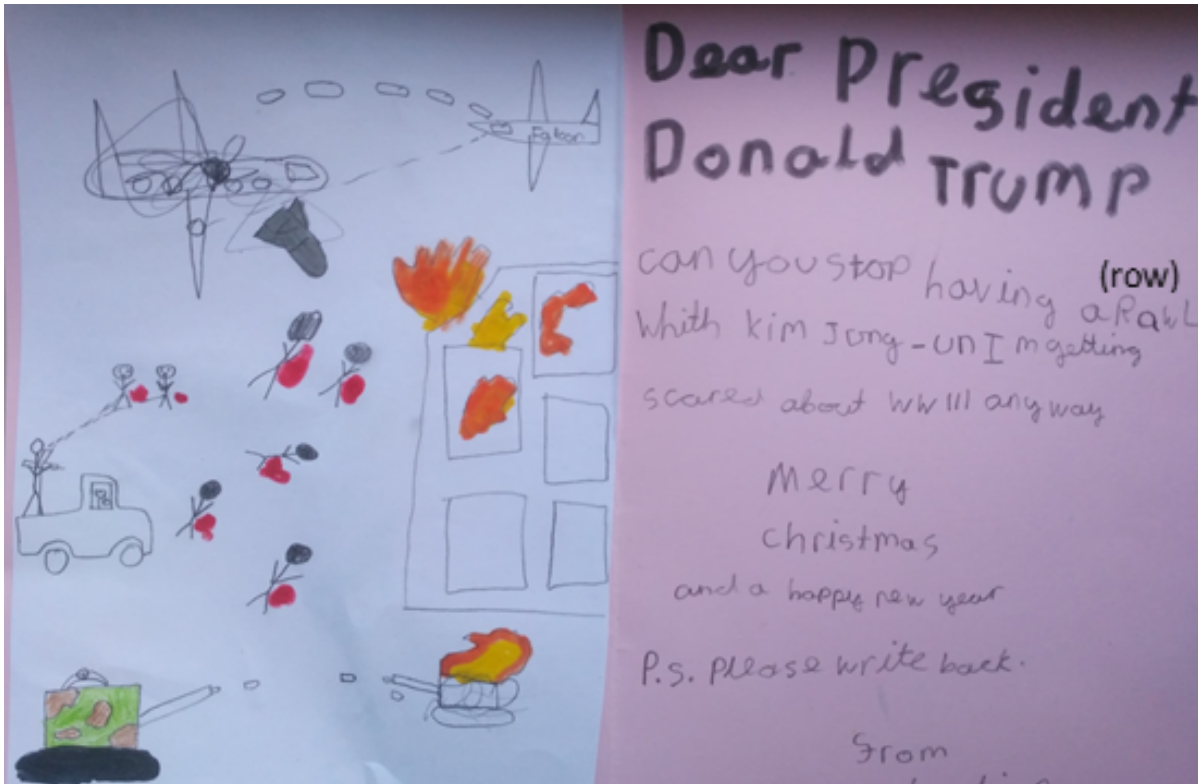


Figure 5.4 Archie's card, inside

Like Keira's, Archie's message is distributed between hand-drawn images and written text (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). By combining and contrasting these modes, Archie capitalises on those he feels most adept with. While Keira's text focuses on sharing her joy at Christmas, however, Archie's serves a critical purpose. Like Jessie and Ella, he has also created a hybrid text and positioned himself as polite but critical. In his concise written text he manages to capture his reader's attention with large lettering in black pen, make a direct request (*Can you stop having a Rawl [row] whith Kim Jong-un*), make a plea for sympathy (*Im getting scared about WWIII*), include a polite Christmas greeting – although the word “*anyway*” suggests this is something of an afterthought – and request a reply.

It interests me that Archie has paid far greater attention to the inside of his card than the exterior. The front again draws on traditional Christmas card imagery, albeit with a bleak tree and a hastily-written greeting. Inside, however, he has meticulously drawn a war scene, which, with its detail of bullets, blood and dead bodies, contrasts dramatically with the front of his card. Thus Archie's drawings – and the dialogic tension between the Christmas tree image and the war picture – carry the meaning graphically and emotively.

In the war image, Archie positions the viewer at a safe distance from the fighting. There is nothing static about this image, however; the lines and scribbles demonstrate movement, imagining the trajectories of bombs and bullets and suggesting the plane and tank have been destroyed. In this I suspect Archie is demonstrating his fluency with moving images, perhaps from news reports, action films or computer gaming. The blocks of flats also suggest this and hint that the war is happening somewhere outside his usual surroundings, at a safe distance from home. Apart from these there is no surrounding landscape, which focuses the viewer on the action. The blood and flames are vividly coloured, and the tank carefully camouflaged; other than these there is no colour in the picture. This draws attention to the violence and chaos depicted and their effect on human life and homes. My interpretation is limited by not having had the opportunity to discuss Archie's picture-story with him. It strikes me, however, that the apparent "winners" in this image are protected by armoured vehicles: the jeep, tank and Falcon jet fighter, which suggests both his knowledge that the soldiers' safety relies on these technologies and his need to imagine them as safe. Archie's card provides a shocking message about his feeling of powerlessness as a child in a world where adults are "having a row" which might spiral violently out of control.

Following intense discussion of Trump and Kim between November 2017 and January 2018, there was a marked decrease in the children's talk about the two leaders, and they almost entirely ceased mentioning them as potential threats. It seems no accident that most of the children's talk about the nuclear threats made by Trump and Kim coincided with headlines such as these from December 2017: "North Korea THREAT: Donald Trump is 'DEADLY SERIOUS' about military strike on Kim Jong-un" (Barnes, 2017) or "Have we got just three months to avert a US attack on North Korea?" (Seddon, 2017). This limited evidence is insufficient to make the claim that our activity had lessened the children's fears. I merely note that this specific threat appeared no longer to hold such urgency for them.

This does, however, provide evidence of the children's intense engagement with social media and the news. The topics they brought to the research group frequently demonstrated their knowledge of and curiosity about the week's happenings: the aftermath of the Ariana Grande concert bombing, a baby born with an unusual medical condition, 3am pranks on YouTube, or the controversial YouTuber Logan Paul. The children talked about devoting considerable time to watching the news, listening in secret to parents' conversations or covertly mining YouTube and other internet sources. Thus I witnessed the children actively making sense of current

issues, eagerly interrogating one other's knowledge, and adeptly gaining access to information. This also spoke to me of their deep desire to understand a world in which adults do not always behave as they would wish and in which events at a distance from them might affect their everyday safety. However, mining sources of information is also an activity some of them hid from adults. This, then, points to tensions between what children want to or need to know and what is considered good for them, and ultimately to tensions around our understanding of children and their agency. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 6.

The final part of this chapter examines a discussion from later in the same research session which provides a striking contrast to the earlier section. This draws attention to the differences between the discursive practices in operation in the school and those in the research group, and the effects of these on the children's interactions. I discuss how Maggie, acting under the constraints of her head teacher positionality, appropriates the activity in order to bring it, and the children, into line with "official" ways of being within the school.

5.3 *Dialogue: What do we learn about retaliating?*

While the children are creating their cards, and perhaps because she has heard the noise coming from our room, the head teacher, Maggie Stanford, comes in for twenty minutes or so. She joins in the discussion, likening Kim Jong-un to a child playing with toy soldiers.

(1) Maggie: *And he reminds me like that, almost as if all of these things are like toys, but they're real, aren't they? And they're real people.*

(2) Archie: *Yes, they are.*

(3) Maggie: *And very dangerous weapons which makes me think, the more, I suppose, energetic he is about wanting to send all these missiles, that the calmer Donald Trump should be... But he doesn't seem to get calmer, does he? He reacts.*

(4) Archie: *It's like all he wants to do is just get, he wants to react. Basically it's a bit like at school, basically, so, someone does something nasty to someone else like hitting them, and then someone else retaliates. So basically, Kim Jong-un launches missiles over America or something*

(5) Maggie: *But what do we learn about retaliating?*

(6) Archie: *It's not nice and it hurts people.*

(7) Maggie: *Mmm.*

(8) Dylan: *Also if you don't do it, and the other person keeps on doing it they'll just, some time they'll just get bored and stop doing it.*

(9) Maggie: *That's what we practise, isn't it? Keep learning that lesson.*

(10) Jessie: *My dad always says TO retaliate.*

(11) Maggie: *Sorry?*

(12) Jessie: *My dad says to retaliate cause if you do it they won't do it again.*

(13) Maggie: *And that's the difficulty isn't it?*

(14) Jessie: *Yeah but if somebody's hurting you*
 (15) Maggie: *Do two wrongs make a right?*
 (16) Jessie: *Yes.*
 (17) Archie: *No.*
 (18) Voices: *No*
 (19) Maggie: *If you hit somebody back, that old thing that we say, and say they fall and bang their head, there are people in prison aren't there, for somebody that retaliates or does something?*
 (20) [silence]
 (21) Maggie: *Have you retaliated, Jessica?*
 (22) Jessie: *No, I don't really get in fights. But I know someone who does* [looking pointedly at Dylan]
 (23) Maggie: *No.*
 (24) Ella: *Yeah, well if you had a brother or sister.*
 (25) Jessie: *I know. I'm lucky that I've got two dogs.*
 (26) Ella: *You really are lucky.*
 (27) Maggie: *Oh poor Morris* [Ella's brother!] [laughing]. *You'd miss him if he wasn't there, Ella.*

A brief glance at the speakers' names in this section demonstrates first the way in which the speech alternates between Maggie and one child at a time, first Archie, then later Dylan followed by Jessie. Yet it is clear that the audience for Maggie's utterances is the entire group, and the children recognise this by chiming in with answers. Bakhtin (1984a) describes the way in which a speaker "while speaking with himself, with another, with the world... simultaneously addresses a third party as well: he squints his eyes to the side, toward the listener, the witness, the judge" (p. 237). In this situation this is literally the case; Maggie addresses all the children through her utterances to individuals, a familiar teacher strategy. As I unpick this dialogue, I shall suggest that it is also metaphorically the case: Maggie speaks from her position as head teacher, which means her utterances also respond to and feed into discourses of accountability at institutional and wider levels.

In contrast with the first section of dialogue, in which the utterances were distributed between the children, who frequently interrupted one another, here individual speakers wait for each other to finish before speaking. In this section only two interruptions occur. These are both by Maggie (lines 5 and 15). On both occasions she cuts off a child mid-utterance, imposing a question of her own. By taking control of this discursive space, Maggie reinforces her status as the most powerful figure in the school hierarchy. The children do not feel authorised to interrupt her, but she may interrupt them. This also suggests that her utterances have greater value than the children's, or are more "correct".

Maggie's utterances are almost invariably constructed either as statements with interrogative tags ("*aren't they*", "*doesn't he*", "*isn't it*") – pseudo-questions with which she requests the children's agreement – or questions with a predetermined answer, such as "*Do two wrongs make a right?*" and "*What do we learn about retaliating?*". In lines 7 and 9 Maggie indicates that the children have provided the legitimate answer. These interactions reflect the "pedagogical default" (Alexander, 2018, p. 2) of the I-R-E recitation script. Thus, up to line 9, Maggie signals her dominance over the dialogic space, and the children signal their subordinate position. Although partly due to the restricted space in the room, this is reinforced by Maggie standing at the door, while we sit, looking up at her.

Maggie uses this dialogue as an opportunity for moral instruction. She holds up Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un as public examples of poor behaviour and expects shared disapproval from the children. By comparing Kim Jong-un with a child playing with toys, she brings the discussion to a "child-friendly" level, perhaps in similar ways to Ella and the dancing baby. Instead of engaging with the children's talk about danger outside school, however, Maggie domesticates the discussion, teaching a lesson about calmness and resisting provocation inside school. Archie instantly picks up on Maggie's cues and responds accordingly with his emphatic agreement (line 2). He demonstrates his understanding of both her argument and her intentions by providing a school-level example (line 4: "*Someone does something nasty to someone else like hitting them, and then someone else retaliates*"). It is worth noting that the words *react* and *retaliate* in this CoFE school context belong specifically in the speech genre of conflict resolution. "Turning the other cheek" is part of the doctrine which drives the school's practices, and the desired behaviour here. Maggie is subtly placing boundaries around the children's sphere of interest, steering their attention inwards towards the school as an enclosed community, and on the behaviour and beliefs expected within it, rather than encouraging them to look outwards as social actors in a global world.

Having demonstrated his fluency with the school's conflict resolution speech genre, Archie then attempts to return the conversation to Trump, Kim and missiles, but Maggie resists this, reinforcing her intended learning point: "*But what do we learn about retaliating?*" This is no open-ended question; Archie and Dylan supply the correct responses which Maggie approves with her "*Mmm*". By interrupting Archie, she consolidates her authority and takes up a position as the children's moral guide. It may seem that I am judging Maggie harshly. Whether or not her views about aggression and retaliation do align with the official school

script, it is important to recognise that she has little latitude here. This is a stance she is expected to take, not only as an adult who must set an unambiguous example to children, but as a head teacher, and especially one within a CofE school. Maggie is constantly aware that she will be judged upon her moral leadership. Every interaction with the children may be reflected in what they say to SIAMS inspectors on their next visit, and past inspectors have specified that they want to hear unequivocally biblical – not just ethical or moral – messages from the children. Thus Maggie is addressing not only the children but is also “squinting sideways” towards powerful audiences beyond this immediate situation.

An interesting feature of Maggie’s utterances is that, at the same time as imposing her authority onto the discourse (“*Keep learning that lesson*”), she also positions herself as a learner (“*What do we learn about retaliation?*”) alongside the children. In this she plays down her didactic role, implying “we” are all subject to some unnamed authority. Perhaps she is referring indirectly to the teachings of the church as an authority which transcends her own. Perhaps she is also deliberately positioning “us” against “them”; the school as a community of peacemakers against the aggressors Trump and Kim.

So far the interchange has merely consisted of the children demonstrating their compliance with Maggie’s instruction. The unsophisticated language they use, “*It’s not nice and it hurts people*” (line 6), reflects a lack of criticality, or perhaps their performance of the infantile position Maggie seems to expect. A turning point now occurs, however, as Jessie enters the conversation with a challenge to the authoritative discourse Maggie has been reinforcing (line 10): “*My dad always says TO retaliate*”. Maggie is taken aback (“*Sorry?*”), and Jessie expands on her statement: “*cause if you do it they won’t do it again*”. It is worth noting here that Jessie attends a martial arts class, where she learns that she may sometimes legitimately defend herself, yet in school physical self-defence is outlawed. I remember being impressed by Jessie’s boldness and how, recognising the irreconcilability of the discourses with which she is presented, she is attempting to establish her position. By bringing conflicting discourses into dialogic opposition, Jessie opens up a space for genuine collective meaning-making (Bakhtin, 1984a), in which the group could explore and evaluate contradictory discourses and go beyond them, to consider, for example, the circumstances under which self-defence might be justified. Such dialogue might also help shape more nuanced and reflective practices within school, including the recognition that discourses may not be inherently right or wrong and that there is a need to look beyond universal answers.

Maggie stops short of directly contradicting Jessie's point with her pseudo-question (line 13) "*And that's the difficulty, isn't it?*", although her use of the word "*the*" pinpoints Jessie's father's argument as problematic. Why it is so she leaves open for Jessie to interpret. Jessie's "*Yeah but*" suggests she feels comfortable enough in this space, and with Maggie, to further her point. She attempts to introduce a more complex argument: "*if somebody's hurting you*". At this point Maggie reasserts her authority, preventing Jessie from completing her point with the rhetorical question, "*Do two wrongs make a right?*" Jessie makes one further bold attempt to defend her now indefensible position, with her "*Yes,*" but is overruled by the other children's chorus of "*No*". Maggie has successfully isolated Jessie from the group, forced her back on herself (Foucault, 1982), subtly casting her as somehow deviant.

Maggie makes a further move to reinforce her position:

If you hit somebody back, that old thing that we say, and say they fall and bang their head, there are people in prison aren't there, for somebody that retaliates or does something?

The change in direction in this pseudo-question interests me. Here is an opportunity to invite the children to consider ethical complexities that go beyond a simplistic right/wrong binary. This would be an opportunity for "deep, whole-person", (Erstad et al., 2009, p. 105) or ontological learning. Instead, Maggie emphasises the punishment that would befall the perpetrator, reinforcing her point by invoking the ultimate authority of the law ("*people in prison*"), and escalating the seriousness of what Jessie is proposing from "retaliation" to "crime", leaving Jessie nowhere to take her argument. The silence that follows suggests the children are slightly shocked. This conversation has been good-natured, but Maggie has unequivocally stamped out any spark of dissent. She has presented the children with an authoritative discourse, which, according to Bakhtin (1981)

demands our unconditional allegiance... it enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority, with political power, an institution, a person — and it stands and falls together with that authority. (p. 343)

The lesson Maggie is teaching is non-negotiable. It is fused with the authority embodied in her by the school, its governing body, the local authority, the national government and Ofsted, as well as parental expectations and the considerable power of the church and its inspectors.

This is not to say that she has no choice; as Foucault (2002a) argues, if we recognise the ways in which we are enmeshed in power relations, we have ample options for resistance or avoidance. In this case, however, Maggie takes the “approved” line. The effect of this is to close down the opportunity for the children to build, through dialogue, a more nuanced understanding of the issues involved and develop their ethical reasoning. As Morson (2004) points out, “in dialogue, the destruction of the opponent destroys the very dialogic sphere in which the word lives. One wants not to destroy but to learn from an opponent, to enrich one’s own perspective by the exchange” (Morson, 2004, pp. 323-324). The very idea that Maggie’s point of view might be enriched by the exchange with Jessie is unthinkable in this environment, at this moment – but perhaps Maggie may have reconsidered the discussion afterwards and found alternative ways in which she might have responded.

Bakhtin (1981) describes how we use “words that are already populated with the social intentions of others” (p. 300) and make them serve our own intentions. We see this “ventriloquation” (p. 299) at play here; Jessie uses her father’s words and Maggie draws on axioms, “*that old thing we say*” and vague powers-that-be. In this way Maggie and Jessie have skilfully avoided direct confrontation, conducting their argument as it were by proxy thus far. Now Maggie corners Jessie (line 21), attempting to force an individualising confession (Foucault, 1978) by asking if she has retaliated. Jessie even now does not entirely capitulate, preserving her dignity with her reply, “*No, I don’t really get into fights*”, with the subtle implication that she reserves the right to if she chooses. We know from other conversations that Jessie *does* often choose to fight, which suggests she is weary of arguing. Jessie then deflects attention onto Dylan. At this point (line 24), Ella injects some humour into the discussion, returning to a recurrent theme in our research group, the evils of siblings. This is the only time in this part of the discussion that the I-R-E pattern of interaction is broken, reflecting a release of the tension of the two opposing discourses. The laughter restores an equilibrium that has been broken, yet at what cost?

A central aspect of Bakhtinian thought is the struggle between “centrifugal” and “centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271). The three episodes I have discussed in this chapter all centre around such struggle, enacted in and through dialogue. On one side is the adult compulsion to draw children into school as a space of perceived physical and emotional safety, to place and police boundaries around that space, restricting children’s interactions with the world outside school and the ways in which children strive to make

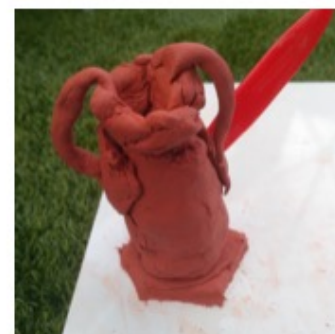
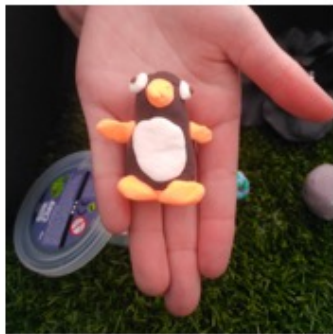
sense of it. This is manifested in several ways in the interactions discussed here: in Dawn's discomfort with Archie's involvement in the research; in her disapproval of his family's methods of dealing with the emotions surrounding deployment; in the rhetorical moves used by Maggie to quash a conflicting discourse; in her success at preserving intact the institutional authoritative discourse, and in the way she domesticates the discussion. On the other side of the struggle are the children's eagerness to talk about and make sense of real-world issues and ethical conflicts; their engagement with a multitude of sources of knowledge of that world; their appropriation of the research as a third space in which they open up dialogues to make sense of the ideas they encounter; and the new ways of being and interacting that are evolving within that space.

Having witnessed the sophistication with which the children in the research group make use of dialogue, I want to make an important point here: that cloistering the children hampers their ideological development and diminishes the role of the school, leaving children to make sense of competing discourses with little support from their formal education. And if we expect children to accept without question the authoritative discourses we present to them, how can they learn to critically evaluate the discourses that surround them and discern those that are good and trustworthy? How can we even imagine better futures if we are restricted only to what we have been given? As Motta (2012) argues,

the positing of a "one" in terms of epistemological truth is itself a reproduction of epistemological blindness that silences other knowledges and ways of creating knowledge, limiting both elite and subaltern to a frame that denies our capacity to be other and continually reinvent ourselves and each other. (p. 97)

Some might reason that in a primary school children must be taught "right from wrong" before they are able to weigh up alternative discourses. If we accept the Bakhtinian point of view, however, that "the ideological becoming of a human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 341), this is the wrong way round. Through engaging in dialogue we learn that our own perspective is a mere interpretation, always partial, and that others' interpretations are equally valid or better; it allows us to observe ourselves from the perspective of another and question our assumptions (Morson, 2004). Dialogue is itself the means, not only to interpersonal and intercultural understanding, but also to our continuous ideological becoming.

In this chapter, I have touched on ideas of drawing and unsettling boundaries and introduced the idea of the research group as a third space. However, my emphasis has been largely on discursive practices and dialogue. In Chapter 6, I expand upon the theme of boundaries, but this time from a more explicitly spatial perspective. This reflects my growing understanding of the constitutive role of space in the children's ideological development and the need for conceptual tools to attend to this. Towards the end of the chapter I discuss the third space of the research group and what its curricular border-crossing afforded us, but the chapter foregrounds mainly what I learned from the children about the spaces and places of their learning lives and their desire for connectedness and belonging.

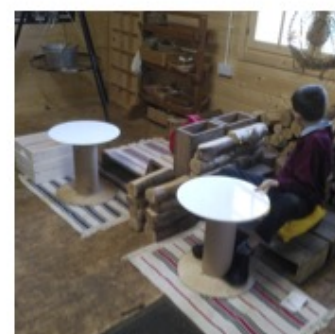
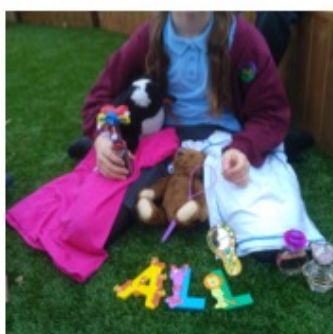
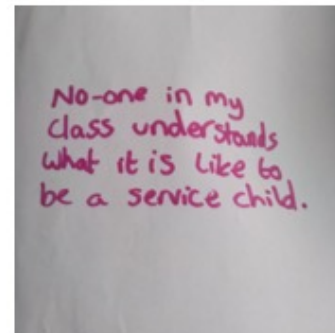


Chapter 6

Learning

from the fieldwork:

Space and place



6.1 Introduction

When I started the fieldwork in summer 2017 with seven children, I little imagined how dramatically some of their lives would change during our time together. By July 2018, Dylan had moved off the military base and into a nearby town and had changed schools; Archie had moved house twice, first locally and later overseas, and Ella was about to follow her father's posting to the north of England. Edward had joined the school and the group in May, moved off the base and into temporary military accommodation, and was already preparing to move overseas a year later (see Figure 4.1). Amelia had also not long joined the school and told us other children still saw her as "*the new girl*". When I met up with the children again in July 2019, Jessie was days away from relocating to the north of England, Imogen's family had moved off the base, and Edward was about to go overseas. Only Keira had not moved. In a sense, during the fieldwork, then, the children were both *in* a place and *between* places: either awaiting moves, still settling in, or both simultaneously. This moment in the children's lives was unique to each of them and yet entirely commonplace for service children. There is little wonder, then, that places and spaces – physical, imagined and virtual – played an important part in their lives and in our project.

From being alongside the children as these changes happened, my attention was drawn to spaces and places, not merely as contexts that furnished both resources and constraints for the children's daily activity, but as far more constitutive of that activity than I had realised, and fundamental to the children's growing sense of self and of possible selves. I also recognised how, in their use and making of spaces, the children actively, and often consciously, worked on their personal development, sense of connectedness and belonging, and their relationships. The notion that "we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities" (Soja, 1996, p. 1) struck me as salient as I reflected on the fieldwork.

I began to realise that in my focus on discursive practices and discourses, I had been treating the spatial as somewhat peripheral. I began to see the richness in attending to spatiality in my project. As Mannion (2007) argues, "we need to 'go relational' and 'spatial' if we are to 'get real' when researching lives of children" (p. 406). The ways in which the children talked about, portrayed, used and created spaces became a central focus of analysis and this is the topic of

this chapter. Before I turn to the fieldwork, however, I discuss the ideas I found helpful in making sense of all this. I include this discussion here, rather than in Chapter 2, because my attention to spatiality emerged out of the fieldwork and analysis; I do not wish to imply that I had a pre-packaged theoretical framework into which I could simply slot all my findings. Kress (2011) calls it “a matter of intellectual generosity” (p. 241) to acknowledge the potential richness in bringing different theoretical perspectives together. I found that the back-and-forth between fieldwork and theory sometimes meant seeking out new conceptual resources and bringing these into dialogue with Bakhtinian theories. This was particularly so when reflecting on space and place.

6.2 *Conceptualising spaces*

I use the two words *space* and *place* in slightly different ways. I find it helpful to think of place as “more nominal” and space as “more of a verb than a noun” (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 2). I am tentatively thinking of place as more centripetal, more located and inward-looking, than space, which to me is more of a centrifugal concept that can encompass imaginary and intangible spaces as well as the physical and bounded. For example, calling the school playground a *place* emphasises that it is sited “somewhere”, and perhaps even “somewhen”; it has spatiotemporal dimensions, although there is nothing essential or fixed about this ever-changing place. Describing the playground as a *space*, however, draws attention to the practices within it and how people understand what it affords them. I might consider its relation to other spaces within the school or local community, for example. I may also think of it as an amalgam of many imagined, relational, affective or purposive spaces that both coexist and change from moment to moment. The playground (not necessarily any specific playground) may be to a child at different times a race track or stage, a space of friendship or isolation, of release or oppression, a space for competition or relaxation. Teachers may reward children with extra playground time or restrict it for punishment; in this sense the playground becomes a conditional space incorporated into mechanisms of control. Although not a hard and fast distinction, perhaps place is for belonging, whereas space is for becoming?

I have spent much time reflecting on a way of conceptualising spaces that can take account of their dynamic, physical, semiotic, discursive, relational, temporal and affective aspects and questions of power. I also wish to think about how we make spaces and places, as well as the

role they play in our understanding of who we are and who we want to be. Ideas of third space particularly interest me (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Soja, 1996). Gutiérrez, for example, offers productive ways of thinking about classrooms as third spaces in which unofficial, disruptive or innovative behaviour and children's knowledges can be drawn on to create rich zones of learning (Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Her ideas resonate with a learning lives approach, as well as with my reflections on the fieldwork, in which, as I have discussed in Chapter 5, the alternative discursive practices and mediational means we were developing generated rich, whole-person learning and opened up to the children new ways of being and understanding themselves.

Bhabha's (1994) ideas about third spaces as "'in-between' spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood" (p. 2) similarly resonate closely with my interest in border and hybrid spaces, in which opposing discourses and ways of being come into dialogic tension, and open up other possible ways of imagining oneself. Bhabha's theories also align closely with a Bakhtinian perspective, with his refusal of essentialism, finalisation and synthesis and his focus on the utterance as unstable and always situated. I also find Soja's (1996) notion of thirding helpful; he describes this as an unsettling of binaries that opens up alternatives but goes beyond a mere synthesis of the two. Thirthing always creates something new: "asserting the third-as-Other begins an expanding chain of heuristic disruptions, strengthening defences against totalizing closure and all 'permanent constructions'" (p. 61). There are also clear parallels here with Bakhtin's refusal of finalisation and his preoccupation with radical openness.

Soja's idea of an ever-expanding chain of disruptions and Bakhtin's emphasis on the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces are particularly helpful, because they explain third spaces as dynamic and ever-evolving. An interesting question is whether it is possible to *create* a third space, or whether third space is something that emerges spontaneously. I suggest both; Gutiérrez (2008; Gutiérrez et al., 1995) also describes third spaces as being both designed and emergent. I have described in Chapter 4 several ways in which I consciously *sought* to create a third space of democratic fellowship and radical openness, by unsettling expected ways of being, behaving and relating in the classroom. In legitimising behaviours and relationships that are often achieved in schools through children's unsanctioned and informal interactions, however, these then became mainstream ways of being and behaving in the new research

space, and were themselves open to unsettling – and so the chain of disruptions expanded and the space was always becoming something more than I had envisaged.

As I illustrate in the vignette *I've got news!* for example, the children thirded the research space by appropriating and sometimes even subverting it for their own purposes: seizing opportunities to discuss their news, to work on their relationships with their peers, to escape a test, or simply to get biscuits. However, this was not only a unidirectional process. The children also made efforts to align the space more with classroom expectations – evident, for example, in their asking me to decide where we would meet or what we would do – which I resisted. At the same time, the children's resistance to some of my propositions – such as involving them in analysis – meant that to honour my commitment to radical openness I was obliged to shelve some of my intentions. The research space was far from a static space, then, and bringing together ideas from third space thinkers and Bakhtin, as well as Foucault's interest in situated, multidirectional and micro-level power struggles, provides helpful insight into the dynamics of the fieldwork.

Another concept I have found useful when reflecting on the spaces of the children's learning lives, and particularly the spaces they talked about most, such as the military base, is that of *affinity spaces*. Gee (2018) defines these as “loosely organized social and cultural settings in which the work of teaching tends to be shared by many people, in many locations, who are connected by a shared interest or passion” (p. 8). While researchers use this construct largely to think about online spaces, Gee illustrates it with his upbringing within the affinity space of the Catholic church. As a “semiotic social space” (Gee, 2005, p. 217), the church is configured by the sets of signs, or mediational means, with which people interact, to which they give meaning, and around which they organise their activity. The church might also be described as a network of physical, virtual, political, international and local places, sites of learning and mutual help, which connect people through their shared affinity for certain values, practices and beliefs. Within affinity spaces individuals carve their own learning trajectories, connecting with others at different times and in different places. And by drawing on distributed knowledge within affinity spaces, they accomplish more than they could alone (Gee, 2005), something I noticed happening throughout the fieldwork.

I see parallels between Gee's description of the affinity space of the Catholic church and the armed forces community, in which people are connected through physical places on various

scales as well as their adherence to the less tangible cultural, social and historical aspects of armed forces life. I suggest that the key physical sites for the children in my research group are their homes, the base and the school, but that they also place increasing importance on connecting with others and building knowledge in virtual spaces that transcend their immediate environment. By participating in affinity spaces, Gee (2018) argues, “young people pursue their interests and passions, define who they want to be, and develop important knowledge and skills” (p. 12). Physical, material, imagined, relational and virtual places and spaces are not merely the backdrop to the children’s lives, but are central to the exploration of who and how they want to be.

I also found ideas of third space and affinity spaces helpful in reflecting on our fieldwork. Apart from on the occasion described in Chapter 5, our meeting places, the cabin and the science lab, were both situated on the very edge of the school grounds. We used these largely because they were available; however, their physical attributes – including temperature and acoustics – and their locations, I realise, were instrumental in shaping our activity. As I describe in the vignette that starts Chapter 4, we in turn shaped those spaces, both physically and by endowing them with meanings and emotions, with routines and ways of relating, being and behaving. These were, then, hybrid spaces, neither fully within, nor fully outside the school. Thinking of the research group as a developing third space or affinity space allows me to attend to the possibilities of becoming these spaces offered us, something I have begun to describe in Chapter 5, and to emphasise the richness of meaning-making that flows across curricular and physical boundaries, which I discuss in Section 6.5. Thinking with these ideas also allows me to attend to affect, the relationships and caring that shaped the space and were shaped by it, ideas I expand upon in Chapter 7.

In this chapter I explore ideas of connectedness and belonging, safety, exploration and ideological becoming that I have drawn from analysing research dialogues, artefacts and observations of the children during their year of being both in and in-between places. First, I focus on the children’s learning lives, using multimodal texts that point to the military base as a key space in their ideological becoming, although also a place of surveillance and constraint, and a temporary one in the children’s mobile lives. I can find no other UK research that addresses in any detail this role of the military base, and yet such research is particularly necessary at a time when the MoD is thoroughly overhauling its family accommodation policies and practices. In Section 6.4 I turn to the theme of mobility. I consider two visual

texts through which Dylan responded to moving home and school partway through the research project. I present some arguments about how he and other children used online spaces both to explore matters of interest to them, and to maintain their social networks when house moves disrupted these. This leads to a brief discussion of tensions around children's online participation. I end on a methodological note, by reflecting on some of the multimodal texts presented in this chapter as illustrations of the sophisticated, border-crossing meaning-making afforded by the third space of the research group.

6.3 *“We feel pretty safe”: The base as an affinity space*

As teachers, I suggest we may over-emphasise schools as places of learning and overlook the importance of others. Yet Gee (2018) argues that “teaching and learning are not confined to one site or one kind of person; they are distributed across many locations, people, and practices” (p. 9). A key site in the children's lives, and one we might overlook as a learning space, is the military base. Of the eight children, all but Keira have spent all or most of their lives living on bases, and during most of our fieldwork, only Keira and Amelia lived off the base. Apart from Ella, who feels the base no longer meets her needs (see Section 6.3.3), the children's descriptions of the base suggest it acts as an affinity space for them, one in which they explore and learn ways of being and connecting with others, as well as a place to which they can belong.

First, the children describe the base as a place of safety. In military slang they live “behind the wire”, separated from Bridgeton and the school by a few miles, as well as by razor wire, police dogs, armed guards, surveillance cameras and access-restricting procedures. The children interpret these mechanisms and semiotics of boundary policing mainly in a positive light, however. They provide a reassuring, impenetrable barrier to the kidnappers and stalkers the children imagine to be at large beyond the wire: “*we do have loads of security and emergency services, so we feel pretty safe*”. Archie, whose family returned onto the base during the fieldwork, after a period living in a local village, talks of his relief at no longer living in “*number one crime city*”. Keira argues that living off-base exposes her to danger: “*People could easily come to our estate and break into people's homes*”. Similarly, Amelia complains she is rarely allowed out unaccompanied because her parents fear for her safety: “*when you're walking home from school somebody might like stop with a knife and like take you and kidnap*”.

you". She says she misses the freedom of living on a base. Imogen points to the media as a source of such fears: "somebody can kidnap you and maybe kill you, like this has happened on the news recently". All this provides evidence of the children picking up the "discourse of fear" (Altheide, 2002, p. 230) that I have drawn attention to in Chapter 5. In this context, the children equate the base with relative freedom. It is a place where they can be outside, unsupervised, and yet feel safe.

An affinity to others living on the base is also evident in much of the children's talk. Jessie, for example, explains they are "really lucky cause we all live with a lot of kids and adults that all know about stuff we all go through", pointing to a sense of connectedness forged and reinforced by shared experiences, history and mutual support. The children quite literally know who is who within their enclosed community. This includes very many children, who attend various local schools; neighbours and friends' parents, who, as I shall discuss, partially share their parenting roles; and adults the children know peripherally, such as the military police, who let them look at their dogs and weapons and occasionally give them sweets.

The children are aware of the base as a place of intimacy, caring activity and fun for their parents:

Ella: *Your mum was at our house yesterday.*
Archie: *Yeah, I know, she did her nails.*
Ella: *They were laughing, in a really high noise.*
Archie: *My mum was laughing when she got home, I don't know why.*

In witnessing such mutual caring, the children are clearly learning profound lessons about ways of being and belonging in a community. This became evident early on in the fieldwork, in their improvisation of a play. The original intention was to develop a scripted performance, but the activity rapidly evolved into imaginative play, in which the children enacted different roles from which they could explore their everyday lives; as Dyson (1997) describes it, to "crawl into the spaces of those stories, to examine them from the inside by playing and replaying them" (p. 19). This play allowed me to witness the children trying out positions, as parents, neighbours and teenagers, adopting their actions, gestures and speech, and trying to understand how they might feel. The drama revolved around two families whose fathers were deployed overseas. Interestingly, as soon as the "dads" learned of their deployment, the children orchestrated multiple ways of caring for all concerned: comfort for shared sadness, a

farewell meal together, practical help with transport and childcare, joining together to cheer on a child at a football match, and attempts to live-stream the match to the absent fathers. As the fieldwork progressed, I repeatedly witnessed the reality of such distributed caring and its importance to the children. When Jessie's mother was deployed overseas for four months, for example, Jessie spent a good deal of time with Ella's family. She talked of enjoying the kind of rough-and-tumble usually reserved for close family members: "*me and Morris end up fighting her dad and he whacks us with slippers*". The children recognised that without such support their lives were circumscribed: "*Say there's like a sports competition coming up, you can't get there and your friends can't take you, or they're not going, you just can't go. So sometimes you have to give up the things.*"

Also evident within the research was the importance of the children's shared historical and social knowledge. They were familiar with one other's houses and the base and used a shared shorthand to talk about them. Particularly at the start of the fieldwork, I sensed they were performing this connectedness for my benefit. An example is a short section of transcript from an early session:

Dylan: *Oh, Miss Lee, er, Archie moved back to the base on Monday*
Archie: *Yay!*
Me: *Oh did you?*
Dylan: *Yeah.*
Ella: *Have you moved to a C house?*
Imogen: *I know what house he's in! 4, 26*
Archie: *Oh yeah, I'm moving into a C. 42, yeah, 427 C*
Ella: *No, the one you used to live in, is it on that block?*
Dylan: *Yeah, 4*
Archie: *Yeah, 427 C*
Ella: *With a C yeah. It was Polly's old house, wasn't it?*
Dylan: *Polly?*
Ella: *Polly Watson. In Year 3, with the ginger hair.*
Archie: *Yeah, her*
Ella: *Yeah, it's her old house*

In this conversation the children eagerly demonstrate their collective knowledge, not only of Archie's move, but also of the types of house on the base, and the block and its occupants, present and past. This is typical of their talk; they seemed to like discussing and mapping who lived where "*in our close*" and recalling previous neighbours: "*Who remembers Frazer?*" In this community in constant transition, the whereabouts of acquaintances is a common topic of conversation, as I remember from my own childhood. In this discussion, as in their play, the

children align themselves with the discursive habits of their parents. They also emphasise and re-forge their connections to the base as a place to which they belong – and which connects them to each other – by virtue of their inside knowledge and their ability to use the speech genre of base life, with references and abbreviations I am unable to fully share.

During the fieldwork the children also drew maps of the base and their parents' workplaces, and frequently discussed the layout of their homes, which were built and decorated to standardised plans, a uniformity which Ella described as annoying:

everywhere you go, like, it's just the same houses, like the same everything really... every house on the base is done out the same way, all the same doors, like, everything the same, and it just gets a bit annoying after you've lived there so long... all my life I've lived on a base.

Yet the children mostly seemed to enjoy the sense of community afforded by their familiarity with each other's houses and their proximity. I glimpsed this frequently, even in Ella's talk:

when Dylan used to live next to us, this was quite a long time ago... there was a hole in the fence, like dividing ours [Dylan, laughing: Oh, yeah!] And we could just climb through and just, like, come into each other's gardens, so we, when, if ever we put the ball over, we could just go and get it. [To Dylan:] We still have one of your balls in our garden.

The children seemed to appreciate their casual and relatively free movement in and out of each other's homes. Perhaps the knowledge that their homes were temporary, to some degree interchangeable, and not their families' property, added to their sense of conviviality. The very homogeneity of military bases and the homes on them may also provide familiarity when children move from base to base. In this sense "the base" denotes more than its actual physical location; we might describe it as an affinity space that transcends immediate situations and provides a sense of permanence in an ever-changing world.

As well as being a place in which to learn about belonging to a community, the base figured in the children's talk as a space of personal development. Leander and colleagues (2010) suggest it would be fruitful to investigate to what extent "liminal places and spaces, such as physical street scenes and virtual streets, [are] key sites for learning and identity work?" (p. 384). My research suggests that these spaces are not merely backdrops to ideological becoming, but that it is through their very responses to their environment that the children learn who they are. They talked constantly of playing together in parks and streets, exploring abandoned buildings, climbing trees and playing football against children from other closes. The value

they attach to physical movement and outdoor, unsupervised play is emphasised in Dylan's assertion "*The good thing is we get to play out a lot. We get quite a lot of freedom*". Streets provide the objects and challenges against which the children measure and test themselves, and the stages upon which they act and see themselves as actors. The children's frequent discussion of their "free" play allowed me to witness its vital contribution to their ideological becoming.

The children's enthusiasm for their out-of-school game "*Base Buddies*", for example, illustrates this. This game involves challenges of increasing difficulty, such as hopping on and off kerbs on scooters and bikes. Many things about this game fascinate me. One is the chronotope, the ensemble of time, space and material and semiotic mediational means on which the game depends: access to scooters and bikes, for example, and a traffic-free area with features that the children can appropriate for the challenges. They also require certain weather conditions and adequate free time together to practise and perform the feats. The game also depends on sign systems. Alongside the progressive challenges, the children have invented a complex set of rankings that they attain by performing these feats. Dylan explains the terminology: "*So the proper order: Member, elder, shaky third leader, secure third leader*" [Jessie: "*Shaky second leader*"] "*No, and then shaky co-leader, secure co-leader, shaky leader, leader*". I am interested in the intertextuality of this, how the children have imported the language of hierarchies – and as Bakhtin reminds us, the verbal and the ideological are always intertwined. Perhaps the children are combining school discourses of progression, testing and targets – "being a secure level 3", for example, was common parlance in school until very recently – with military ranks and promotion; possibly these ranks also stem from video games, in which individuals gain status by progressing through challenges. In out-of-school clubs, such as swimming or ballet, the children also often take tests to progress through grades. "*Base Buddies*" thus reflects closely their progression- and target-oriented lives, and shows how discourses and ways of knowing are not confined to any institution or time but flow beyond and through these.

I hesitate to idealise this play – indeed, it may construct or maintain a powerful, exclusionary élite within the children, and in rejecting Jessie's contribution above, Dylan may be asserting his superior rank. Yet the game clearly affords the children a sense of belonging. Their mastery of both the physical challenges and the speech genre of the game enables them to take up positions within the group of "buddies". I suggest also that by supporting and challenging one another to extend their physical limits and their bravery, the children quite deliberately co-

construct and use this game as an affinity space in which to pursue their self-development, and on their own terms – deciding for themselves when they have had enough, for example – albeit influenced by adult discourses. The streets become “a zone of development and transition, whereupon children gradually move away from home and the comfortable confines of family life to a more “adult” existence of peers and the tensions and pressures of the outside world” (Leander et al., 2010, p. 353). This is not only so for the less experienced or confident children, whose physical development is scaffolded by the sequence of challenges, but also for the more competent ones, as they mentor the novices, encouraging them to develop their skills and initiating them into the ways of the group. In an era in which children’s outdoor spaces “are being eliminated” (p. 354), it is clear that the base enables an important developmental space for the children, and that they relish the opportunities and positions it affords them.

A report on the lives of service children by the Children’s Commissioner (2018) suggests that, while teachers are concerned that children may be somewhat over-sheltered on a military base, to children it is a “safe and secure environment” that affords them “total freedom to explore their surroundings” (p. 9). To some extent, my fieldwork bears this idyllic picture out. However, the reality is more complex. The children’s freedom is never “total”; it is always held in tension with constraints of various kinds. I turn to these in the section that follows.

6.3.1 *“I don’t have to have, parent vision, all the time”*

In the same way that the parents share childcare, particularly during deployments, they also distribute the monitoring of children’s behaviour outside the home. The children frequently narrated incidents of surveillance and control which suggests their use of public spaces is heavily policed.

Ella: *In the summer we were playing this really fun game? And it was like tag, like hide-and-seek tag, and we used to get loads of people playing it, and then we were playing it at like half six*
Imogen: *Did you hide behind the car? Their car?*

Ella: *No, we just hid like around the close, like around the area, and like, we weren't even being loud, well sometimes there was a few screams, cause it was kind of dark, but it wasn't late, and then they, the woman, Helen, I think that's her name*

Archie: *Yeah.*

Ella: *She just came out and just started shouting at us to be quiet and it was only like seven, half six.*

Adults acting *in loco parentis* place boundaries on the places and times in which the children may play, the amount of noise that they may make and the numbers in which they may gather together. This, I suggest, reflects fears of children's unruliness (Jackson & Scott, 1999; Collins & Kearns, 2001; Leander et al., 2010, Weller & Bruegel, 2009), an assumption that they will cause damage:

some people were kicking, they were playing football and they were kicking the ball up against the green shed, which is our electricity fence, and our mum had to come out and tell them off... it's where all our electricity is, and if someone breaks that, then we have no electricity.

The children also described “random” adults “banning” them from certain spaces by reporting perceived misconduct on Facebook. Thus adults use social media to distribute and orchestrate the task of surveillance. Such mechanisms of remote control may provide reassurance to parents, especially in service families when one parent is frequently deployed. They may even increase the likelihood of the children being allowed to roam more widely. Yet they may also act as instruments of coercion, pressuring families to curb their children's freedoms and comply with the disciplinary norms espoused by those with the loudest online presence. These practices reflect Foucault's (2002a) description of the “threefold aspect of panopticism – supervision, control, correction” (p. 70).

Further, I suggest such practices undermine children's dignity. The children's indignation when narrating incidents when they have felt unjustly punished is quite understandable. They have no recourse against “judgement by Facebook”; they may not legitimately hold Facebook accounts until the age of thirteen. I suggest such intrusive surveillance and control not only demonise children, but also deny them citizenship of public space – which thereby becomes adult space. Is this not a hypocritical paradox when we often position service children as little soldiers who serve their country? It reflects a troubling lack of trust in and understanding of the younger generation and fails to recognise the value of public space for their personal development. This mistrust compounds their confinement in an era in which children are already increasingly kept indoors out of fears for their safety. Imogen's assertion “*I don't have to have, parent vision, all the time*” resonates with Foucault's panopticism.

Additionally, many of the conflicts described by the children could, perhaps, be avoided by including children in the planning of spaces. Keira, for example, lives on a new housing estate which provides a mixture of social housing, “affordable” and more expensive houses. Despite

its size, this estate has no children's play area: *"There was gonna be a park and then they just made it into allotments"*. Without permission to walk the mile and a half to the nearest play area, Keira and her friends play in the streets under the eyes of vigilant neighbours: *"we were just playing nicely, and then number 2 came out and said, and said, 'It's PRIVATE PROPERTY!' When it actually wasn't theirs"*. While allotments are not exclusively for adults (although Keira sees them that way), a lack of imagination on the part of planners, a reluctance to commit to the long-term maintenance of safe play spaces – or possibly, given recent media exposure of segregated playgrounds (e.g. Grant, 2019), a desire to reduce the visibility and audibility of poorer children – have resulted in children's marginalisation in what could have been a thriving intergenerational space. Similarly, while the base has a wealth of playgrounds, often supplied by the RAF Benevolent Fund, some have been placed out of bounds by the surveillance practices mentioned above, while the poor design of others leaves the children looking for challenge elsewhere, repurposing the streets as play spaces. Entering into dialogue with children about how they use their local spaces is, I suggest, the first step towards creating and managing spaces in which all can flourish.

In the next section of this chapter I present two multimodal texts which Jessie and Ella use to explore their feelings about space and place and the possibilities for personal development these provide or constrain.

6.3.2 “I’m not allowed to go ANYwhere”

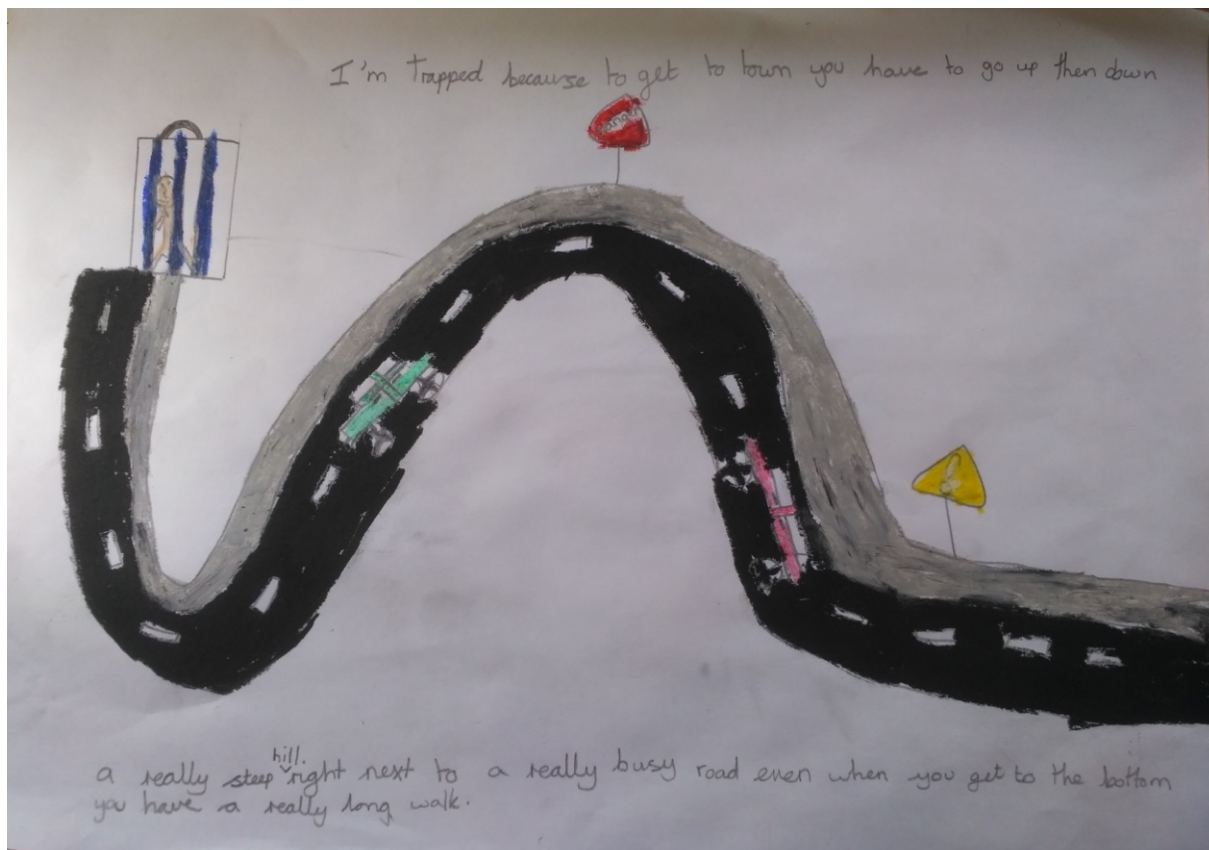


Figure 6.1 Jessie's multimodal piece

Jessie created this piece (Figure 6.1) about halfway through the fieldwork, following much discussion of living on the base and moving house. Her multimodal text combines a pencil-and-pastel drawing with writing, speech and gesture. The image positions the viewer both above the road, as if looking down onto it, emphasising distance, and at the side, so that we see details: signs, cars, the cage and the hill. It depicts a stark black road, with sharp bends indicating that it leads up and over a steep hill. An empty grey pavement runs alongside it, and two signs warn of danger. Two unpeopled cars travel along the road. The only human figure is strikingly depicted in a cage at the start of the road. Jessie explains:

This is me [pointing to cage] at the base, and then to get to anywhere from the base [tracing her finger along the road] you have to go up a really steep hill that's right next to a really busy road, so I'm not allowed to go ANYwhere, cause my mum's afraid that I'll get hurt or something. But [in a tone of sarcasm, eyebrows raised, smiling] I know how to walk on the path.

Around her picture Jessie has written: *I'm trapped because to get to town you have to go up then down a really steep hill next to a really busy road even when you get to the bottom you have a really long walk*¹. This expresses Jessie's unambiguous frustration at her physical inability to "get to town", where she goes to school and where many of her non-service friends live. Her repetition of the word "really" emphasises the triple barriers of the steep hill, the distance and the busy road. She represents vividly her feelings of isolation and imprisonment with the violent image of herself in a cage. Her picture and her spoken words together express the deeper frustration of not being able to "get to ANYwhere".

Jessie's image could be described as both map and metaphor. Its composition, content and what Jessie leaves out are informative. The road starts at the military base, but its destination is open to interpretation; it is simply the world beyond the base. The left-to-right orientation of the road directs the viewer's eye (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) from the given starting point of the caged figure and along the road that could lead anywhere but ultimately goes off the page and nowhere. Jessie demonstrates this by tracing her finger along the road while explaining it to me. The stark colour, achieved with dense pastel colour-blocking, and the lack of any surrounding landscape also focus the eye onto the road itself. Also missing from the picture are any living beings other than the self-portrait, which adds to the sense of Jessie's isolation and disconnectedness from the outside world. Instead of being full of travellers, the empty cars here symbolise impersonalised danger. Neither is there any form of public transport in this picture, reflecting the reality of this rural area, in which catching a bus into town – or anywhere – is impossible. And rather than the *Welcome to Bridgeton* sign Jessie passes on her daily journey to school, she depicts only warning signs, emphasising danger rather than destination, a layer of semiotic restraint that compounds the physical restrictions to Jessie's freedom. All this makes the road a barrier to the world outside the military base, rather than a route into it.

It is not only physical and semiotic barriers that trap Jessie, however; her parents' anxiety is a further constraint. Even though Jessie feels capable of walking safely along the pavement, and has glimpsed intriguing footpaths that invite exploration, resistance is futile in the face of adults' perceived overprotectiveness:

¹ This portion of text has been previously used in a published article (Lee, 2019)

I'm only allowed out of the base with an adult. I think I could protect myself if someone, if something happened. My parents pay hundreds of pounds for me to go to karate, which is a martial art I will never get to or have to use. I, they pay hundreds of pounds for me to go to karate, and they don't really like it when I miss it, but then they never, let me go out. Like, if something happened I could just use my karate skills.

Jessie's artistic text highlights several tensions relating to spaces and places of childhood that the children explored during the fieldwork: between connectedness to the wider world and the feeling of missing out; between exploration and protection; between the base as a space of freedom and a place of confinement; and between desire for independence and frustration at its slow approach. The children's discussions and art also provide insight into the ways in which these spaces and places are discursively – and physically – produced and assigned meanings, and how power is enacted within them. These themes and tensions also run through the children's active concern with their personal development, as I describe in my discussion of Ella's ideas in the next section.

6.3.3 “Out of the base it’s like the real world”

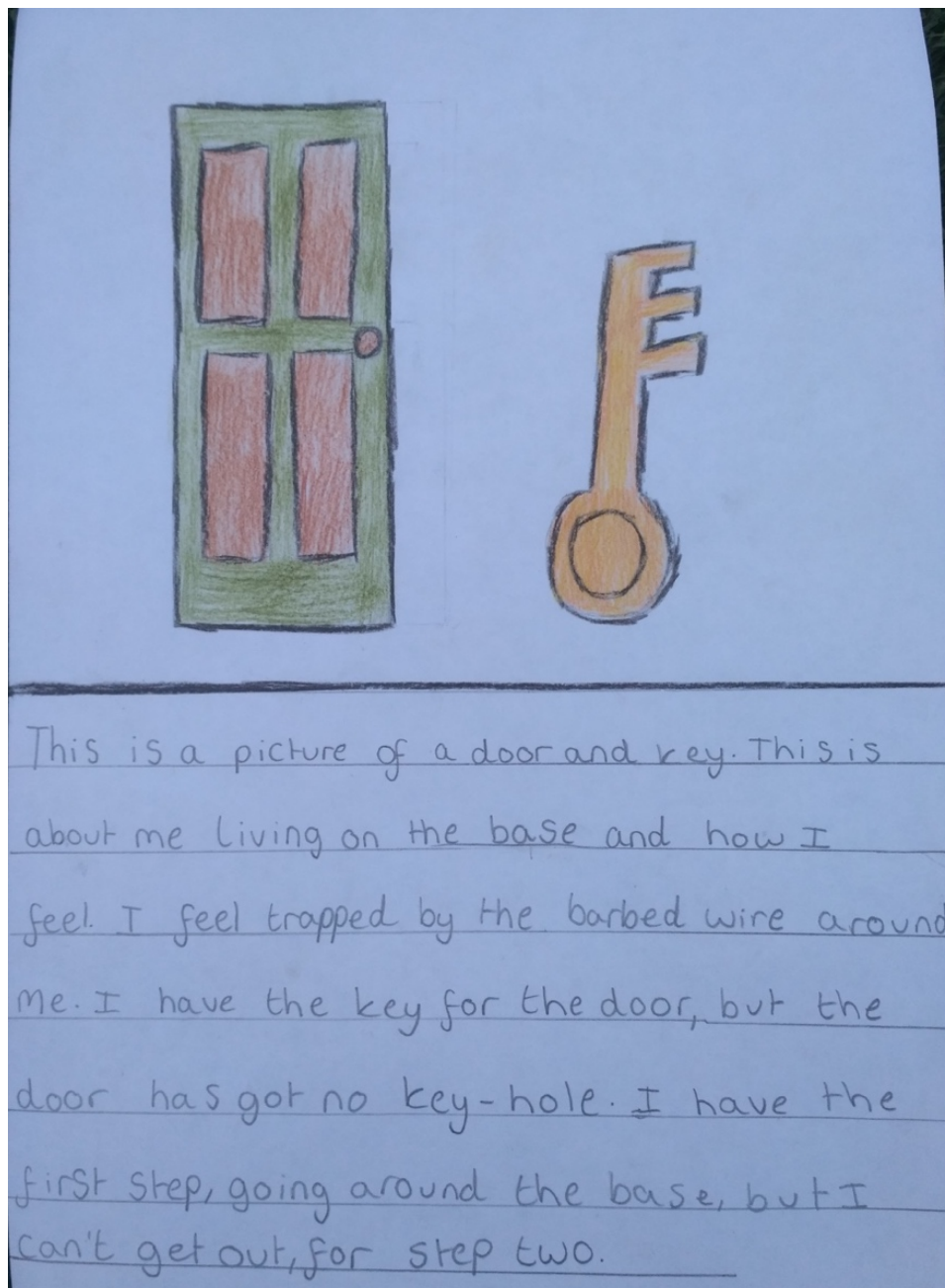


Figure 6.2 Ella's multimodal piece

Like Jessie, Ella uses a physical metaphor for freedom, exploration and captivity; in this case a closed door and a key, objects which act as both means and barrier to a destination (Figure 6.2). Ella's multimodal text also layers image, writing and speech. In the image, the viewer is positioned directly opposite the door and a giant key, which has the effect of drawing us towards the door, offering us the key, and then repelling us; the solid door is closed tight. The

door is not a route, then, but an obstacle, a full stop. Ella's written text explains, *"I have the key for the door, but the door has got no key-hole"*. The complex and remarkably self-aware argument Ella is working out here is that her personal development is a series of steps. She already has the key, having gained the skills she needs for step one: *"I'm allowed to go to like everywhere on the base on my own now"*, and she is impatient for *"step two"*: gaining access to opportunities beyond the base. As the oldest child in the group, preparing herself for an approaching house move and secondary school, she is orienting herself towards her future. She tells us, *"out of the base it's like the real world like you can find the real you in the real world, like what you want to start doing, like your future"*. To Ella, living behind the wire is inadequate preparation for that future, hence the lack of a key-hole in her drawing and her inability to access the "real" world beyond the door, where she will find the person she wants to become. There is a sense of pointlessness in both Jessie's and Ella's work: both have competences, but no opportunity to put these to the test. The military base is an inauthentic place of safety which holds them back from maturing at the pace they wish to. Perhaps, however, Jessie and Ella's readiness to explore the wider world is a product of that very safety that has scaffolded their early explorations.

On the threshold of adolescence, Ella talks of chafing at the structures and gatekeepers that she feels disempower her:

One day I was coming back from a party and their mum dropped me off and then I was walking through the gate and the police stopped me and said, "Hey, you look over thirteen. Where's your ID?" And I said, "I don't have one. I'm eleven." And then the police called me into his little hutch and asked me for all these details. I felt quite awkward giving out all my details. And it felt like he was spying on me.

Such over-zealous, intrusive surveillance and policing reinforce Ella's dissatisfaction with life on the base and its disconnection with the "real" world with its potential for mobility and privacy, where there are no guards who *"come up right to your car and put their head in your car"*. Ella imagines a life of increased independence and mobility, pictures herself going out with friends to enjoy the amenities of a city. To her this can only become a reality if her family moves off the base.

These two multimodal pieces allow me to observe Jessie and Ella not as passive recipients of learning experiences but as consciously preoccupied with their personal development. They link their becoming to the spaces in their lives and their ability to explore beyond their

immediate surroundings. I shall argue in what follows that, while the other children seem more content with the opportunities available to them, they are all similarly working out where they connect to and fit into their immediate social environment and the wider world. All actively seek out and create spaces in and through which they can explore and become who they want to be. I also argue, however, that these are sites of tension as well as possibility; the children's desire for exploration and freedom is often frustrated by attempts to preserve authoritative discourses of safe and innocent childhoods. I suggest that it is on these very fault lines, the third spaces where the centrifugal and centripetal come into dialogic tension with each other, that the children's ideological becoming is made manifest in fascinating ways, as in the two examples above.

6.4 *"I don't know what school I'm going to when I move"*

I have considered the importance of the base as a place of support, connection and belonging and as a space of becoming, one which provides the children with a degree of freedom not always available elsewhere, albeit a somewhat artificial and bounded freedom that they push back against. However, the base is also a temporary environment, subject to change at short notice. This is increasingly the case as families choose – and are encouraged – to move out of military accommodation and buy their own homes¹. By late July 19, only two of my participants – those who had moved overseas – were still living in military accommodation. There are, of course, gains and losses in moving off-base. It enables stronger links with schools and local communities, and provides educational continuity for children, but the serving member is still posted regularly with little or no influence on the location of the new workplace. My reflections on the role of the base as a support network, an affinity space and a site of learning, something that has attracted little attention in the literature, suggest that for many children, the losses outweigh the gains.

In this section I discuss the children's responses to moving home and school, presenting three visual texts – one from Ella and two from Dylan – alongside reflections on the fieldwork. I suggest that participation in affinity spaces beyond their immediate environment, and

¹ This is a response both to the dilapidated conditions of service housing and to a thoroughgoing, and unpopular, overhaul of service family accommodation policies, a consequence of an ill-conceived privatisation of most MoD housing stock (see Smith, 2017; National Audit Office, 2018b; Public Accounts Committee, 2017, 2018).

particularly virtual spaces, helps the children deal with the mobility of armed forces life, an ever-present theme in our research group. Again, I discuss these as spaces of both possibility and constraint.

Having witnessed Ella's desire for a more independent and exciting future, it is unsurprising that she described her impending move to a completely new area as an opportunity to realise that future: *"if you get a bus, within ten minutes you're like in the city? Loads of houses and shops and things"*. Throughout the fieldwork Ella recounted discussions with her parents about purchasing a house and finding a new school, updating us weekly on their progress: *"we've got our mortgage sorted out. I know it sounds boring, but it's good"*.

Ella's excitement and optimism were tempered, however, by difficulties commonly experienced by service families during postings. In Ofsted's review of service children's education (2011), the authors describe the challenges of navigating school admissions procedures. One is the difficulty in obtaining school places mid-year. Eight years later, and despite changes to admissions regulations intended to mitigate disadvantage to service children, this was still a problem. Ella's parents managed this by delaying their move until the summer holiday, something her father's fairly high military rank enabled. What proved more difficult was the local authority's requirement that they provide an address before a school place is allocated: *"I don't know what school I'm going to when I move. Because we have to get a house first... Technically my mum and dad just want to get a house so that we can be put down for school"*. This was further complicated because the family hoped to move off-base – something Ella longed for – and because the schools Ella preferred were over-subscribed. In late June 2018, mere weeks before their planned move, Ella's parents exhausted their options; they moved into military accommodation, obtained the address required to secure school places, and attempted to buy a house later. Ella spent the entire school year fretting over the school move, and eventually moved house twice in short succession.

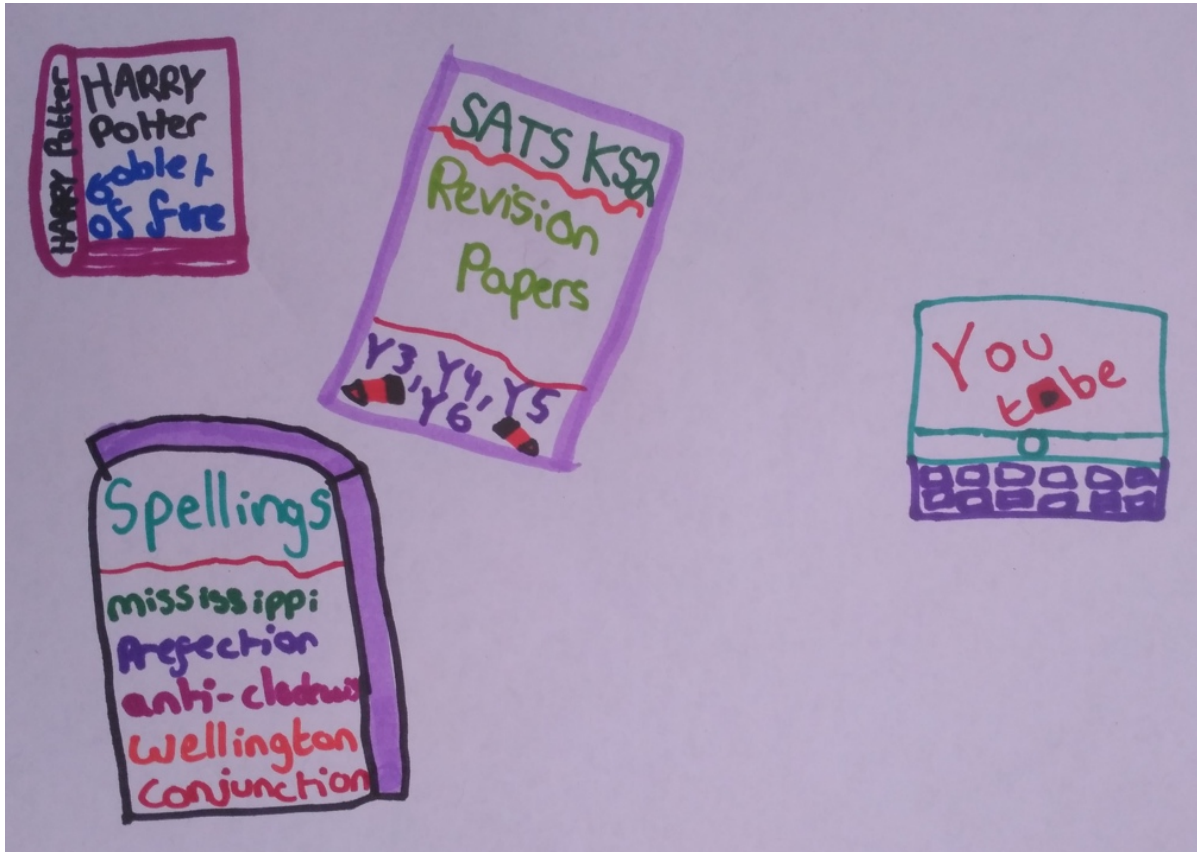


Figure 6.3 Ella's free time activities

Ella also put pressure on herself academically, perhaps to help along the school admissions process and, linked to this, to hasten along her imagined future self. In the image above (Figure 6.3) she represents her spare time activity, depicting herself as keen to succeed at school and highly engaged in literacy practices. Her design¹ shows how these flow between school and home. Ella has grouped three elements together – a book, SATs revision papers and a spelling list – and places the fourth, a laptop, slightly apart, which implies she sees it too as “educational”, but less clearly a school object than the others. Interestingly, the laptop is playing YouTube, a site blocked by the school’s internet provider, rather than an approved learning site. This suggests that she makes a distinction between her book-based, test-related schooled literacy and her digital literacy practices.

¹ This image has been previously used in a published article (Lee, 2019)

I sense that Ella is creating for herself an affinity space of scholarship, which revolves around her aspirations, her activity and her material surroundings. By October 2017, seven months before SATs, she is already revising regularly, staying indoors rather than playing outside, and doing extra homework. With *“really good scores”*, she hopes she will have *“a better chance of getting into a better school?”* While she hints at her parents’ aspirations – *“My dad wants me to go to LSLT; it’s like an outstanding school, I think it’s number 3 in the country”* – Ella seems remarkably invested in her studies, unlike the other children, who describe homework as a parent-enforced chore. Ella says she has sold off the toys she used to be *“obsessed with”* and acquired a bookcase instead. In her last year of primary school, and on the verge of adolescence, she pictures her future self as a successful student, surrounded by like-minded friends; she even imagines studying at university and visiting her parents at weekends. Homework is a step towards that future.

This eleven-year-old’s zeal may be admirable; however, a sensibility to intertextuality cannot ignore the terminology of league tables, Ofsted ratings and SATs scores that pervades Ella’s talk and images of education. Indeed, throughout the fieldwork I noted how little the children talked about learning and how much they discussed instead the “doing” of education (tests, punishments, demands, time pressure, competition). Ella has absorbed and enacts the authoritative discourses and individualising practices of marketised, target- and results-driven education. In order to participate successfully in this regime, Ella invests time, energy and emotion into achieving her target grades. Thus heavily politicised discourses seep into the affinity space of scholarship Ella is creating, and she aligns herself unconsciously with these.

6.4.1 *“I can keep in touch with all of you”*

Ella’s depiction of her digital literacy practices points to another affinity space for the children, who, typically for their generation, spend “countless leisure hours traveling through all kinds of virtual worlds” (Leander et al., 2010, p. 360). YouTube, gaming and TV featured heavily in the fieldwork. The children talked of internet celebrities and enacted internet crazes: they performed the “floss dance”, raps, songs and pranks, and brought in slime. They used my phone and the school iPads to peruse online maps and images of places of interest to them, including their old homes. They also often discussed their digital devices and described how they furtively bypassed their parents’ efforts to control or monitor their internet use. Facer (2014) argues that new technologies “ask questions of us about how we wish to create space,

about how we wish to live” (p. 123). My research provides evidence that the children wish for spaces that allow them to connect to each other, to others and to the wider world. They crave to traverse the confines of their physical life. Gee (2018) argues that online affinity spaces enable young people to develop interests, skills and knowledge and their self-understanding. I suggest also that, particularly for service children, whose physical environment is liable to sudden change, such spaces, accessible from anywhere, allow both connectedness and encounters with otherness.

This seemed to be the case for Dylan. Having lived on various bases his entire life, in November 2017 Dylan announced he might be moving to a town some miles away “*because we want our own house instead of like a rented house*”. Unlike Ella, who was determinedly positive about her move, Dylan was equivocal about his, despite aligning his desires with those of his family – “*we want*”. He described it as both “*very sad*” and “*exciting*”. Like many service children, Dylan was dealing with multi-layered challenges; his father returned from a month overseas on the day before the move. Dylan spent the first research session after the move creating a piece of art, in which each colour, he explained, represents an emotion (see Figure 6.4). The artwork, and the slow, silent painting of it, are graphic illustrations of feelings too strange and complex to define. I understand it as an utterance beyond words. This piece of art has a dreamlike quality and, indeed, Dylan described a dream/feeling about his move and feeling out of place:

I had this dr- this weird, I had a feeling in like er my room last night, and I was like, it was like I got kidnapped but the house I got put in was my house, that I live in now, I'm like eeeerp!



Figure 6.4 Dylan's painting

Several weeks after this, Dylan created a model (Figure 6.5), and explained his design choices. In his new surroundings he misses the easy interactions he had on the base, the casual movement between homes, the outdoor play spaces and the availability of friends:

I'm making like um I'm gonna make a face, and it's gonna have like a red cross through it? Because like when I was living on the base, I like made a lot of friends there, but when, now I live on, obviously, Hamborough, none of my friends are like around me? And that's what, I'm gonna put a massive like, I dunno what colour, but X in the face. [It represents] that they're not around me any more and I'm sad.

Dylan has combined two materials in this model. Silk clay provides him with pastel colours to portray his skin and facial features. However, for the feelings he wishes to express in the cross,

he needs something more intense. Plasticine affords a much more vivid red, that, he says later, represents anger. The cross violently obliterating the face's features conveys a powerful sense of Dylan's disconnection from his friends, and perhaps also, a threatened sense of self; no longer knowing quite who he is at the moment, or how to feel. This is accentuated by the lack of any hair or body – the head is decapitated – and the way in which he has been “crossed out”. Thus this simple object holds nuances that go beyond Dylan's words *“they're not around me any more and I'm sad”*.



Figure 6.5 Dylan's model

During the year, Dylan updated us regularly with plans and dates: *“I've got news! We're not leaving! Until June! We were gonna leave after Easter, well first it was January first it was June or July and then it was after Easter, then it was before Easter and now it's bloomin' June again”*. And alongside this “real life” news, sometimes almost in the same breath, Dylan also recounted his virtual life: *“My dad's coming home today... Oh, and I got other good news. I'm buying a battle pass on Fortnite”* (a multi-player live game). We learned about what Gee (2005) describes as the internal and external aspects of his affinity space: Dylan's personal progress in Fortnite, the development of the game itself, and the devices that mediate, or that Dylan would like to mediate, this virtual existence – consoles, computers and phones. We also heard about the people Dylan follows on Instagram and his use of social media to connect with his

father during his frequent absences. Dylan traversed between real and online spaces in ways that we may find difficult to understand if we draw a sharp division between the two.

Young people who enjoy gaming are often depicted in the media as loners, reclusive “addicts”, unable to connect in real life with people (e.g. Hymas, 2018). A dialogic approach seeks to question such authoritative and finalising discourses and attends instead to the complexities of people’s situated activity. I suggest that Dylan, for example, uses the game Fortnite in very similar ways to Base Buddies: the interior aspects of the game allow him to gain status by completing challenges, either solo or with his “*score twin*”, while his talk about the whole gaming experience invites connection with his peers, provokes banter and brings them into his affinity space: “*you would probably get killed. I mean I wouldn't cause you know I've got a nice [pauses, then, with deliberate nonchalance] two solo wins?*” Reporting on her investigation of young people’s use of social media, boyd (2008) argues that their online social activity differs little from what they do offline: “they hang out, jockey for social status, work through how to present themselves, and take risks that will help them to assess the boundaries of the social world” (p. 137). I sense this is the case with Dylan.

Dylan’s investment of time, energy and emotion in online affinity spaces suggests his virtual life plays an important role in his relationships and ideological becoming. It allows him both to explore social spaces inaccessible to him in real life and their rich possibilities for temporarily inhabiting other positions of power and control (McNamee, 2000), and to maintain and extend his relationships within and beyond the confines of his physical neighbourhood. One of the first things Dylan does in his new home, for example, is to Facetime Jessie: “*It was very emotional because we... have a poor connection*”. While the model in Figure 6.5 portrays disruption, or even severance, in some of Dylan’s offline friendships, his online social networks are largely uninterrupted by his move. They allow him to attenuate his relationships until he is ready to “let go”. I observed this happening when Dylan eventually changed schools too. On the evening of his final research session with us, I received an email from him, entitled “*RAF REASERCH!*”:

Hi guys I have finally made a group for us so I can keep in touch with all of you and also so you can tell me what you have been up to in the group

Figure 6.6 Dylan's email

Although for various reasons we did not eventually use this group chat, it was clearly important to Dylan that he held open the option, at least, of continuing our dialogue.

Just as Ella's affinity space of scholarship is far from a neutral space, online space is also a space of struggle between competing discourses and interests. The Children's Commissioner report (2018) foregrounds the benefits to service children of social media as a window into their deployed parents' lives and as a means to addressing children's fears. While my research supports this argument in principle, it also invites questions about the complexities of children's participation in an online environment shaped largely by and for adults. Some of the content my participants discussed is clearly aimed at children. The teen YouTuber Ruby Rube's "3am challenges", for example, tap into children's fascination with pranks, the supernatural, gaming, and staying up late. My participants were sceptical and rapt in equal measure with her claims to have summoned ghosts or hidden in toyshops overnight; some even reported trying out her challenges at home. Such trends are nothing new; we might even argue that evaluating fishy propositions plays a vital role in children's ideological becoming. More troubling, however, was that many of my participants had also seen more controversial YouTube content, such as films by Logan Paul, whose filming of suicide bodies in Japan has been described as "horrifying" and "disturbing" (Reynolds, 2018, para. 3). The children described this work as "*wrong*" – "*but cool*".

While a deep exploration of the complexities of children's internet citizenship and the debates around education for media literacy is beyond the scope of this project, I suggest that the tensions are similar to those I have foregrounded in Chapter 5 and earlier in this chapter. They are about protection and children's desire for knowledge and connectedness; about freedom and surveillance, citizenship and marginalisation; and about how we construct intergenerational space. Facer (2012) asks whether we might go beyond debates about children's online safety needs, which, she argues, tend to terminate at restrictions and surveillance, and consider instead "children's rights and capacities to engage in democratic debates about the nature of an online public space *in which they are already participating*" (p. 398). Involving children in such dialogue would, I believe, counteract the isolation of furtive internet use behind parents' backs. It would promote children's ideological becoming, allowing them to collectively explore the ethics and politics of the online environment and to develop their own stances towards it. It would require us all to acknowledge our collective

responsibility to manage that shared space in ways that recognise children not as adults-in-waiting but as citizens.

In this chapter I have discussed affinity spaces the children inhabit and create: the military base, outdoor play, scholarship and online spaces. These offer children opportunities for connection, belonging and development, and may help to mitigate the dislocating effects of mobility in their lives, but they are also spaces in which the children must navigate competing discourses and interests. Whether we are considering children's online participation or their wider social interactions, my key argument is that we should create spaces for dialogue with children, in which we take seriously and sensitively their desire to engage with and make sense of the world. To conclude this chapter, I return to the multimodal pieces I have presented here and consider them as illustrations of the way in which the research group became one such dialogic space. I examine how unsettling curricular boundaries and discourses of individual success afforded rich meaning-making opportunities.

6.5 Reflections on meaning-making in the third space of the research group

The sophistication of the children's meaning-making during the project brings to mind Kress's (1997) observation that children frequently "make comments which are so incisive that we can only wonder at the precision of their insights" (p. 87). It concerns me, however, that the school curriculum may actually impede such complex meaning-making, for several reasons. In the curriculum, knowledge is carefully corralled into separate conceptual and timetabled containers. This is often the case even in primary schools, despite their potential for cross-curricular learning. In my school, for example, although each class had termly themes, such as "Africa", or "The Romans", learning was packaged into separate subjects, each with its own subject leader who advised teachers on content, policy and practice and monitored teaching. (Literacy was conceptualised as two separate entities, reading and writing, led by two subject leaders.) We also assessed the children's work against predefined, subject-specific criteria. In this context, each text created by a child was read by its teacher audience predominantly as evidence of the acquisition of certain knowledge or skills – the ability to identify or use complex language structures or technical artistic skills, for example – rather than for its meaningful content. Thus the child's meanings were often secondary to the form in which

they were presented. We even specified via success criteria the evidence we wanted to see in each piece of artwork.

Lying somewhere on the borders of, and beyond, these subjects, and holding their meaning not as evidence of attainment in writing, art or geography, but in their multimodal synergy, such pieces as Jessie's, Ella's and Dylan's might have no space in school. Similarly, the quality of their artwork might go unrecognised within the assessment rubrics of individual subjects. Our research space offered, then, a unique third space that allowed meaning-making too complex to be engaged within narrow conceptualisations of curricular knowledge and quality. It allowed the children to draw on the rich resources they have at their disposal when curricular border-crossing is legitimated and quality is not defined by age-related descriptors.

The word curriculum originally meant a race course (Barnhart, 1988), and, with its predetermined content and given timescales, I suggest it still retains traces of that meaning. As a teacher, I often felt our emphasis on pace rarely allowed children time to reflect on their learning. In the research group, in contrast, we made meaning slowly and meanderingly. The children were able to return to subjects that concerned them and reflect and build upon ideas explored before. The pieces discussed in this chapter are not isolated texts, but, following Bakhtin, links in a chain of utterances. Dylan's painting and sculpture speak to me, for example, of a gradual move from raw affect to the ability to articulate his emotions, literally to put a shape to them. Similarly, Jessie and Ella's texts were responses to another piece Ella had created five weeks previously (Figure 6.7). This had clearly initiated much invisible reflection, which surfaced in the later pieces (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). We see a deeper and expanded argument in Ella's new text, but what particularly fascinates me is how Jessie has taken up and developed Ella's image of the trapped child in a tiny rectangle, and brought it, and the ideas of captivity and exploration, into dialogue with her own experience, to create something entirely new.

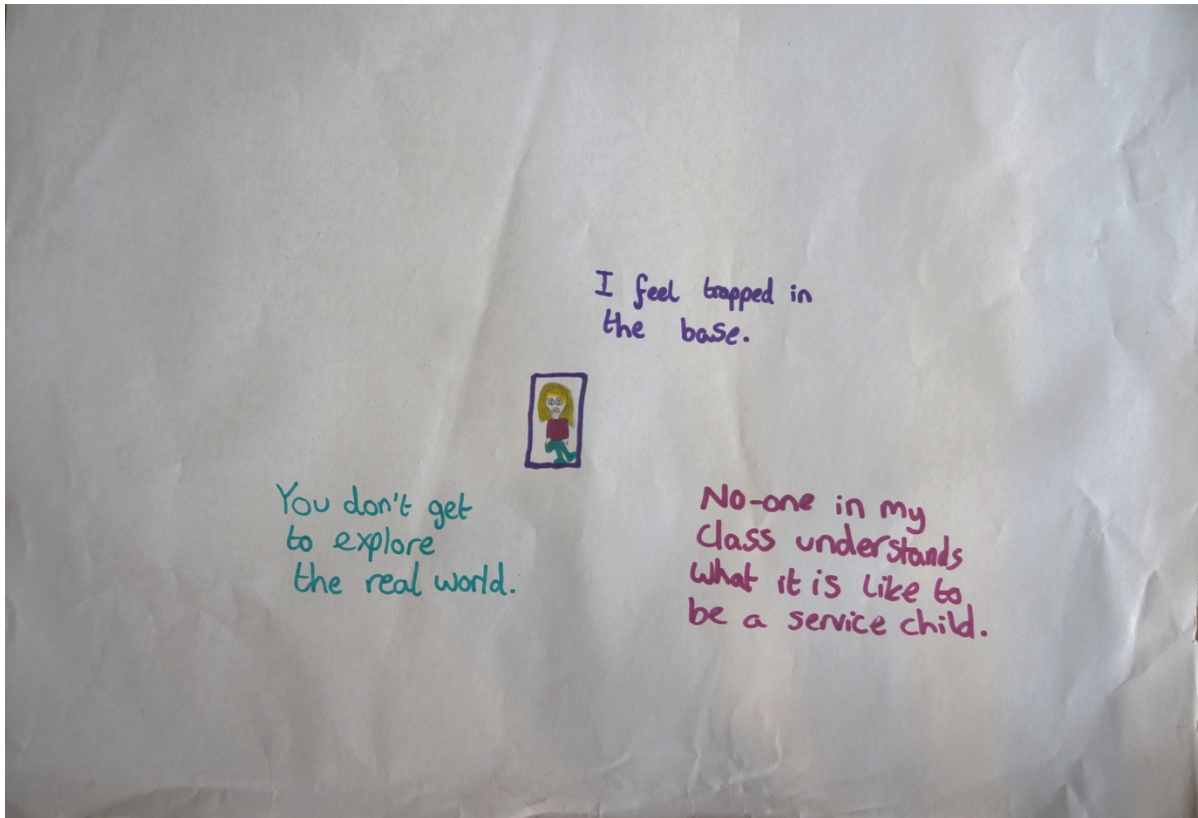
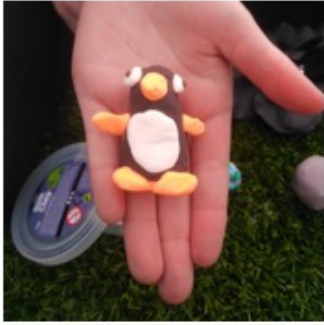


Figure 6.7 Ella's earlier "trapped" piece

This also illustrates the importance of a space of fellowship rather than competition. When children are valued on their individual performance of a task, imitation is understood as cheating, as subtracting from another's credit. Thus, as I argue further in Section 7.4, a performative culture causes friction and discourages harmonious relationships. However, such a culture is based on the epistemological position that creativity is an individual accomplishment. Despite the pervasiveness of this individualising discourse, however, this is only one way of understanding creativity. Dialogism allows us instead to consider creativity as the recontextualisation of others' utterances (Pennycook, 2007). From this perspective, no one has anything to lose if one person redevelops another's idea; indeed, all stand to gain as ideas are collectively deepened and expanded. In Chapter 5 I described the children as collectively articulate; here I might describe them as collectively creative, enabled by the culture of the developing third space which deliberately unsettled discourses of individual success. This, I suggest, is an important contribution to knowledge, and I expand upon it towards the end of the next chapter, presenting evidence for what happens to fellowship and emotions when

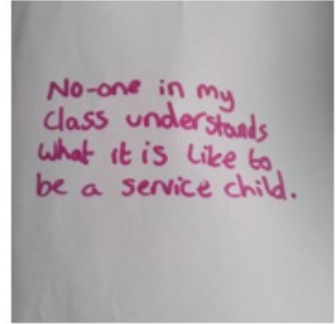
learning is imagined not as competitive but as collaborative. I start the chapter, however, with something that was evident from even before the start of the fieldwork: the children's overwhelming concern with relationships, and particularly their relationships with their parents.



Chapter 7

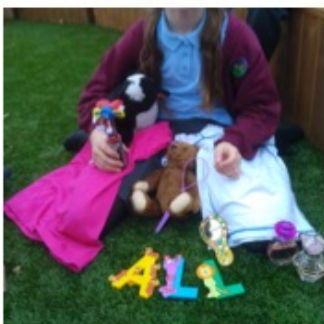
Learning

from the fieldwork:



Relationships, objects

and affect



7.1 Introduction

Threading through all the activity in the research group is the children's preoccupation with relationships. Whatever the topic under consideration – school, play, social media, politics – in a sense, our research is all about relationships: with family, peers, teachers or neighbours. I have already mentioned several examples of this. The discussion about the conflict between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un is largely about the safety of the children's families: "*shooting missiles at a plane my dad would be in*". Talk of living on the base is, similarly, largely about relationships: police officers, neighbours and playmates; conviviality, kindnesses and support; surveillance and control; friendships and losses. When describing her future, Ella imagines the friends she will share it with. Moving house is chiefly about relationships too, and about maintaining social networks across geographical distance.

In this chapter I focus on three areas of interest: parents' deployment, classroom relationships, and relationships in the research group. I consider how relationships are interwoven with space and place, temporality, institutional demands and ideological becoming. I also discuss the children's and their families' uses of "evocative objects" (Turkle, 2007, p. 5) in several ways: to mediate love across distances, as utterances, as reflective tools and to create "narratives of the self" (Erstad et al., 2009, p. 100). Miller (2010) argues that "the study of material culture is at least as effective a route to the anthropology of relationships and the constitution or dissolving of personhood as any attempt to confront the nature of relationships directly" (pp. 152-153). This stance certainly resonates with my experience in this research.

7.2 Parents' deployment

Reflecting the increased burden of deployment on a shrinking but ever-busier armed forces population, every child in the research group experienced regular parental absence during the fieldwork. Partings, absences and homecomings, changing patterns of parenting, and shifting family dynamics and logistics are features of their lives. And seldom are children dealing solely with deployments. Often these are layered with other life-changing events, such as home or school moves, as well as the everyday joys and challenges of childhood; something that research that focuses exclusively on deployment takes insufficiently into account.

focus on diagnosis, preventative factors and therapy suggests there are normal and abnormal responses to deployment, and interventions that can be devised and applied to mitigate the risks or correct abnormalities.

A commonly-used typology is the “cycle of deployment” (Logan, 1987, para. 1). This conceptualises deployment as a series of seven stages, each of which triggers typical behavioural and emotional responses. The posited stages include: anticipation of loss as families prepare for deployment; detachment and withdrawal at the parting; “emotional disorganisation” (para. 10) followed by recovery and stabilisation as families learn to cope without the absent parent; and so on. In this model, later stages overlap with anticipation of the next deployment. This model, although developed via common sense rather than empirical evidence (Farrell-Wright, 2011), features in resources supplied to families and schools by organisations such as Families Federations and SCISS¹. It may provide a helpful reminder to practitioners that deployment is a complex, prolonged, changing and repeated experience of anticipation, separation and reunion. It may also offer reassurance to families. In my fieldwork, Ella mentioned the deployment cycle, which suggests that the concept is circulating widely.

Yet it is important not to consider the framework as the last word about deployment. No two deployments – or families or children – are alike. Parental absences differ in timings and nature; families deal with them and children experience them in unique ways. For my participants, they varied from planned four-month overseas deployments, part of long-term defence strategy, to frequent, brief deployments at short notice – disaster relief, for example; from training courses within the UK to weekly commuting, an increasingly common practice as families purchase permanent homes off-base. Weekly commuting was my own childhood experience for many years, leaving me with vivid memories of tearful partings and precious but intense family holidays. Many children experience all these types of deployment at different times in their lives or even concurrently.

Rather than evaluating the cycle of deployment model or developing an alternative framework, in this section I discuss the aspects of deployment that the children say concern them most. I present three pieces of evidence: a map, timeline and poem created by Ella

¹ The organisation Service Children in State Schools

(Figure 7.2), a section of transcribed dialogue from the very first session with the group, and a clay model created by Archie (Figure 7.6). These texts all illustrate the children's intense desire to talk about their parents' absences, and introduce many aspects of deployment that matter to them: the emotional impact, communicating across time zones, partings and homecomings, fears for their parents' safety, and other people's lack of understanding. In my discussion of these I further consider the meaning-making process itself: the ways in which the children used multimodal texts within the third space of the research group as mediational tools for sophisticated reflection.

7.2.1 "When he goes away I'm really sad"

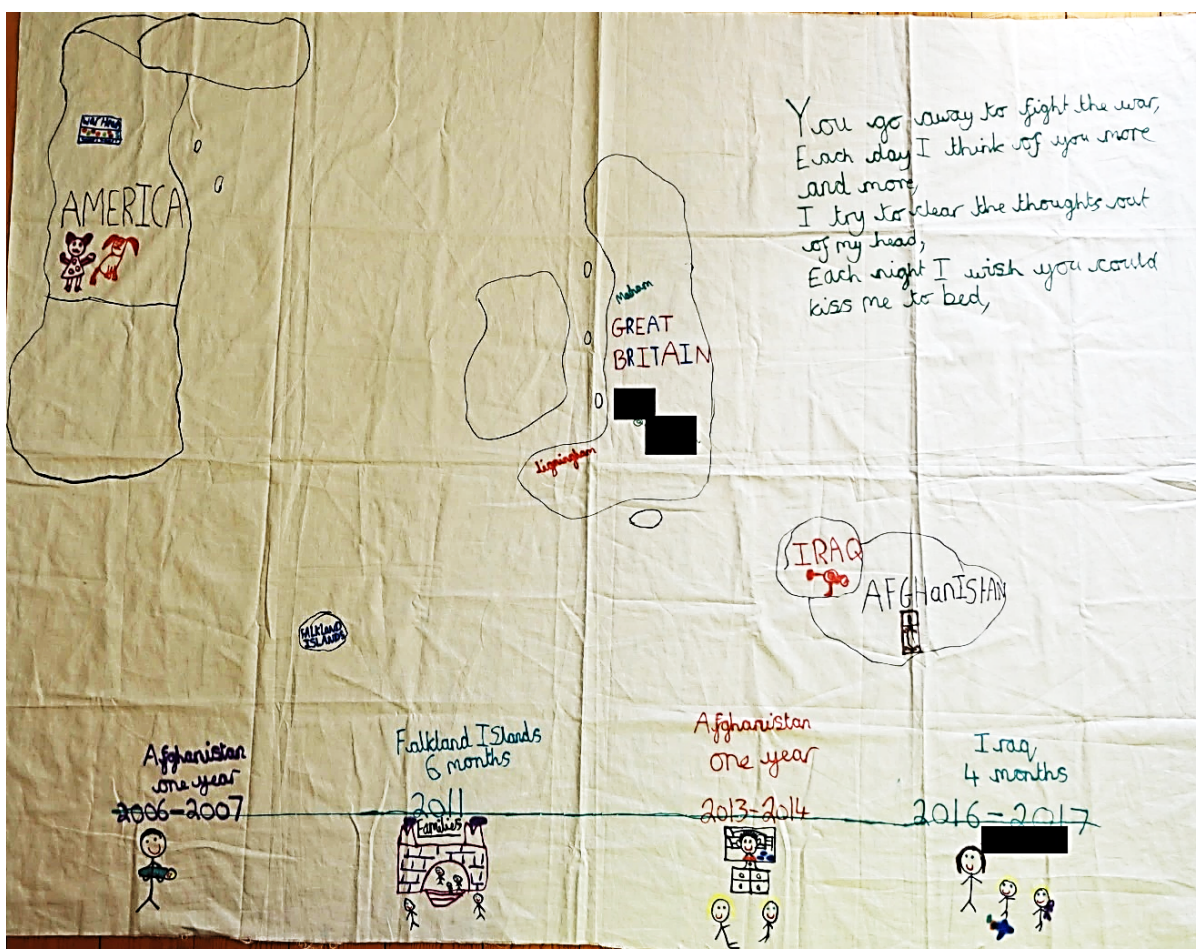


Figure 7.2 Ella's map

In this very early session in the fieldwork, the Year 4 children were not in school, but Ella still wanted to meet, so it was just the two of us. I had brought various materials, and, rummaging

through them, Ella chose a large piece of fabric, announcing she wanted to make a map. She puzzled about how she might do this; after a few moments she sat bolt upright:

Maybe we, um should, like... do the places where like our parents have been? And then we could write stuff like, "I feel safer when my dad is more closer to me, like a country closer." And then you could write for every place he goes, or she, you do, like, how you feel when they go to this place?

Thus with very little direction from me about what she might do, although she knew our guiding question ("What's it like to be a service child in this school?"), Ella used the session to explore her feelings about her father's absences and their effect on their relationship and her sense of safety.

She started by designing her map on paper and then copying it to the fabric, bringing to it her geographical knowledge gained from following her father's travels from a distance. Few UK ten-year-olds, I suggest, are able to map the approximate locations of Iraq, Afghanistan and the Falkland Islands from memory. Moje and colleagues (2004) argue that third space is created by the bringing together of knowledge and discourses gained from different spaces of young people's lives. In this activity, Ella was not only bringing her knowledge from home into school, but also integrating cognitive and affective knowledge. This was not only legitimated in the third space we were creating, but also served to construct that third space. At the same time, we were also tentatively renegotiating, or thirthing, our roles. Initially, Ella clearly positioned me as a teacher, prompting me to set parameters for the task and apologising for her "very bad drawing". She said she would convert her initial stick-figures into "proper" pictures, reflecting perhaps a learnt expectation of what constitutes good-quality drawing. I resisted this positioning, handing back the design decisions to Ella, and trying to show that I was interested in her meanings rather than in judging her drawing. Gradually I observed Ella becoming less diffident about her ideas and adding features to her text without deferring to me. She decided not to redraw her stick-figures, recognising that they sufficed for the meanings she wanted to make. Throughout the activity, Ella also talked, adding a layer of spoken text which helped me understand both her meaning-making process and how she wanted her images – and herself – understood.

In this map, Great Britain is at the centre of Ella's world, represented by its size relative to the other countries, its central position (although this also reflects the maps Ella is familiar with) and alternating red and blue lettering, suggesting the union flag and a certain patriotism,

unsurprising in a service child. Ella has also labelled the RAF bases that she has lived on. Other countries are personalised with objects her father brought back for her: a wooden toy he made in Iraq and a money box from Afghanistan (Figure 7.3); sweets and cuddly toys from America. This is a very personal map, showing how the world is mediated to Ella by her father's love for her, reified in gifts he has made and bought. I discuss the importance of such objects "as companions to our emotional lives" (Turkle, 2007, p. 5) in Section 7.3.



Figure 7.3 Detail from Ella's map

Having designed her map, Ella realised places were not enough; she needed a temporal dimension too, and she decided to incorporate a timeline – an extraordinarily sophisticated idea, encouraged, I suggest, by the open-ended activity with no predetermined objectives or time pressure. For each entry on the timeline, Ella sketched a memory, or family memory, from each of her father's deployments. The first image (Figure 7.4), for example, shows a smiling Dad holding baby Ella below the words "Afghanistan one year 2006-2007". Ella tells the story of being born during her father's year-long deployment:

He went away in, like literally just before, so he went like on the beginning of August and then he came back like in August when I was nearly one, so he didn't really see me as a baby... my mum didn't tell him if it was a girl or a boy. And my dad thought it was a boy. He came back with loads of boy gifts.

Ella's understanding of herself, then, is bound up from the very start with her father's absences. She also describes this story from her father's point of view; it is a collective memory, part of her family culture, and she is aware of both its poignancy and potential for

humour. By combining images, dates, written and spoken text, then, Ella is creating a “narrative of the self” (Erstad et al., 2009, p. 100), bound up in spaces, time and affect.



Figure 7.4 Detail from Ella's timeline: meeting her dad for the first time

The other images on the timeline depict a family support group with a bouncy castle, a Facetime conversation streamed to the TV, and the school's Red Arrows Club. Thus Ella portrays service children and their families drawing on social networks and technologies which support them through deployment. However, the timeline acted not only as a representation, but also as an “other” way of understanding her life, which provided Ella with a moment of insight:

In total, if my dad was to do this all in one, I wouldn't see him, for two years and ten months... Nearly three years... I'm eleven this year. So I'm ten at the moment. So, if he was still away, so let's say he started it in September, I wouldn't see him till I was like, fourteen, thirteen.

This, I sensed, was an example of the kind of deep learning that happens when someone encounters other ways of seeing and knowing. The dialogic tension between narrating familiar family stories and making the timeline provided Ella, I believe, with a new understanding of just how much her father had been absent from her life. Being thirteen or fourteen was an unimaginably long way off. I remember being concerned that this idea might cause Ella distress. She did not dwell on it, however, focusing on practicalities: “So it's better to have it more split up... Like six months”.

The final element of Ella's multimodal text is a poem, again something she proposed herself, feeling perhaps that the map and timeline needed an affective dimension. Figure 7.5 shows her draft version:

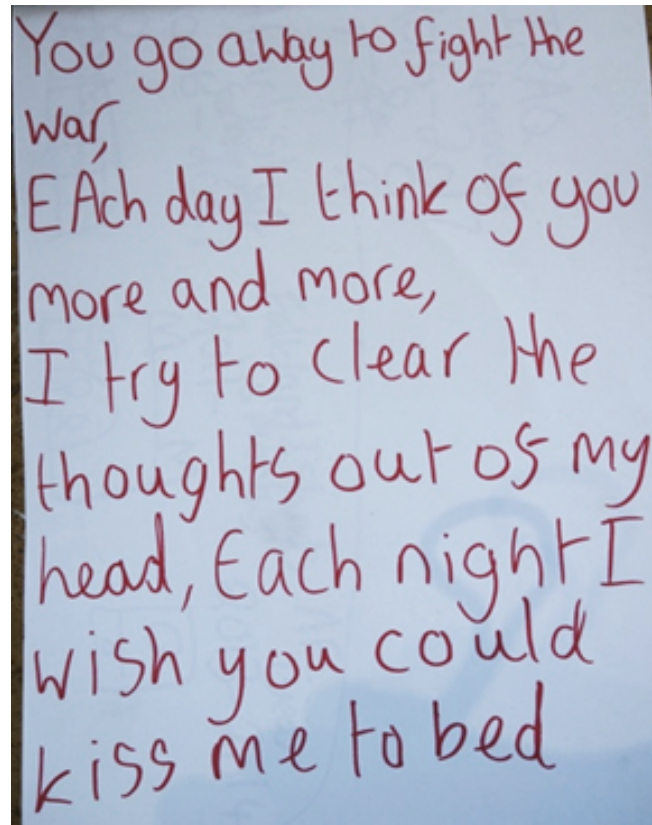


Figure 7.5 Ella's poem

This is quite clearly a love-poem to her father, which movingly describes Ella's longing for his presence and her struggle to manage her feelings by "clear[ing] the thoughts out of my head". Ella wrote this poem in minutes; her handwriting reflects how she started slowly, contemplating whether it should rhyme, then stopped talking and finished it at great pace. I sensed she was self-conscious about such overt sentiment but also intent on expressing the force of her feelings. Again, she planned to set aside her poem and improve it later, as she had learned to do in literacy lessons, finding more "powerful adjectives", for example, but abandoned that idea. With its simple word choices this poem would be considered unexceptional as a classroom literacy text, but to me, its communicative power lies in its simplicity. Ella elaborates:

Like I just miss him more like as the days go, cause like the first day, you just, it's only just been a day, then after it's been like two months or something, then you just

start to like um like you think of him more and more, but like at the same time you... try and forget about him, not like in a mean way, but like, just try and clear it out of your head?

Here she describes a tension between needing to navigate everyday life by distracting herself from thoughts of her father, and feeling disloyal, “mean”, if she successfully manages to do so. Ella demonstrates both a complexity of feelings and sophisticated, meta-level reflection on her emotions and means of coping with deployment. Her poem is also an emotive reminder that, as Edward puts it, a day when a parent is away is not “*just another school day*”. That Ella copies it onto the fabric in her best (and school-approved) handwriting suggests she wants future audiences to read her poem.

The themes Ella has incorporated into her map, poem and timeline recurred regularly throughout the fieldwork. What follows is a section of dialogue from our first session together, in which I was trying to encourage the children to consider possible research questions. I had expected that they would raise various aspects of service life. This, however, was not the case.

“Sometimes you get a bit emotional”

- (1) Amelia: *How service children feel about their parents going away for such a long time.*
(2) Archie: *That’s my dad.*
(3) Dylan: *And my dad.*
(4) Me: *So, is it to do with, just to do with people going away? Cause we might find there’s all sorts of other things that are interesting that we want people to know about.*
(5) Dylan: *What it feels like.*
(6) Jessie: *How military children feel as their, their parents are in the RAF*
(7) Dylan: *And doing stuff without them.*
(8) Keira: *And the army.*
(9) Imogen: *Do they miss their parents when they go away?*
(10) Me: *So, do we want a more general question? A bigger question?*
(11) Jessie: *Um, how military children feel about having people that, don’t know much about, um having a military parent that goes away all the time. Like, if your parents go away you can’t really tell them,*
(12) Dylan: *No you can’t.*
(13) Jessie: *cause they won’t understand. [...] But it’s also annoying when your parents go away and, then like, they start talking about, what they’re doing tonight with their parents, what they’re gonna, like what they’re doing with their parents on the weekend, how much fun they’re gonna have, to us, but, they don’t realise that our parents aren’t gonna be here. And it gets really tough.*
(14) Dylan: *Well*
(15) Ella: *Sometimes you get a bit, a bit emotional.*
(16) Archie: *My dad’s only been to Cyprus with the RAF [inaudible]...*
(17) Dylan: *My dad’s been all over the world, ‘cept for Antarctica.*

(18) Imogen: *My dad's mostly been in a few places in the world; he's been in Poland quite a few times and then I've only been there once.*

(19) Keira: *I don't know how much times my dad's been away. I can't remember.*

(20) Dylan: *And also when like when they're flying away, they go really early in the morning, you don't even have the chance to say goodbye, they just go?*

(21) Archie: *Yeah, my dad tried to do*

(22) Dylan: *Without even leaving a letter*

(23) Archie: *Without he even give me a big hug. And he just went.*

(24) Amelia: *But they can't.*

(25) Imogen: *And it's like my dad he went in the middle of the night and now my brother thinks that, my mum's gonna go, so now he's waking up in the middle of the night.*

(26) Amelia: *Sometimes it's a bit hard when your parents go away and they're away for quite a long time, and then they're like, they normal, they just, kind of.. When they, come in they just don't, sometimes, do anything, and they just, go to bed, cause, my dad is in Cyprus an' that's two hours ahead, so, um, when he comes back, he's coming back, I think he's coming back at about, so it's like, in Cyprus it would have been about midnight, so he would have been really tired.*

(27) Archie: *Well, my dad's coming back, my dad went on the fourteenth of May and he's coming back in September, so I think, he's coming around... so twelve, o'clock and so it might, like midnight he'll be back. So that's about, in Cyprus that's about, three o'clock, cause it's three hours ahead.*

(28) Dylan: *My dad's been away for nearly a year [...]*

(29) Archie: *We could look things up, like my dad's in Cyprus, and if he sees a snake, like a poisonous snake, I could look it up, or poisonous insects.*

Like Ella's map, one of the striking aspects of this dialogue is its affective dimension. It is hard to imagine a more thorough contrast to the "authoritative parenting, buzz haircuts, withdrawn emotions" (RNRM Children's Fund, 2009, p. 34) stereotype of service children. Despite my attempts to encourage the children to suggest broad research questions (lines 4 and 10), they are clearly uninterested in discussing this. They want to explore what they have in common: parents who go away. That they grasp this opportunity so avidly and launch into such personal and intense talk suggests, as Jessie hints in lines 11-13, that spaces for such discussion – and, importantly, with people who understand – are rarely available to them. Jessie's comment that other children "won't understand" was echoed many times during the project. Talking with people who share their experiences is a priority, then, for the children. This directly contradicts the argument (Sorries et al., 2015) that the "aloof" nature and "limited emotional resources" (p. 210) of service children prevent them from interacting with one another.

Some months later, Edward, who joined us from another school, described the research group as a caring space that was missing at his previous schools and those his mother taught in:

At [other] schools, you might have a child coming in in the morning crying because their dad's gone away for six weeks but they don't do anything; well they might take them out of the classroom to talk about their feelings, but they don't care. To them it's just another school day. All schools should do this sort of research so they know what it's like for their children.

Edward's point is that removing children from the classroom to talk about their feelings becomes a perfunctory intervention if simply a routine response to parental deployment. To him, caring requires taking time and effort to understand the children's lives – and the children notice the difference between real dialogue and going through the motions. Edward's insightful comment resonates with what Noddings (2010) describes as a prerequisite for caring: that the “the carer puts aside her own values and projects, and tries to understand the expressed needs of the cared-for” (p. 391). In Chapter 5, for example, I mention an interactive “empty chair” display intended to help children cope with missing someone. Missing someone is something service children know more about than most other children. Yet in this display, missing a loved one means missing one who has died. With a quarter of the children in the school regularly missing a parent on deployment, this display, while clearly thoughtfully constructed and well-intended, may fail to speak to their experiences and may leave them feeling marginalised. Had staff involved children in creating the display, they could have opened up a space for dialogue about different kinds of loss and ways of dealing with it.

7.2.2 “My dad's been away for two thousand years”

As with Ella and her timeline, the amount of time their parents are away is something the children frequently discuss (lines 1, 11, 18, 19, 26, 27 and 28). No one quibbles with Dylan's assertion that his father has been away for two thousand years. Extended and repeated parental absences are so common in many service children's lives that we may assume it becomes routine. Yet, as Ella's poem expresses, even well-developed support mechanisms and coping techniques only stave off the pain of deployment temporarily. Amelia speaks of feeling distressed when a teacher, unaware her father was away, asked to talk to him after school. To Imogen, such incidents reinforce her idea that “*teachers are forgetting about service children*”. All the children, whatever the pattern and length of their parents' absences, want people to understand their hefty emotional impact. Towards the end of the research project, Amelia, who with both parents in the RAF experiences constant frequent and short-notice deployments, angrily describes a sort of fatigue: “*he go, come, goes away, comes back, goes*

away, comes back, goes away and comes back for about two months". She can hardly keep track of her father's whereabouts: *"My dad's going somewhere on Friday; I have no clue where"*.

While the children invariably describe deployment in negative terms, its impact varies. Most children talk of feelings of grief or fear. Imogen, however, who often portrays her relationship with her stepfather as hostile, describes feeling *"kind of multi-emotional"*, welcoming his absence but missing the stability he brings: *"I liked him being away but at the same time it kind of felt really annoying... my brother has been hitting me, kicking me a lot when my dad's been gone"*. Imogen's words point to the pressures on a family of constantly adapting between dual and single parenting and household responsibilities. Similarly, Amelia describes her father being *"shouty"* when he returns from deployments.

The children identify *"doing stuff"* without their parents as a particularly painful aspect of deployment. They crave their parents' physical presence as playmates and at bedtime, as Ella's poem describes. On one occasion, Archie sculpts a clay vase (Figure 7.6), and then thrusts a plastic knife into it, explaining:

well my dad went away to Cyprus, for four months, and I barely got to see him, for Skype or anything and er I was really trapped, I was trapped, like my love was trapped? A bit like this knife going through here, so basically the vase was pouring my love, until the knife trapped it which trapped the love and cut the life.



Figure 7.6 Archie's vase

There is a violence about the knife in this model, an image of violation and pain, emphasised by the traces of the physical stabbing and Archie's destruction of an object which would usually require gentle handling and a safe place for display. It no longer has integrity as a vase. This speaks of Archie's visceral reaction to his father's absence. Archie feels this particularly acutely perhaps, not only because his father is his only living birth parent, but also because he is away for the entire school summer holiday, a time when many children expect to spend more time with their parents. Seeing or hearing about friends going on family holidays is not easy. He explains, "*My mum tried everythink just to make me cheer up, that my dad was away. Nothing worked*". His words "*cut the life*" suggest he feels life itself is suspended, and his idea of love being trapped is a powerful description of affect, of love he feels, but cannot express to his father. There are resonances between Archie's vase and the head crafted by Dylan (Figure 6.5), with its crossed-out features. Perhaps the very tactile nature of modelling materials

makes them a medium through which the children can mediate their embodied feelings, put a shape to them and turn them into something they can examine and present to others. As Maybin (2007) suggests, “texts instantiate a kind of crystallisation of meaning, a ‘this is how things are’ moment of reification, however fleeting, which provides some kind of held focus within children’s continually ongoing processes of meaning-making” (p. 524).

School holidays, birthdays and Christmas are times when the children say their parents’ absences trouble them most and the contrast with their friends’ lives is the starkest: “*Last year we were waiting for him to come home so we could open our Christmas presents. We had to wait till the 24th of January*”. Small wonder, then, that Jessie finds it “*tough*” to hear other children talking about fun with their parents (line 13). Others talk of being “*emotional*” or “*sad and lonely*”. When parents are deployed at short notice, family plans must be put on hold, as Edward explains: “*My dad used to work in the SAS and he’d get phone calls, like at one o’clock in the morning, and they’d say, ‘Pack your bags, you’re going to Afghanistan for three months.’ So then it was really, bad*”. Dylan, whose father is similarly often deployed at short notice, describes his feelings: “*My dad got a call saying he’s going away for six weeks... obviously I’m angry because of that... I’m angry with whoever set up like the trip to six million places*”.

The children describe partings as particularly challenging. Each family has developed its own routines around partings, and these have become important traditions in the children’s lives. Ella’s father, for example, leaves behind a shoe box for her to find, with goodies, photos, stationery for her to write to him, and a recording of his voice on a timer. This wakes her up with the words, “*Have a good day at school*” and sends her to bed with “*Good night, love you, sweet dreams*”. He also leaves her a “kiss” jar full of marbles, each one a daily bedtime kiss, to last until his return. These gifts provide Ella with a positive distraction from the parting as well as daily reminders of her father’s love for her. In her research with Danish service families, Heiselberg (2017) similarly found that “soldiers and their partners went to great lengths to create relational spaces, where sharing of and participation in everyday life’s banalities became possible despite geographical distances” (p. 78). Ella is learning the reality of this in her family. Rather, then, than the one-size-fits-all solution of prayer offered by the authoritative discourse of the school, Ella’s family has developed multiple ways of mediating love, staying connected across a distance, and of coping with the yearning and loss that figure so strongly in their lives.

Such elaborate traditions may not be every family's style, or even possible, especially with short-notice deployments. However, my research suggests that, although painful, the children prefer advance warning of deployments and a definite marking of the farewell. Archie and Dylan describe feeling deprived on occasions of a letter or farewell hug (lines 22-23), while Imogen (line 25) mentions her younger brother's reaction to his father's inexplicable disappearance. Amelia speaks on another occasion of the shock of coming home from school to find her father gone: "*When I got home, I was like, 'Where's Daddy?'*". Similarly, Archie describes not having time to prepare for a deployment: "*Before he went to Cyprus. He didn't tell me. Oh my God, by the time he told me the day before he was going, I was like [crosses his eyes]*". His facial expression and "*Oh my God*" suggest both a reaction too strong for words and an expectation that the group will understand. In Chapter 5 I describe Dawn's disapproving attitude towards Archie's family making a "*big thing*" of partings. My research suggests that for Archie, sometimes, a big thing could be exactly what he needs.

Uncertainty about the timings of their parents' returns can also be unsettling for children and families: "*you never know when they're coming back*". In her research on military adolescents' literacy practices, Sherbert (2011) identifies ambiguity as a pervasive theme. As a teacher I had witnessed the powerful affective impact of such uncertainty in the responses of some of my colleagues to their partners' deployments, and especially when their apparent stoicism dissolved when the longed-for return was delayed, often because of avoidable administrative errors or broken-down aircraft. I recalled this during my MSc research, when one of my participants talked of his parent's flights being cancelled so frequently that "*you stop expecting them to come home on time*". Cancelling a flight is simple and accomplished in a moment, but the anguish it brings is far from simple or momentary. Is it naïve, I wonder, to suggest the armed forces might improve their logistics and communications systems to prevent such unnecessary distress to families?

7.2.3 "*You... don't know if anything's gonna happen*"

As I have discussed in Chapter 5, during the fieldwork almost every child talked of fearfulness for their parent's safety, often using the impersonal "*you*" or the third person, it being too uncomfortable for "*I*": "*If their parents have to go and help people that are in war, then they would be in danger. So the children would feel very sad, cause their parents could like, get bombed or something*". While our instincts might be to avoid feeding such fears by protecting

children from knowledge of their parents' deployments, my participants emphasised strongly their need to be able to imagine where their parents were and what they were doing, to be involved and to know that they were safe.

Children's "need to know" is evident in Archie's talk of researching potential dangers to his father in Cyprus (line 29 above). Snakes and insects are tangible and manageable focal points for his anxiety. Archie also describes how he uses technologies to glean details about his father's everyday activities and create narratives around them: "*every day he Skypes me, he tells me what he does, and then I just make up stories*". We observed Archie doing this on one occasion, using the mediational means of a T-shirt with a map of Cyprus. Trying to pronounce the unfamiliar place names, he strings them together to narrate his father's travels around the island:

Um, he was thinking of going to the tip of Cyprus, um, and, stay there for a few days, then he decided, that was a pretty stupid idea, er so he, decided just to go to, [reading] Zally.

It is clear Archie is improvising here. Yet whether the story is strictly true matters little. More important is the sense of connectedness he is trying to achieve by filling in his knowledge of his father's everyday life. Ella's father uses Facetime to help her picture his life on deployment. By staging pillow fights in his bunkroom, for example, he provides Ella with carefully-framed images of safety and fun as an alternative to the dangers she may imagine.

Without some concrete knowledge of their parents' deployments, the children rely on what they can glean from news, social media, films, computer games, family history and educational resources. Myerhoff (1978) describes such a process: "odds and ends, fragments offered up by chance or the environment – almost anything will do – are taken up by a group and incorporated into a tale, used by a people to explain themselves and the world" (p. 10). Yet as these fragments tend to focus on dramatic events – violent images of combat being more newsworthy than the often humdrum reality of deployment – they may furnish children's imaginations with an exaggerated sense of danger. This supports the argument that "children often have misconceptions that may be more dangerous to their psyche than a frank discussion of the facts of war" (Ryan-Wenger 2002, p. 251). Do teachers take service children carefully into account, I wonder, when teaching about subjects such as World War 1 or Remembrance Sunday? It is perhaps telling that one of the vignettes that introduce this thesis took place as we were returning from an act of remembrance on the school playground.

It is also important to recognise that children may hide their anxiety from their parents. My MSc research highlighted clear differences between children's ideas of their parents' deployments and parents' assumptions about what their children imagined. One child, for example, painted a soldier in camouflage ducking beneath a wall, surrounded by explosions and graves, while his father told me: "*[He] thinks it's all hotels when I go away, that I've never worn green, never drawn a weapon; as far as he's concerned it's all hotels*". Children may avoid discussing their fears with their parents, unwilling to burden them or make them feel guilty, or even, perhaps, to admit to having contemplated their death. This is even more likely, I suggest, if children have assimilated the kind of stiff-upper-lip, little-trooper discourses that I identify in Chapter 1. Spaces for frank discussion and glimpses of the everyday reality of their parents' deployments may provide helpful counterbalances to the children's more catastrophic imaginings.

Social media allows the children more frequent and direct contact with their parents than in the past, yet, even so, unreliable technologies and different time zones create their own challenges and frustrations: "*Keeping in touch when it's like ten o'clock at night in Iraq, we're - it's only like four here, so it's like, he's getting really tired and like we've just got back from school, so, it's like really weird timing and things*". This utterance hints at the difficulty of connecting with a parent when relationships are enacted in brief, intense moments of connection, often dictated by the number of soldiers queuing to use a communal telephone with limited connectivity. When the whole family, including the at-home parent, must share that precious time, it may seem all too fleeting. As Archie says: "*I would like to talk to him on the phone more oftently*".

In this section I have drawn out various aspects of parental deployment that preoccupied the children during the fieldwork, and described its hefty impact. I have also discussed how creating multimodal texts allowed the children to tell and enact their love for their parents and their responses to their absence, but also, at a meta-level, to reflect on their affective responses and their coping strategies. I have touched on the idea (with Ella's family practices as an example) of objects as a mediator of relationships, and I explore this further in the next section. Extending Bakhtin's dialogical principle to encompass material objects, I discuss how the children used objects, not only to mediate relationships, but even to explore and create coherent self-narratives. I also consider material objects in the light of the school's ontology and argue that recognition of the generative role these play in children's sense of self provides

schools with opportunities to better support children's emotional, relational and intellectual development.

7.3 Objects-as-utterances and narratives of the self

While social media contact is fleeting and unpredictable, physical objects provide a more constant comfort to children during their parents' absences. The importance my participants attached to objects – whether brought in from home or created during the fieldwork – was striking. Some regularly struggled in with bulky rucksacks full of objects, and I often wondered what this effort achieved for them, and how to interpret all this. A question I often asked myself when puzzling over the fieldwork was “What might Bakhtin say?”

I suggest a dialogic approach to objects understands them as material utterances, as signs. This is not merely an attempt to slap a language-oriented theory onto non-linguistic phenomena, but rather a recognition that Bakhtin's theories are capacious enough to account for multimodal dialogue, which includes objects. Like words, for example, or images, objects carry traces of their backstories, of affect, culture and ideology, which may or may not be known to the people making meaning with them. And from the very first days of our lives these shape our understandings of the world and our sense of self. However, like words, an object's meaning is not fixed, but made anew as it is used in a particular context, time and place. And, as with words, but possibly even more intentionally and carefully, because it takes place across a longer timescale, an individual selects an object to make meaning for a particular audience. Similarly, the audience's interpretation of that meaning is filtered through their memories, affective stance and interests. Words, images and objects and the giving of these can wound, disgust or make us feel appreciated. However, in their very materiality, objects do so physically. As we touch, smell or taste an object, throw or cuddle it or place it on a shelf, its texture, density, taste, smell, weight and size “speak” to us in ways beyond words. I suggest this may be even truer for children than for adults. Young children, for example, make meaning by putting objects into their mouths; children of primary age can often identify who owns an object from its smell. Certainly the children in my research group were alive to the “wonder of objects” (Maclure, 2013, p. 231).

To explain my dialogic approach to objects-as-utterances, the sketch in Figure 7.7 depicts some of many objects Imogen brought to the group: her first shoe, her scan photo and some new baby cards. Each of these had its own backstory; each was designed and used to address a specific message to a particular audience in a particular time and space, and each carried traces of cultural practices, values and beliefs. The meanings of a scan photo, for example, may be entirely different to an obstetrician and to a pregnant mother. To Imogen, the very fact that her mother had kept it in a pretty box with other keepsakes shaped her understanding of how much she was cherished. The idea that “at the bottom of man’ we find not the Id but the other” (Todorov, 1984, p. 33) is salient here. These objects provided Imogen with material “others” that allowed her to gain a purchase on who she was and might be. By bringing these intensely personal objects to the research group she made that understanding visible to a new audience, inviting us to see her as a precious person, which also involved her imagining how she might appear as a coherent individual through our eyes.

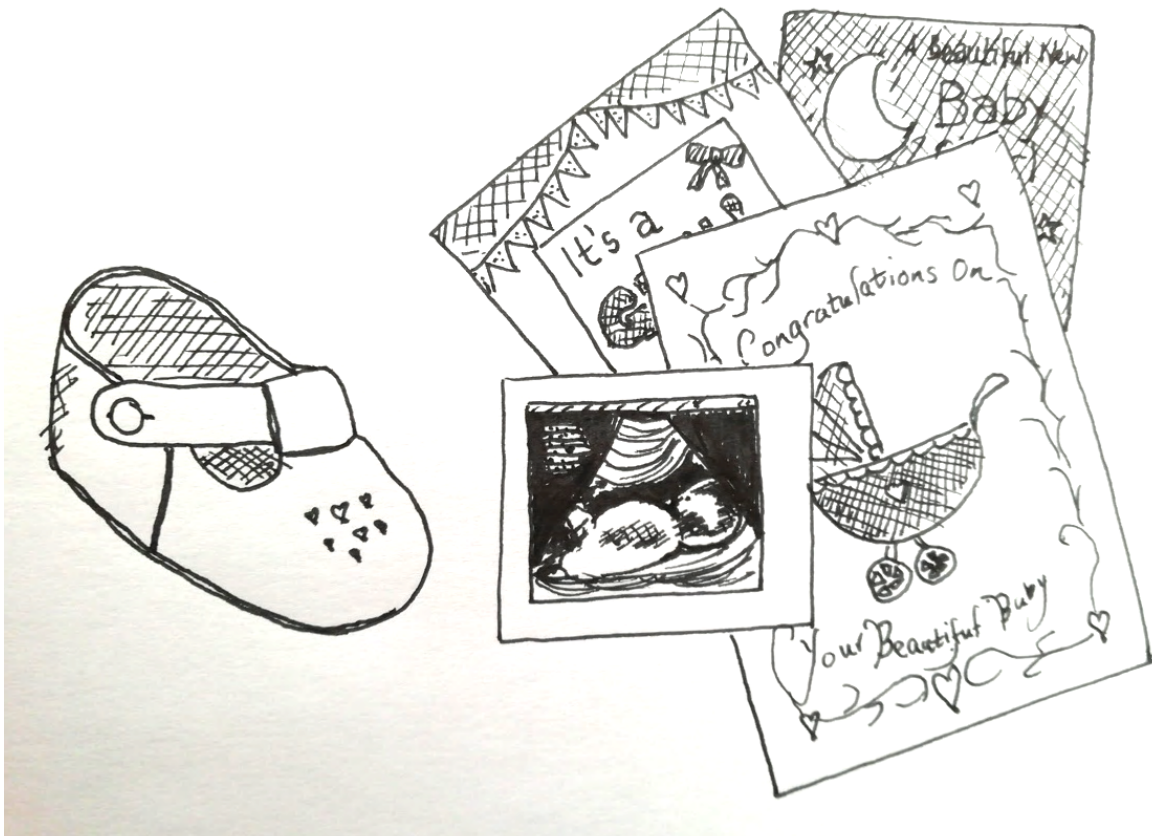


Figure 7.7 Sketch of objects brought in by Imogen

Yet these objects-as-utterances must also be understood in the context of the chain of utterances (Bakhtin, 1986) in which they participate. During the fieldwork Imogen also talked almost weekly of her complex relationships with her two dads and her struggle with the pain of her parents' separation, which screams out in details from her timeline (Figure 7.8). Bringing all these utterances into dialogue with one another allows us to understand how Imogen used the research group as a space in which both to unravel these complexities and to carefully curate an orderly self-narrative that places her at the centre of a loving family. The permanence and solidity of the objects perhaps provide her with evidence of how much she is loved, something to hold on to when that self-narrative feels fragile. All this brought home to me the importance of creating a space in which objects are welcome and their importance recognised.

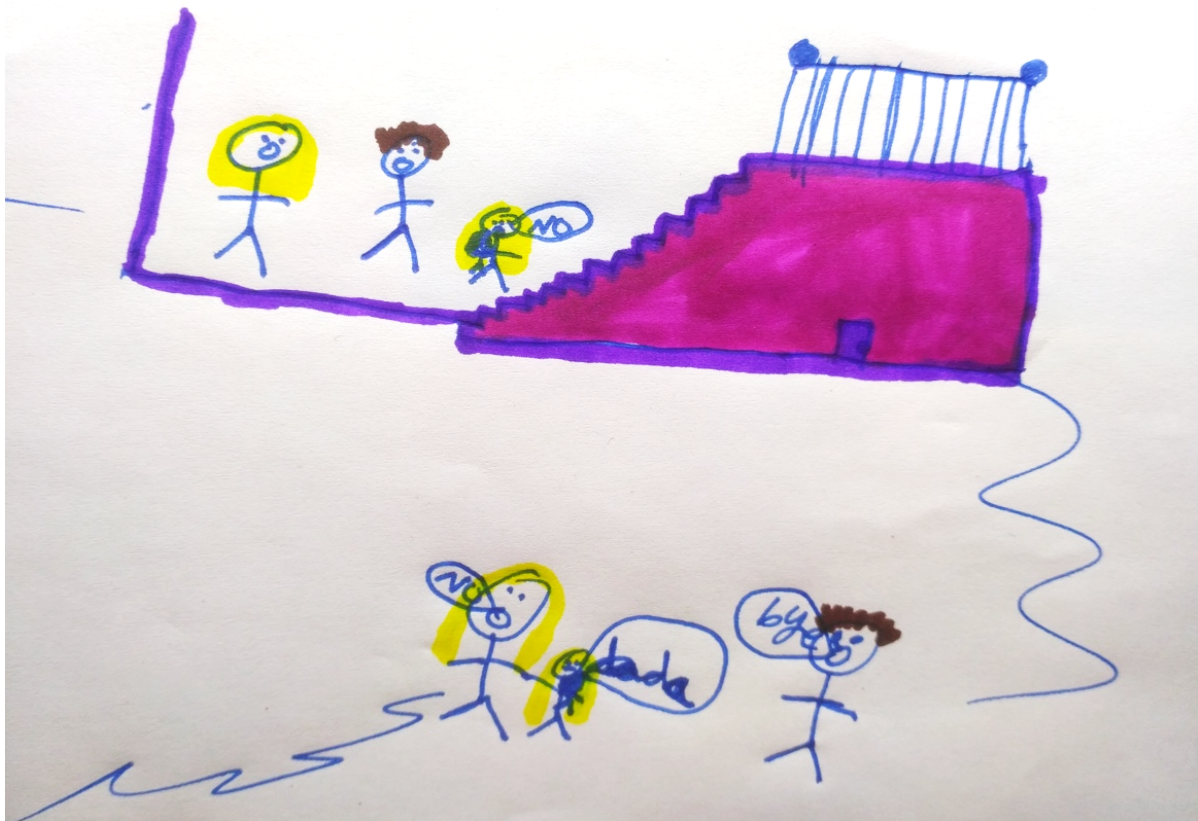


Figure 7.8 Details from Imogen's timeline

Another child who seemed particularly sensitive to the wonder of objects was Amelia (see Figure 7.9). She would bring cuddly toys, her babyhood security blanket, cosmetics, scented lip balms, once a toy electronic tablet, and even the giant inflatable banana. She often made a

nest of these objects around her, draping her soft blanket over her knees and stroking it. She would also pass her objects round and allow others a turn with them. Eventually the stories Amelia constructed around each object emerged. Some were about Cyprus, her objects reminders of people she had known during her years living there. Others were gifts from deployments. As Miller (1998) argues, “objects are the means for creating the relationships of love between subjects” (p. 128). Having talked about “*crying for the whole night*” when her father went away, Amelia’s penchant for soft toys such as her Falkland Islands penguin is not hard to understand.



Figure 7.9 Some of Amelia's objects



Figure 7.10 Amelia's seat

The photo in Figure 7.10 shows a seat built by Amelia, and into which she incorporated a special shelf for her toy flamingo. This easily-overlooked detail speaks volumes about how Amelia's sense of self was both mediated by objects and powerfully bound up with places. The flamingo, a symbol of and souvenir from Cyprus, was a powerful mediational tool that Amelia used in several ways. As an utterance itself, it mediated Amelia's affection for Cyprus and her grief for her previous life there. It also provided her with an entry point into talking about Cyprus. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) point to the "power of artifacts to create a space for listening" (p. 147). Amelia had little shared history with her classmates, having joined the school relatively recently. This was a way of making connections with them, a space in which they could learn who she was and where she came from. The flamingo helped validate Amelia's funds of knowledge (Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992); she could speak some Cypriot Greek, and knew about the geographies and wildlife of the country, for example, but had few spaces

in school in which such knowledge was visible. I also sense that the flamingo, along with many other objects that Amelia brought in, allowed her to represent her past to herself. Amelia's life was populated with people and places who existed for her only in the form of memories or objects. I think that grieving is not too strong a word to use:

I've had to move schools three times. Yeah, three times and, all I have to do is make new friends, leave my friends, make new friends, leave my friends. So then I would have loads and loads and loads of friends, but most of them wouldn't be with me, only some of them which are in this school now. Cause that's why I've got this teddy. It's from my friend in my old school.

Miller (2010) suggests that part of the process of moving on is a sifting-through of objects and relationships, deciding what to leave behind and what still matters. I observed Amelia using the research group as a space in which to carry out this important work.

Figure 7.11 shows a wooden heart Amelia created to memorialise her life in Cyprus. She made the heart in the research group, yet her design process spanned home and school, as she brought in printed digital images to incorporate into it. Her design includes pictures and symbols of her school, activities and the base, as well as motifs of flamingos, themselves forming a heart shape, which she emphasises by cutting around them to form another heart. She has included the name of the base below the word "Love", written in a fancy font. This writing commands the central space of the heart, drawing the viewer's attention. There is also a strong element of harmony in the colours Amelia has used, the pinks and violets of her paint complementing the tones in the digital images. This heart tells a story of belonging, of Amelia trying to connect her life narrative across the disjuncture of her move from Cyprus to the UK, from one school and community to another.



Figure 7.11 Amelia's wooden heart

7.3.1 *"You're just not allowed to bring toys in, not even for just break"*

The eagerness and effort with which Amelia and others brought in objects week after week and the care they took over designing their artefacts in the research group provide evidence that they had a real need for "objects to think with" (Turkle, 2007, p. 5). Toys and other comforting objects, however, were contraband in this school, as Jessie explained: "*you're just not allowed to bring toys in*". Teachers no longer devoted time to such activities as "show-and-tell". These were deemed appropriate for younger children only, if indeed at all. I suggest this is for three reasons. One is practical: objects, it is thought, cause trouble. They get lost, broken

or even stolen. Sorting out such problems is time-consuming. The second reason is ideological and ontological. Children might use objects to “show off”, competing with their peers for the most desirable toy. Linked to this is the idea that school is a place where the cerebral is celebrated over the material. Children must reject grubby and superficial materialism and work towards becoming more spiritual beings. Describing these ideas as a *depth ontology*, Miller (2010) explains, “it is assumed that paying attention to the material is always at the expense of paying attention to the social, the person” (p. 77). A CofE school is necessarily premised upon such a dualist ontology, reflecting the Christian doctrine of flesh and spirit. The third reason reflects policy demands. First, the sheer quantity of prescribed curriculum content leaves teachers with little time for activities considered non-essential, such as “show-and-tell”. Second, there is an authoritative discourse at play, an intellectual hierarchy in which the use of concrete learning materials is considered inferior, merely a step towards the abstract thinking highly valued in Western thought (Turkle, 2007) – as well as tested in SATs. I see something of this in Ella’s talk of replacing her toys with a bookshelf. Perhaps there is a sense also that the concrete holds children back, that their intellect can only be properly freed once it no longer depends on the material world.

For these reasons, our research group became a rare space in school into which children could legitimately bring belongings outside a narrow range of permitted items such as pencil cases and lunch boxes. The enthusiasm with which they did so leads me to wonder whether we overvalue abstraction or insist on it too soon in primary schools. Is it too much of the “tell” and too little of the “show”? Does a depth ontology prevent us from epistemological open-mindedness, of reflecting upon the ways in which objects-as-utterances and as “centrepieces of thought” (Turkle, 2007, p. 5) might support children’s emotional, intellectual and relational development? Encouraging, rather than merely tolerating, children’s use of “objects to think with” (p. 5), might also provide opportunities to bridge different spaces in children’s learning lives, to understand and build on their funds of knowledge (Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992), competences and priorities that may remain otherwise invisible and unacknowledged in formal learning settings. As I saw with Amelia and Imogen, objects may also provide children with ways of connecting with their peers, inviting understanding and sympathy, and forging caring relationships. The remainder of this chapter expands the theme of relationships with peers. First I discuss classroom relationships and then the relationships that evolved in the third space of the research group.

7.4 “These are some cute people that I love”

In a fourteen-month research project taking place within a school, we might expect classroom activity and the curriculum to feature heavily in the children’s talk. Yet this was not so. In my project the children talked very little explicitly of their “official” education. Some months into the fieldwork I introduced methods aimed more directly at understanding the children’s school lives. Yet, surprisingly, the discussion these prompted still focused predominantly on relationships. This experience tallies closely with the findings of a research project (Bibby, 2009) aimed at investigating how children understand themselves as learners. Trying to probe children’s attitudes towards school subjects, Bibby found the children returned constantly to the theme of relationships, leading to her conclusion that “what the subject is, epistemologically speaking, is as much about the teacher and the room it is experienced in as it is about the content or other more ‘adult’ or teacherly concerns” (p. 45). I have suggested that, for my participants, service life is all about coping with deployment; I could similarly argue that school life is all about relationships.

In one session, for example, we borrowed iPads and I invited the children to take photos of anything they thought was important in the school. They then used the app Pic-Collage to curate these; some also added emojis to their photos. This activity was not an unqualified success, as we could only retrieve a couple of the collages from the iPads (see Figure 7.12 for Keira’s), and were unable to use them later as prompts for discussion as I had hoped. Ella, however, finished before the others and talked me through her photos:

this is the chime bar thingy, and I took a picture of those cause like when I was little I used to play on them and I used to like let my stress away by banging on them really hard and then, um, this is my classroom cause that’s where I do all my learning and that’s where all my friends are, well they should be there, um, this is the bench, because I love lunch, and I eat my lunch sometimes on that bench, er that’s my mum – I don’t like her – , er, that’s the library, that’s my favourite place in the school. And then this is me, Dylan and Bailey, cause we’re the captain and vice-captain, and then that’s the, we won rugby, and then this is Miss Darke, cause she wanted to get a picture, and I don’t like this cause it’s got my ugly brother in it. And then these are some cute people that I love, and then I’ve got another one, and that one, [showing lots of photos of the same small child].



Figure 7.12 Collage of children's photos

The photography worked as mediated activity in several ways. First, being photographers positioned the children in a hybrid, third role – neither pupil nor adult – that mediated their authorship in choosing and framing their subject matter. All the children exploited this third role to move with relative freedom around the school and interact with people, and to focus on their own priorities of relationships and belonging. Among Ella's photos, for example, were dozens of a four-year-old whom she found "adorable". That Ella later deleted these pictures suggests she realised taking them was beyond the remit of the task, but she nevertheless enjoyed using them to talk about her favourite little child.

The mediating means the children use here – Keira's photos and Ella's narrative, as well as what they choose to omit – illustrate how relationships and affect are entwined with objects

and spaces: the playground and toys, sports trophies, the library, the lunch bench. Carefully curated evidence of children's learning is displayed on almost every wall and horizontal surface of this school. Yet rather than photographing and describing this formal business, they both focus largely on informal spaces and times. They foreground people and emphasise the ways in which their environment reflects their place and their history within the school community. This observation resonates with Thomson and colleagues' (2007) findings from their reading of school displays: "For children, the history on display was personal and associational, it was about them and their web of relationships" (p. 397). It is notable that while much of the school's activity is stratified into age groups – classes and sports teams, for example – Keira's photo choices and Ella's talk portray the school as an intergenerational space. Ella describes it almost as an extended family, with herself, her mother and brother at the core. Photos of the sports trophies suggest that belonging to a "house" is important to the children: they also provide evidence that children have learned to value their status as house captains. What also stands out is Ella's description of both the people she has photographed and the school environment in terms of feelings: stress, loving, not liking, ugliness and cuteness. What is important here are people and affect.

Hilppö and colleagues (2017) suggest that visual tools such as photographs mediate not only meanings but "might also mediate the social organization of moments of telling and listening and their affective attunement" (p. 370). We see this happening with Ella, who consciously uses her photos as the centrepiece for a narrative clearly intended to have a comic effect on her audience. This explains some of her droll asides, such as "*I don't like her*", referring to her mother, and her comment about her "*ugly*" brother. As both are popular among the children, only Ella could get away with these outrageous comments. Thus she both emphasises her special position as the daughter of a member of staff and sister of the children's friend, and ensures a light-hearted, carnivalesque atmosphere. The ensemble of activity, artefacts and telling works to position Ella as a popular and funny person with a clear sense of belonging to the school community.

The photography activity, however, also brought out less positive interactions within the school. Following the children, who had dispersed to take photos, at one point I heard shouting up ahead and quickly caught up. A few children, keen to photograph the school hall, but too polite to disturb the lesson taking place there, had attempted to take their photo discreetly through a narrow window in the door. Mrs Green, teaching PE, was furiously

berating them, allowing them no opportunity to explain their actions. As soon as I arrived, however, her behaviour changed. This reaction was unusual: other staff, including Maggie, had responded very differently, posing for photos or greeting the children as they moved around the school. I am left wondering why some staff members use shouting or public humiliation as a default way of keeping children “in their place”. I have pointed to similar incidents in the vignette that starts Chapter 4, in which Mr Grayson publicly censures Imogen for being late to class, and Imogen walks with me to the cabin rather than risking reigniting Mr Hopgood’s remembered wrath by running ahead. Is it fear of unruliness, I wonder?

The photography activity is only one of many examples of the intertwining of relationships, affect and spaces that I observed during the fieldwork. The school is built around a central “hub”, a glass-roofed space, housing sofas, the school library and displays of children’s art. Originally conceived, perhaps, as a third space within the building, its purpose is less clearly defined than other spaces. The hub is often used for one-to-one interventions for children considered at risk of not achieving their potential. Keira describes it as a place of serenity:

It’s very, sometimes it’s very peaceful in there. Cause once me and Mr Grayson had to go out there to do some math... and there was only two people, well one was reading with a younger class, and it was just me and him, and it was still very peaceful? And that’s what I like about the hub, sometimes it’s REALLY peaceful.

Evoking a memory of a time she and Mr Grayson spent peacefully working together on her maths, Keira describes the hub as a space of peace and togetherness and reflects this with the two emojis on her pic-collage. I suspect she might also enjoy working there because it allows her privacy from other children’s scrutiny.

In contrast, Keira describes the classroom as a place where “*I have different emotions [...] cause sometimes I cry, because people are annoying me, like once in science, and then sometimes I’m happy, if I get something right or I get a merit or a dojo point*”. Keira portrays the classroom primarily as an affectively-charged space of systems – in this case classroom management systems – and relationships. The children also frequently describe the classroom as competitive, divisive and oriented towards self-interest:

some people in our class, the other people that are clever and like the people that always get their work done first, they always think it’s a race, and if they finish first they always like boast and like make people really angry in the class and fights and stuff.

All KS2 children in this school complete a daily maths challenge. For this, they may not collaborate or draw on distributed knowledge, from textbooks for example. This activity was new to me, and when I asked the children's teacher about it, she recounted a physical fight which had broken out when one child dramatically increased his daily score, having practised the challenge at home. Thomson and Gunter (2006) point to students' "strong sense of personal positioning and capability created from comparing their 'self' and their position in relation to others" (p. 847). While the school would strenuously deny that teachers promote an ethos of competitiveness, for this maths challenge children's progress is recorded on wall displays, allowing or even encouraging them to compare their performances. Foucault (1977) might describe this as a "normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them" (p. 184). The classroom becomes a space in which individual worth is quantified and made visible in test scores and the quantity of work achieved in the shortest time. Thus it constructs winners and losers, and rewards or punishes them. That this maths challenge happens every day suggests the powerful effect such practices may have on a child's self-understanding as a learner.

Bakhtin's (1984a) idea that we need an external perspective to understand ourselves, that "man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other" (p. 287), invites us to recognise the potentially damaging effects of such public valuing of scores on children's sense of self-worth. Imogen recounts: "*I remember on the spelling test I got a very low score and Harrison went around telling everybody. I got so mad I had to go and tell Mr Harding*". Imogen's anger here is an understandable resistance to being defined by her test scores and the humiliation that may ensue. It is troubling that the fight over the maths challenge provoked neither change in practice nor dialogue among staff about what it was teaching children: test scores must be improved, even at the cost of children's dignity and harmonious classroom relations.

Bibby (2009) argues that "knowing and learning are bound up in the unconscious emotional flows of relationships" (p. 52). While I agree, I also think the reverse applies: that our assumptions about knowing and learning (whether considered or unconscious) configure relationships and affective flows. To illustrate, I use a short vignette which reflects a fragment

of a lesson I took part in as I helped out in Pat's class at the start of my fieldwork¹. Most of the children from the research group were in this class.

“Don't forget your success criteria”

“Do you think it's noisy in here, Mrs Lee?” I start at Pat's ringing tone. How should I react?
“Erm...”

“I was just saying I can't believe how noisy Dickens Class is today. Wasn't I Alfie? And he's still talking. Alfie Carmichael, wasn't I just saying how rude it is to talk when I'm talking? Do you want to come in at lunchtime and do your writing then instead?”

Alfie shakes his head.

“Well, if you're going to waste my time, I'll waste yours. I want to see a lot more writing from you by the end of this lesson. Now, I'm going to give you all another fifteen minutes to finish your writing and I expect you to work without talking. And don't forget your success criteria. Who's actually looked at their success criteria this lesson?”

A few hands go up.

“Yes, not many. That's what I thought. Mrs Wright doesn't just stick those into your books for fun you know. I want to see them highlighted by the end of the lesson.”

What I wish to emphasise here is how performativity is inseparable from classroom spaces, temporality, objects, relationships and affect. This is manifested in this vignette partly in the chronotope of the classroom, its layout and the objects within it. That the children are seated at desks to write in exercise books is so ubiquitous that it becomes invisible, and yet it is by no means a prerequisite for learning. But because writing has been identified through SATs results as weaker than other subjects in this school, and therefore likely to attract the attention of inspectors, the leadership team expects that children write – meaning handwriting in exercise books – in every lesson, every day, across the curriculum, except PE. The assumption here is that more is better; the emphasis is on quantity, quality and speed. Thus the physical layout of the room, which also inhibits children's movement and interaction, is tied to policies around testing, progress and inspections at national level and their interpretation at classroom level.

Closely linked to the physical shaping of the classroom is a temporal element. The success criteria in the children's books, which Pat constantly emphasises, focus the children's attention on their lesson-by-lesson progress towards the targets they must attain in order to have made “expected progress” by the end of the year and key stage. Thus education is entirely

¹ I discuss a longer account of this lesson in my article (Lee, 2019)

future-oriented, all about “what next”, rather than about “what now”. From the fifteen minutes Pat “gives” the children to finish their stories, to the children’s academic trajectories, there is a constant focus on driving forwards at speed. This features heavily in the children’s talk in the research group, and it worries me that they are already positioning themselves as “winners” or “losers” in the race for success. Jessie, for example, is proud of being “ahead”: *“I’ve done a Year 6 test. And when I was in Year 4 I did a Year 5 test”*. Invited one day to create a timeline, Jessie depicts a future of career and university. Imogen’s, on the other hand, stops at the present. The reason, she says, is that her future is “uncertain”: *“mum says I’m a bit behind in class but I might improve.”* It troubles me that a nine-year-old child is already placing limits on her imagined future based on her perceived position in the academic race.

The lesson described in this vignette, I suggest, is based on a performative idea of learning as acquiring curricular knowledge and meeting predetermined norms, and of teaching as curriculum delivery. From this perspective, children’s prioritising of their relationships is a barrier to learning; they are “off-task”, and Pat must cajole, coerce, reward and punish to keep them on-task. Describing such teaching as “pedagogical violence” (p. 316), Matusov (2009) describes how “the conventional teacher often has strong unilateral control promoting the only one legitimate activity in the classroom that is non-negotiable for the students” (p. 320). Pat must have absolute control, which includes even emphasising that the children’s time is hers to “give”. Reframing learning instead as dialogic, relational and exploratory requires a teacher to recognise the children’s current priorities and align learning with their interests. Things that might be considered as barriers become instead the very stuff of learning. This reduces conflicting interests. As Matusov (2009) argues, “the student’s question mediates the student’s own learning and creates the most meaningful educational event” (p. 376).

I suspect that my ex-colleagues might feel betrayed by the image of the school that I am drawing here. They would point to the official school values, and to their devotion of time, passion and energy, and often even their own personal resources, to provide the children with an engaging curriculum and extra-curricular events, and to establish a stimulating and pleasant physical environment and caring relationships. They would probably also point to their latest Ofsted inspection as official endorsement of this labour. Yet I was surprised at how little these things were evident in the children’s talk.

There were, however, glimpses of something kinder, more caring or precious going on in school. These, interestingly, often involved third spaces. As the children moved through the school taking photos, for example, people often smiled, waved and chatted with them. In one classroom I observed that a child who found the crowded environment threatening had been provided with a “den” of her own, a mini third space into which she could retreat when she needed time alone. I saw small intimate acts of caring, often by teaching assistants or lunchtime supervisors, and often heard them using terms of endearment with children. Sometimes my participants enthused about a classroom activity. On one occasion, for example, Ella opted to stay in class instead of joining us. This was for a religious education lesson in which the children were invited to practise meditation; interestingly, an activity almost diametrically opposed to the usual time-pressed, content-focused, outcomes-oriented activity of the classroom. Ella later remarked that she would include meditation in the curriculum of an ideal school. On another occasion, Dylan, Archie and Jessie had taken part in a taster session of African drumming, and energetically performed a song for me. Such activities seemed to capture the children’s imagination and engagement in ways that were not evident in their talk of the routine classroom business.

Having explored some themes of relationships and affect within the school, I turn in the final section of this chapter to the research group itself. I discuss it as a third space in which relationships were nurtured, explored and developed.

7.5 Relationships in the third space

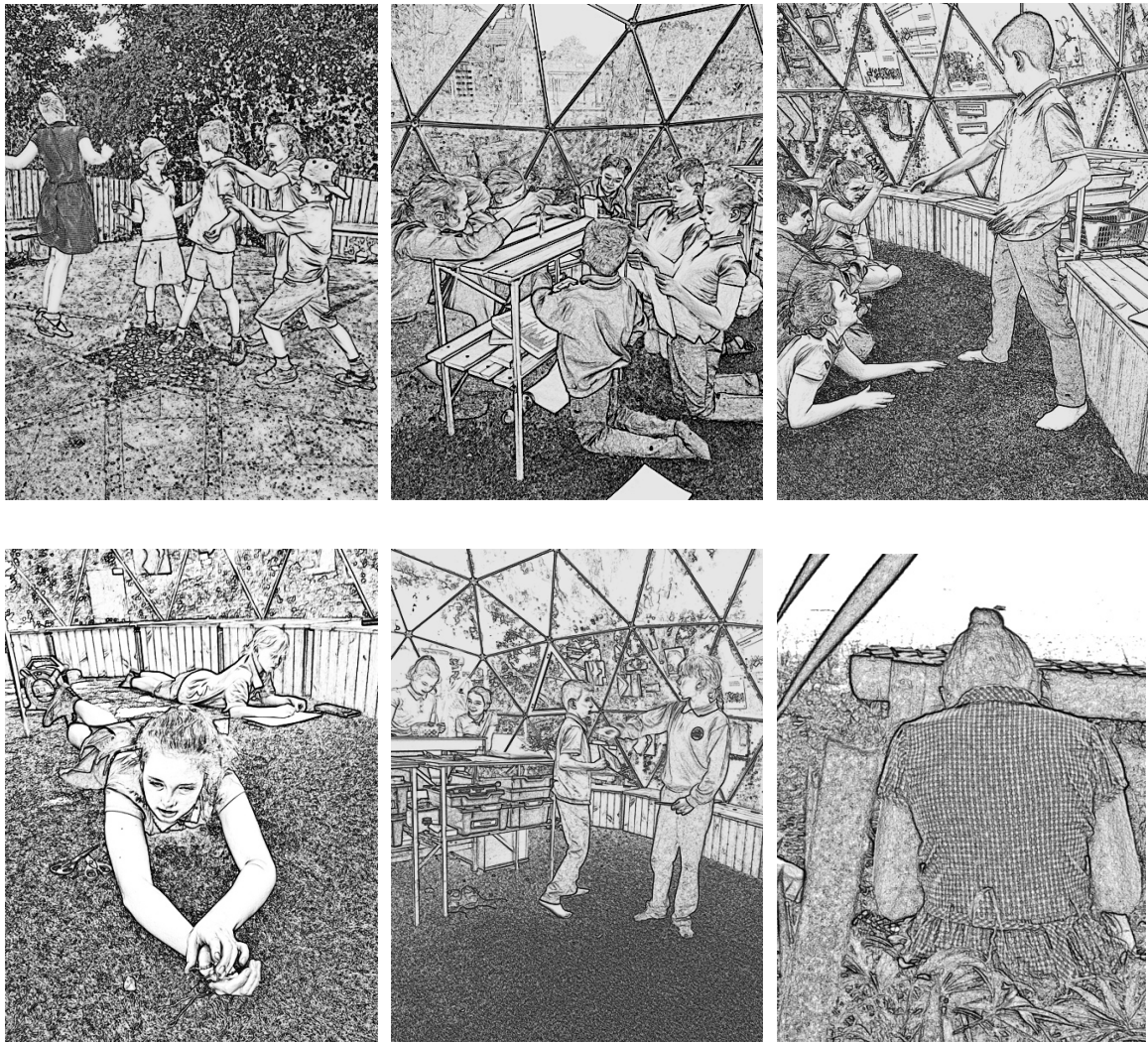


Figure 7.13 Images from fieldwork

In Chapter 4 I have discussed my aspiration to develop a methodology of democratic fellowship. Foucault's (2002a) question "why must one punish and reward in order to teach something to someone?" (p. 83) resonated with me. I have explained how I wanted to create a third space in which the default ways of being in school were disrupted and which opened up new possibilities for relating, a space at the heart of which would be dialogue, care and respect for our common humanity (Fielding, 2016). Bragg and Manchester (2017) describe such a school space as "capacious", which

involves allowing for difference, for struggle and difficulty; for a wider range of identities; a greater fluidity in roles; an openness to the world, a sense of being in process, dynamic, changing, even where this involves discomfort or incompleteness. (p. 873)

Having spent much time reflecting on how physical spaces channelled docility within the school, I felt that freedom of movement, a relaxation of time pressure and a more comfortable atmosphere than in the classroom were important elements in establishing such a space. One theme that frequently occurred in the children's discussions of school was physical discomfort and being sedentary most of the time. The children complained about the "*really hard chairs*", and how "*You just have to sit there and listen*". They expressed a special hatred for sitting "*squashed up*", "*boy-girl, boy-girl*" on the wooden floor in assembly – perhaps this was partly about dignity as well as physical comfort. School would be less stressful, according to Jessie, "*if we had softer chairs, or like if we had blankets and food during the day*".

Looking back over my research images (see examples in Figure 7.13), they depict children standing, striking poses, lying on the floor, kneeling together around a shelf they appropriated as a puppet theatre, and sitting on the ground under a tree, on benches in the playground and on the seats they built themselves. The flexible physical spaces we occupied allowed the children to choose how to place themselves in relation to one another. For her seat, for example, (Figure 7.10), Amelia chose to raise herself above the rest of us, suggesting perhaps a desire to be noticed or to see everything the others were doing. Dylan and Jessie, on the other hand, often created companionable, side-by-side seats (Figure 7.14). These allowed them personal space and a table each for making things, but also reflected and reinforced a closeness that the two children also mediated throughout the fieldwork in many ways: by performing their new secret handshake or rapping in unison, by discussing Jessie's worries about gendered clothing, or describing their shared history and their online activity after Dylan's move. With cushions, cotton mats and their own belongings, the children also attempted to make their spaces as comfortable as the materials allowed. I also provided biscuits and drinks for the children each week, a deliberate act to help create a caring space. Thus the research group acted as a third space in which relationships were nurtured, performed and explored.



Figure 7.14 Jessie's and Dylan's seats

I do not claim the group was some harmonious utopia, however. There were many discordant moments, particularly at the start of the project. In one very early session, for example, when the children had decided they would improvise a play, I had suggested they might jot down or draw their initial ideas. My transcript of this session contains many instances of the children being extremely vigilant and critical of one another; they commented on others' handwriting and writing speed, argued over spellings, pointed out someone's runny nose, jeered at one

other for reacting to an insect. I noticed a particular friction between Imogen and Archie. He constantly provoked her by peeping at her drawing and she snapped at him in response. The children seemed far less interested in making sense of, or even listening to, what others were saying, than in finding fault with how their peers did things. This seems to me to reflect the ceaseless scrutiny, comparison and competition to which they are subject through such mechanisms as success criteria and the maths challenge, which emphasise style and speed of work over meanings made; perhaps the children had assimilated such scrutiny into their own ways of being and relating. After my previous experience with the children in my MSc group, who had been lively but responsive and supportive towards one another, I remember often feeling exhausted and anxious about how the project would work.

This was only temporary, however, as the dialogue in Chapter 5 and those I discuss below demonstrate. I suspect that initially the unstructured nature of our research space unsettled the children; their vigilance in early sessions was perhaps a way of compensating for a perceived lack of direction or control. I suspect also that the reason why my MSc participants had reacted so differently was that I had previously taught some of them, so our activity and relationships in that project had been more akin to classroom than third space. Over time, however, in the PhD project the children's fault-finding diminished; they started listening and responding to one another and collaborating. I began to observe the hoped-for relationships developing. With no rewards for productivity or performativity, for example, eventually the children became companions, rather than competitors, trusting rather than mistrustful. A common complaint in the classroom was of "copying", whereas in the research group, the similar images children created were part of our distributed meaning-making process. The group became a space to which they could bring news or matters that interested or worried them, knowing these would be taken seriously and that we would take the time to explore them as far as they wished. Some of these were "serious" matters; others "frivolous", material from popular culture such as Peppa Pig and floss dances. Even these had a serious purpose, though, acting as social glue, allowing the children to demonstrate their shared cultural knowledge (Dyson, 1994). The research group became, then, a space for solidarity.

One striking example of this is when Imogen recounted a personal dilemma. The dad she lived with had been offered a posting to Cyprus, and her birth father, whom she stayed with some weekends, was unwilling for her to move away. Imogen was asked to help choose, a position that caused her significant distress and confusion:

I didn't really know if I wanted to, but then like when I came back, I did want to go, but it's just really weird. But then also, like other people when they want, when their dads get posted to Cyprus, they're lucky, cause they don't have a dad that doesn't refuse. Whereas I'm not so lucky. [My mum] really wants to go. But I'm thinking she doesn't feel MY PAIN.

The children showed immense sensitivity to Imogen's difficult position. Archie tried to help her to understand her parents' perspective, and realise how precious she is to them: *"that's why they're just trying to stay with you, because he loves you, that's why"*. He demonstrated his sympathy by sharing personal experiences of having a step-parent. Dylan reassured Imogen, *"I feel your pain"*. Dyson (1994) argues that our "sense of self is linked in dynamic ways to that of others who are "marked" in similar ways by experience and history" (p. 16). I saw this in action here as the children drew on their histories and experiences to help Imogen to make sense of her dilemma, to persuade her that she was loved and offer sympathy, and then sensed when to change the subject. It is hardly surprising that by the end of the project Imogen talked of trusting these children above all others. Amelia also explained, *"you can actually talk about your feelings, if you're, if like your parents are away, but then in your class you can't, cause there's not, like, they don't really know what you're talking about."* Once we had established our third space, then, I believe the research group did indeed act as a space of dialogic and democratic fellowship, which the children appropriated as a powerful resource, knowing that they could draw on our collective wisdom and sympathy.

I conclude this chapter with a short section of dialogue from one of our later sessions. This took place just after Archie had learned he was to move to Cyprus. Archie told me while walking down to the science lab that he was *"sad and scared. What if I can't make friends?"* The following is a short excerpt from that week's transcript. Archie initiates the discussion with a closed question:

Switching schools and making friends

Archie: *I'm gonna ask these other people this: What is it hard to make when you're at, when you switch your own school?*

Jessie: *Friends.*

Archie: *Thank you.* [silence]

Dylan: *Hey at my school, I've already made friends.*

Ella: *When we moved, there were these people that lived round, there's these kids and they were just, they were just splashing around in the pool next door, cause they were the people with the slide, and they said if we wanted to go over and then they started like a massive pool party.*

Archie: *Weeeell, I've heard that some people there are quite horrible*
Imogen: *Um well, what I used to do, well when I started at Bridgeton I just started playing with people, and then I started making friends with them, cause they started to ask me*
Archie: *I know what I can do.*
Me: *What?*
Archie: *Um, well, this is gonna be a school on the base so that's good. Um, I might be able to invite one of them over to my house, basically, and then*
Dylan: *Invite me over, I'll come over*
Jessie: *Yeah, I'll come*
Archie: *Don't worry, I'll come back over here. Erm*
Jessie: *Yeah, you'd better.*
Archie: *Um, yeah, so just invite them over to my house, we can just play out and stuff, take them down to the beach and stuff.*

The children's solidarity is evident, as are the practical suggestions they offer from their own experience. Dylan hints that Archie will make friends quickly. Ella and Imogen suggest initiating outdoor games, giving Archie the idea of inviting school friends to his home. He reassures himself that these will be service children themselves, implying that they will be easier to befriend. Dylan and Jessie then emphasise Archie's likeability by insisting that he should invite them out to Cyprus, that they will come, and that they want him to come back eventually. Thus we see the children working hard together, and in multiple ways, to set Archie's mind at rest.

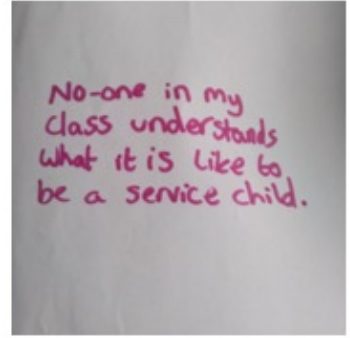
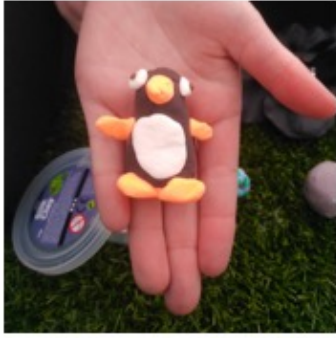
What was also telling about the last three sessions before Archie left was that, having talked very little about his birth mother all year, he suddenly began mentioning her frequently. He talked about her illness and her final year, and about visiting her grave before moving to Cyprus. If others changed the subject he returned to it. On one occasion he remarked: "*My mum in heaven was really nice wasn't she? She was the nicest mum. Everyone liked her. She used to give all the children sweets*". It was almost as if he was taking a last chance to talk about her with children he could trust; indeed he hinted at this, saying he would not talk about his mother until he had a "*really sensible*" friend in his new school. As a few of the children in the group had distant memories of his mother, this was indeed his last chance to draw on their collective memories before he moved away from these links to his earlier childhood. In true Archie fashion, he then broke the tension, rolling up his trouser leg to reveal a gory wound from falling off his "*cooter*" in the skate park, and everyone reacted with suitable admiration:

Jessie: *It IS big. You wait till you see this.*
Archie [revealing wound] *DADAAAA!*
Amelia: *It's pretty big.*
Jessie: *It's very big.*
Me: *Ohhh goodness!*
Edward: *Euughhhhhh!*
Amelia: *That's why I don't go skating.*

7.6 Summary

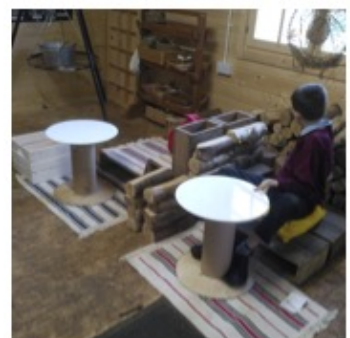
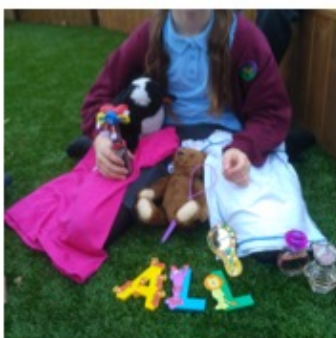
In this section I have pointed to ways in which our relative freedom from usual curriculum-progress-outcomes constraints, as well as a deliberate breaking-down of practices which maintain docility, allowed us to develop the research group as a third space that neared the ideal of democratic, dialogic fellowship to which I aspired. Instead of being a space in which a single, teacher-specified, curricular activity was permitted, this was a space of permeable boundaries, which allowed the children to bring their priorities and knowledges to the group and to explore and address these collectively.

This chapter has been all about the children's ever-present concern with relationships and affect, and about the telling and living of these in the research group. When we consider that relationships and affect are the very stuff of which life consists, the children's preoccupation with these becomes unsurprising. Relationships were both subject and methodology: we talked about them at the same time as developing relationships of trust, solidarity and responsiveness. This was, then, a space of learning, about, from and with each other: learning about how children and their families experience and deal with parental deployment; about some of the ways in which relationships are enacted within the school; and learning about and from the children's use of objects to explore and present aspects of their lives.



Chapter 8

Continuing the dialogue



8.1 Introduction: On the threshold

This is not the first day we are here, nor is it the last. Both the past and the future are part of the moment we are currently living. (Peuranen, 1998, p. 35)

A year after the fieldwork ended, I returned to the school to meet some of the children one last time. Mindful that they might have wondered what had come of the research project, I wanted them to know what I was doing with everything I had taken away from the fieldwork. I was also keen to learn something about their memories of the project, how they would like the research to be used, and generally to “catch up” with what had happened in their lives. We watched a film I had compiled from texts created during the fieldwork; this prompted memories of making these, and some hilarity. I invited the children to note down or draw a reflection on the fieldwork and a message to future audiences of the research.

In many ways, these were not the same children they had been two years before. Things had moved on. The children were taller; they had been through the rites of Year 6: SATs, house captainship, leavers’ ceremonies, secondary school induction days. They were on the threshold of new social worlds; some about to relocate to new physical places, too. Similarly, the school was no longer the same place; staff had come and gone and changed roles. Even the buildings had changed. At the same time, some things seemed unaltered. The children still talked about their parents’ latest deployments and about moving to new homes and schools.

The observation that starts this chapter seems to summarise the moment we found ourselves in, straddling the past and the future. However, Peuranen’s (1998) point, rooted in Bakhtinian thinking, is that such a position is a fundamental condition of human freedom: we are never complete and finalised, can never “know the final truth either about ourselves or... others” (p. 28). This thesis is far from the last word on service children, and I reiterate my point from Chapter 1: it is a contribution to a dialogue that started long ago and that will extend into the future. The children’s messages show an awareness of this:

Do more of this kind of research in more places to have knowledge about us and share this knowledge worldwide. (Amelia)

Please learn from our research. Service children are not heard and you don’t know how we feel. If our work was made public it would mean we were heard. (Jessie)

Do more of this kind of research in more places. (Edward)

Put it in a book so other people can understand how we feel. (Imogen)

*Use our resurch properly and think about our feelings when our perents go away.
(Keira)*

I hesitate to call this chapter a conclusion, then. I attempt to summarise – but not finalise – what I learned about, from and with the children. This is my contribution to our knowledge about the learning lives of service children, but it also speaks to some concerns and priorities of children more broadly. Instead of giving answers, however, I offer questions that might prompt generative dialogue or further research. Drawn from the evidence presented in this thesis, some of these questions are sociological in nature, about how we understand children’s citizenship of public or virtual space, for example, while others are more practitioner-focused: about how the military might take account of children in planning for families’ accommodation needs, or about how schools might rethink the importance of objects in children’s meaning-making. My questions offer an approach to reflecting on policy and pedagogy that differs significantly from schools’ routine self-evaluation, which tends to be based on Ofsted criteria and deals with outcomes, norms, teacher effectiveness and so on. These questions invite practitioners to build a deeper understanding of their situated practices and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin these practices, and to imagine what is possible when we question the taken-for-granted and begin to think otherwise.

I consider myself very privileged to have spent this extended period of time with these children. This unique opportunity allows me to make a contribution to methodology, and in Section 8.4 I offer some reflections on what I learned from this situated activity, from my positions as a researcher, as a teacher, and as a fellow human. Following that I reflect on what I could have done differently, and in Section 8.6 I consider the strengths of incorporating ideas of spatiality and objects within my dialogic theoretical approach.

Before I turn to these questions and reflections, however, I return to commitments I made in Chapter 1 of this thesis: to develop more sophisticated ways of knowing service children – and more complex knowledge of them – than our common proxy of outcomes data. One of the most satisfying aspects of this study for me personally has been to witness the coming-to-fruit of an approach to researching with children underpinned by a commitment to radical openness and a dialogic understanding of voice, and made possible through my unique positionality and relationship with a primary school. In this section I briefly summarise the

insights I gained into the learning lives of service children through this study, and my contributions to various fields of research.

8.2 Key insights and contributions to knowledge

This study points to the considerable emotional and practical impacts on service children of the uncertainties of their changing lives. Through being alongside children before, during and after momentous events such as parental deployment and moving house, I provide evidence that the challenges service children face are not isolated, but complex, ever-changing, multiple, often cumulative, and reach across many aspects and spaces of their lives. Looking beyond simplistic discourses of neediness or resilience, I highlight how service children's everyday priorities may differ hugely at times from those of their teachers and carers, but may go unrecognised.

My research also provides important evidence of service children using opportunities available to them to make sense of their lives of uncertainty. I learned of their desire for connectedness and active engagement with “big” matters – of relationships, death, politics and society – often considered adults' concerns, and I point to a disconnect between the matters children are engaging with in their everyday lives and the traditional UK primary-school curriculum. The children were clearly avid learners, actively preoccupied with their own development, and it surprised me just how little they talked of school as a space of learning, compared with other spaces such as the military base and online spaces. They described school instead primarily as a place of systems, obligations, competition and relationships.

More positively, the children also talked of school as a place to which they belonged. Unsurprisingly for children who moved home more frequently than most, and were required swiftly to establish themselves in new social surroundings, their desire for a sense of belonging and a coherent narrative of the self was evident throughout the project. I provide evidence of the children using the research group to explore and articulate their developing sense of self.

While I had not conceptualised the research group as a therapeutic intervention, it was also interesting to observe how the children appropriated it as a supportive space in which to make sense of their emotions. I highlight how through creating multimodal texts, bringing in objects and talking about these, the children put shape to their affective responses to their

circumstances, drew support from each other, and reflected on their emotions at a meta-level. My analysis demonstrates that the children's carnivalesque behaviour was far from mere silliness and played an important role in their management of emotions. Taking up activist positions similarly provided them with a sense of control and an alternative to fearfulness. My research points to the value of opening up spaces for child-led, multimodal dialogue. My participants described "really listening" as an act of caring in itself.

8.2.1 Contributions to knowledge

My theoretical, ethical and methodological approach has resulted in a broad range of evidence which allows me to engage with various research fields.

First, this thesis extends the limited literature on UK service children. In a field dominated by simple consultations and psychological research, it is a rare sociological study, and the only one, to my knowledge, that uses critical ethnographic and arts-based methods with UK primary-school service children over a lengthy period. It provides important insights into the complexities of service children's lives, disrupting unhelpful stereotypes of service children as needy, resilient or heroic that have until now received little critical attention within the literature. I have made the case that the focus on disorders or attainment data which pervades the literature diverts attention away from the UK military's disregard of children in their own right and from inflexible practices that act against children's interests, and have shown instead that children are far more than passive victims of the military lifestyle. I also argue for a much-needed critical and theoretically-informed approach to children's voice within this research field.

Second, this thesis provides detailed evidence to those interested in how powerful discourses of standardisation, performativity and individualisation pervade primary-school policies and practices and play out in children's learning lives. It offers not only critique, however, but also important insights gained from a concrete living-out of an alternative approach to learning based on dialogic principles. It makes visible the possibility and the challenges of developing pedagogical approaches that privilege curiosity, flourishing and collaboration. It illustrates the rich learning and caring relationships that can be forged when pedagogical spaces are aligned with children's interests and open to diverse knowledges and ways of knowing.

Third, my work makes a contribution to the field of literacy research, providing micro-level evidence of how children use multimodal literacy practices to support their emotional and social wellbeing. It also demonstrates how, by drawing on the affordances of different modes and their expertise with these, children of all abilities (as defined in traditional tests) can make meaning in highly articulate and creative ways, and have important things to “say”, when allowed to represent their knowledges multimodally, rather than through writing and talking alone. Importantly, it also provides important evidence that articulacy and creativity can be conceptualised not as individual assets but as collective accomplishments.

Finally, as an exposition of the ways in which a set of theoretical, ethical and methodological commitments played out in the reality of a research project with children, my thesis may offer interesting methodological and theoretical insights to others who work within a Bakhtinian theoretical framework, who research with children, or are interested in children’s voice.

8.3 Further questions and reflections

In Chapter 1, I cite the claim that service children “don’t want to be seen as ‘special’ [or] to be singled out for special overt consideration or treatment” (DfE, 2010a, p. 2). My participants disagreed. All explicitly stated either that they felt different from other children – “*specialler*” in Keira’s words – or that their lives were harder in ways their peers could not understand. Yet, while they shared certain experiences, the children’s lives were also very different and differed from day to day. One-size-fits-all practices will simply not fit all children, or indeed any one child all the time. At the same time, much of what the children talked about was not exclusive to service children, as I learned from conversations about the floss dance and Peppa Pig with others researching with children of a similar age. It is important, then, to recognise that service children are far more than just service children: their lives are complex and they navigate through and between many social spaces, from which they take and make a little of who they are. And just as learning cannot be enclosed within spatial and temporal boundaries, real or imagined, neither can “serviceness”. A plane flying over a school playground, a song or spoken word may be a reminder of a parent’s absence; an image, object or joke may prompt memories of life and friends elsewhere. And perhaps the more strongly boundaries are reinforced to “keep out” what does not belong in a school, the more of a jolt a child receives when these things find their way in.

My research suggests that dialogue about children’s learning lives is needed in schools. This invites reflection on how we understand and construct children, teachers, schools and learning. On both micro and institutional levels, how, and by whom, are the school’s physical and imagined boundaries constructed and mediated? How permeable are these? How do we, and how can we, know and value the children’s rich knowledges and competences, which are always cognitive, affective, relational, ideological and embodied? Instead of teaching by numbers – “it’s Year 4, Term 3 so it’s the Ancient Greeks, fractions and fronted adverbials, and these are our targets” – we might consider how the curriculum can reflect children’s interests (and indeed all of ours), help us explore these together, and widen all our horizons? What if we constructed the curriculum *with*, rather than *for* children? Or if the curriculum were an invitation, not an imposition? And what if we no longer relied on the crutch of age-related, tick-box norms that encourage us to read children’s work as evidence of attainment, rather

than for its meaning? How would this challenge us to know children and their qualities differently? What hierarchies might this break down?

I suggest also that the armed forces, at all levels, need dialogue about the impact of policies, practices and everyday decisions which filter down to children and flow into all areas of their lives. Postponing a flight or posting an individual may seem minor matters, but are decision-makers aware of the powerful effects on children? I suggest the MoD should fund qualitative research, not only with service children of different ages and in a variety of settings, but also into its own situated social practices of decision-making, to provide an in-depth, joined-up understanding of the multiple factors that feed into those decisions, and the ways in which they are enacted and play out in people's lives. What would happen, also, if we stopped seeing children as obstacles to military effectiveness and starting attending instead to the obstacles we expect children to overcome? Or if we stopped portraying service children as little troopers, the cute and emotive face of the military family, and considered instead the ways in which the military's commitment to violence may actually commit violence on children?

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I discuss concerns that permeated all the activity in the research group: the children's overwhelming preoccupation with relationships; their need to belong and "find their place" in their social and material surroundings; their need also for connectedness, with their peers and families and with the real and virtual world they sense is often just out of reach. I have provided evidence of the children's voracious mining of the media and their social networks and their desire to engage with and make sense of the perplexing fragments of discourses they encounter through these. The thread running throughout all this is the children's active concern with their own ideological becoming, their exploration of who they have been, are and can be.

What, I wonder, changes when schools place care, relationships and personhood at the heart of their activity? What needs to "give" in the system? Frequent school moves are a characteristic of service children's lives: how might these be made easier if policies and practices around school admissions, induction and information transfer were based above all on caring, on helping children form relationships and deal with loss, and on enabling them to maintain a coherent narrative of the self? What if the question asked of each learning experience is not "how has this enabled the children to meet their objectives?" but "how has this enabled the children to flourish?" How might such a shift in orientation reposition

teachers? My research suggests this could fundamentally reconfigure children's relationships with peers and teachers, their experiences of learning and their understandings of themselves as learners.

We need to trouble assumptions that children struggling with transitions are “needy”, lack “resilience” or have “behavioural problems”. We might find ways and time instead to listen to children and reflect on what they tell us. Perhaps they are simply handling change in the way that suits them best. Perhaps we fail to recognise the multiple burdens they often carry at any one time: school moves, house moves, parents' deployments, making new friends and grieving for old ones. Rather than trying to assess whether a child possesses or lacks resilience, I suggest we take a multidimensional, dialogic approach and ask: How do we enable children to draw on the distributed resources of a community – our care, knowledges and fellow humanity? When children are dealing with loss and trying to carve out a position for themselves in new surroundings, what mediational means do we make available or deny to them? In the time- and resource-pressured environment of a school, we might consider how we can devote adequate time to helping children manage change, without making assumptions about what is “normal”. How do we make spaces in which children may hold, examine and exercise power over uncomfortable feelings, rather than expecting them to leave them at the school door? How do we provide positions to children from which they can imagine positive futures? How do we find out from and with children how they want to be cared for at this moment, without assuming all children want the same at all times of their lives, or even that they know what they want? How do we go beyond self-reported “best practice” and “ten top tips” approaches?

Similarly, what changes when we reposition children as increasingly locally- and globally-connected social actors? Again, my research raises questions around boundary-drawing and our construction of childhood; about children's access to information, about how we understand children's citizenship of public and virtual spaces, and the protection they need within those. Previous research has identified the relative freedom enjoyed by children living on military bases. My research corroborates this, but goes further, drawing attention to streets as sites of learning which scaffold children's navigation of the world and provide parents with the support and distributed resources of a community. While I suggest there is a trade-off for children between independence and surveillance, perhaps for younger children the gains outweigh the losses. Policymakers might reflect on such matters as they make far-reaching

decisions about service family accommodation. There are also wider questions here about what parents require to allow their children increased opportunities for independent outdoor exploration, and about our collective responsibility to construct intergenerational public space, both physical and virtual, in which children can participate, not as gatecrashers, but as full citizens and co-constructors. How do we engage them in dialogue about our aspirations and our collective construction of those spaces?

All this also invites wider debate about authoritative discourses and children's ideological becoming, and particularly, I would argue from this project, in faith schools. I am not advocating moral relativism, but an openness to otherness, the key to our ideological becoming. My participants live in a rural, relatively white, middle-class area, in which almost all primary schools are CofE schools. This restricts their opportunities for real-life encounters with otherness. By teaching children that there is a knowable truth that resides in a particular religious text, we further risk trapping them in ontological certainty and discouraging criticality. How, then, might we provide the cohesive community to which children can belong, while avoiding unthinking conformity, the extreme of centripetal, consensus-seeking activity? My discussion of Jessie's clash with Maggie in Chapter 5 provides an example of a teacher thwarting children's engagement with an alternative discourse that might lead to whole-person learning. Rather than closing down dialogue and providing finalising certainties, I suggest we can and should create openings for children to evaluate other ways of understanding the world. How, otherwise, can they imagine a different or better future?

8.4 *Children's positions within the third space*

One of my aims in this project was to create a third space within a primary school, one with democratic fellowship at its core, and to examine its potential for exploring the children's learning lives. This became not only a space *about*, but also a space *of* and *for*. By this I mean it was a space in which the children taught me *about* their learning lives, but also a space *of* learning for us all; it was a space in which we talked about relationships, and one in which relationships were enacted and explored; a space in which I could learn about the real-and-imagined places in the children's lives, but also a lived social and physical space; it was a space in which dialogue was both a means to communication and a way of living and being and becoming together.

In Chapters 6 and 7 I have discussed some of the ways in which this played out in the fieldwork. Our use of a cabin on the physical border of the school was enormously influential on establishing the third space, but other ways of thirding the official work of the school were equally important. From my position, having taught and observed others teach, it is difficult to overstate the effect on the activity and relationships within the research group of having neither predetermined curricular objectives nor expectations of progression or outcomes. This offered the children four things: a legitimate forum for exploring things that mattered to them; trusted people with whom they could share these; a multiplicity of positions they could take up, and plentiful and varied material and social resources for making meaning.

Rather than being seen as a barrier to the “official” work of acquiring curricular content, in this space the children’s priorities and curiosity led the learning. I have provided evidence that this was cognitive, affective, embodied and ideological activity, in which the children were deeply invested. The rewards and sanctions that operated elsewhere in the school to keep children on-task were redundant. As I discussed in Chapter 7, I consciously used various means to develop the space of democratic fellowship. One was to deliberately break down the I-R-E script which can lead to a teacher having multiple parallel conversations with individual children, rather than genuine group dialogue. All of this meant that instead of seeking my approval of their “work” or behaviour, or measuring their merit against their peers, the children began genuinely to listen and respond to one another and develop caring relationships. I saw better “groupwork” in my fieldwork than in thirteen years of teaching. I do not claim the research group was a utopia, but it shifted the emphasis from individual status-seeking and solo creativity to collective meaning-making, from competition to companionship and equity.

Further, positioning children not as pupils but as designers, researchers, decision-makers, problem-solvers, meaning-makers, initiators of activity and activists allowed them to inhabit “other” positions and experience the world from within them. The arrival of letters from the Queen, for example, taught the children that they could make people take notice of them. Some then continued to take up activist positions within their local communities, as I describe in Chapter 5.

As the vignettes and images in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 testify, the children addressed their concerns actively and creatively in the research group. I suspect this was partly because

multimodal meaning-making afforded them “semiotic resourcefulness” (Bezemer & Kress, 2016, p. 130). My research provides evidence of the children’s fluency with multimodal texts, and suggests that shifting privilege away from written meaning-making allows even those considered less able writers to draw upon their strengths as powerful meaning-makers with a keen awareness of audience, genre and design and an ability to effect change. Objects, both brought into the group and created by children, were immensely important in their meaning-making: not only as a means to present themselves to others as they wished to be understood, but also as a means of exploring and creating coherent narratives of the self. With these material utterances as well as spoken and gestural ones, the children hypothesised, probed, teased, sympathised and sought sympathy, aired grievances, challenged and defended, confessed, questioned, performed, pondered and imagined in sophisticated ways. They put shape to nebulous feelings they could not always describe in words, which allowed them to “freeze” their feelings for a moment, to examine and begin to make sense of them.

This invites reflection on pedagogies and the mediational means we make available or deny to children in the classroom. How can we utilise and develop children’s eloquence in the literacy practices of the 21st century? What assumptions lie behind privileging abstract thinking over object-mediated thinking? Or by dividing knowledge into subjects? How does this affect learners? And why drive children “forwards” relentlessly, setting targets for individual tasks, outcomes over a term and progress over longer time spans? SATs tests rely on solo, abstract thinking and written responses within time limits, for ease of administration and marking, and for perceived reliability and validity. To score highly, children must be trained to operate accordingly, and to value tests. Do we really understand how this affects the ways in which children make sense of the world and themselves as learners? Why individualise children and deprive them of the distributed resources available in almost any other social sphere? Is what we deem “progress” real growth? My research suggests that some children may spend their school life feeling they can never measure up, because our measuring tools do not allow them to demonstrate their strengths. In Chapter 7, I provide evidence that a performative classroom culture encourages competition and discord. When a nine-year-old says her future is uncertain because she is “*a bit behind*”; when children equate speedy work to being “*smart*”, or associate reading with “*reading for your reading record*”; when a child considered to need catch-up interventions in writing proves herself to be a remarkably skilled meaning-maker using other modes, it is clear these questions cannot be ignored.

There are also implications here for future research with children. Having seen service children paraded before a conference audience so that we can “hear their voices”, I reiterate my argument that snapshot approaches are ethically and methodologically unsound. Before this project, I considered myself competent at listening to children. I had spent a great deal of my life doing just that. Yet I realise now that much of that listening was superficial, drowned out often by my own assumptions. Without claiming to tune in to children, the intense and extended multimodal meaning-making and analysis in this project, and the conditions, relationships and theoretical understanding that enabled this, have deepened my ability to make insightful connections and critical observations. For me this has been far more than the activity of extracting themes from data and relating them to the literature, but a holistic cognitive, affective, relational and embodied process. I now find myself making meaning from what both children and adults say and do in very different ways from before.

8.5 Troubling the project

This project has not only been a dialogue with a group of children, theory and literature, but a constant reflexive dialogue with myself and with imagined others. One recurring question is whether it was necessary to spend so long in the field. Perhaps a shorter project might have generated equally interesting knowledge? Yet by being alongside the children for many months, I was able to attend to the changes in their lives and the ways in which they navigated those, something that, to my knowledge, no other research with service children has done. Following the children into their new surroundings, I am sure, would have been even more fruitful. Another generative line of inquiry could have been to accompany the children between the various settings of their lives. By researching in school only, I have no first-hand experience of the children’s situated activity in other social spaces. I have evidence of some ways in which learning seeps between school and home, clubs, streets and playgrounds, but was unable to witness this directly for myself. While there were good reasons for remaining within the school site in this project, it would, I believe, be informative to investigate service children’s learning across sites.

There is also the question of children as researchers. In Chapter 4 I have described how, from my experience in this project, I am unconvinced by arguments that research about children’s lives can and should be led by children themselves. However, I do not dismiss such arguments

unconditionally. Perhaps I could have devised better ways of engaging the children in the analysis and overall direction of the project? Or, perhaps with other participants or a smaller project, things might have turned out differently? My experience does raise tricky questions, however, about children's ability to relate findings to their wider sociocultural and historical context and the literature, as well as about children's own epistemological stances – questions we must address satisfactorily if we are to assert that child-led research is real research.

Another troubling question concerns the ethics of anonymity. Nesper (2000) argues that by anonymising participants and places, we risk treating them as interchangeable representatives of sociological theory, isolated from their sociocultural environment. This is precisely something I sought to avoid in this project. Nesper also makes the point that, with will and effort, it is quite possible to identify participants and places, however diligently anonymised. Although we chose pseudonyms and the children understood why, and indeed sometimes used them in the research group themselves, I was uneasy when some told me later that they would like their real names used in disseminating the research. To do so would be a heartfelt acknowledgement of their centrality to the project and would perhaps locate them as real, embodied people more securely within the places that play a constitutive role in their lives. Yet, once the children's names were attached to the research, this could not be reversed should they later change their minds. Further, aware of the enormous work that goes into creating and maintaining a school's reputation, I was unwilling to jeopardise this. Thus, having promised anonymity to the children, their parents, the school and in my university ethics application, and following discussion with the children, I decided to keep the pseudonyms. I have attempted through the vignettes, discussions, artefacts and images, however, to provide glimpses of the children in their surroundings.

8.6 Theoretical reflections

In Chapter 2 I describe embarking on a theoretical journey. On reflection, I might describe this as a dialogic journey, and in three interlinked ways. It was firstly an exploration of theory, bringing my positionality and ways of being and understanding the world into dialogue with a whole host of theories, finding those that made sense to me and helped me make sense of the world, and turning away from others. Second, it was a journey that brought into dialogue utterances from children, my own reflexivity, assertions from the literature, and perspectives

from theorists, each deepening my understanding of the other as I moved back and forth between theory and fieldwork. And, third, it was a journey into dialogue; a gradual unsettling of centripetal, monologic ways of being, and a shift towards a third space of dialogic fellowship. In this section, I briefly discuss this journey and suggest the theoretical contribution that my research is making.

Early on in the project, as I explain in Chapter 2, I found resonance in Bakhtin's philosophies and theories of dialogism. I found in these a sound ontological, epistemological and ethical framework for my research. I also encountered the work of Foucault at an early stage of the work and found that bringing the ideas of the two thinkers together deepened my understanding of both. I have wondered sometimes whether I was straying too far from this theoretical home with my interests in third space and objects. However, in its openness to otherness, its refusal of finalisation and its antipathy to monologism, dialogism is a generous approach to understanding the world. Similarly, Foucault (2002c) argues that "I should not like the effort I have made in one direction to be taken as a rejection of any other possible approach" (p. xv).

While he does not explicitly alight on third space or objects-as-utterances, Bakhtin's thought ranges widely enough to encompass these ideas. I have described in Chapter 2, for example, how ideas of third space are closely aligned with Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and the chronotope. I have also provided examples of these ideas coming to life in my fieldwork. And in Chapter 1, I discuss Bakhtin's thirding of conventional binary conceptualisations of language as either a static code or a tool for getting things done in the world. His approach to multimodal texts and objects, I am sure, would be similar, rejecting attempts to create a systematic grammar through which they can be "read", but emphasising instead their ideological saturation, the chains of utterances in which they play their part, the chronotope, audiences, and intentions, all of which congeal in the situated act of meaning-making. Bakhtin's (1986) dialogical principle, summarised in the statement "I hear *voices* in everything and dialogic relations among them" (p. 169), points to a conceptualisation of utterance that goes far beyond simply the verbal and written, and can, I think, be usefully applied to analysing socially situated meaning-making with objects and multimodal artefacts, and to understanding their powerful role in children's ideological becoming.

Bringing these conceptual resources together is, I suggest, rare in research in a UK primary school, and even rarer is the opportunity to put them into practice by creating a third space in which to work with children for an extended period of time. In this thesis I show how this orientation to researching with children enabled them to attend to and make visible their interests and concerns, and enabled me to bring these into dialogue with the wider discourses and practices that shape their lives.

We have all now gone in different directions, each extending the chains of thousands of utterances to new audiences in new spaces. While this dialogue can never be finalised, this thesis must close, and I finish as I started, with a vignette.

“Give ’em a voice”

I’m back in the staffroom at lunchtime, after saying goodbye to the children for the last time. I’m sitting with Laura, the TA responsible for service children. A few teachers hurry in occasionally to bolt a sandwich before the afternoon’s lessons. The staffroom has been renovated since I taught here. It’s hard, looking around this clean new space, to remember its cramped and cluttered predecessor. Some things are unchanged though. On the coffee table, as always, lies a small pile of Ofsted inspection reports from outstanding-rated schools; on the walls are printed meeting minutes, the school self-evaluation form, a poster entitled “What is Spirituality?” and a sign-up sheet for a teacher’s leaving party.

Pat is speaking in a lowered tone, with an occasional glance at the door. *“I had twenty-eight parents’ meetings last week, we had test week, and now Jenny says she wants the data in by Monday. Well I’ve told her it’s just not gonna get done. I’ve got prayer space too next week. And Pupil Progress Meetings. God knows when I’m gonna do my planning...”* She’s interrupted by the appearance of Sophie, a new teaching assistant. *“Does anyone know where the reading benchmarking kit is?”* People suggest various places, but Sophie says she’s looked in them all. *“Try Year 4,”* someone calls after her as she rushes back out.

I comment to Laura that school seems as busy ever. *“Tell me about it,”* she says. *“It’s like being stuck on a hamster wheel; it’s never-ending. Jill’s been off for three weeks so I keep getting taken for cover; she’s got loads of SEN in that class. I haven’t been able to do any of my own stuff. We’ve got those twins in Year 2, d’you know them? They’re service, both mum and dad are RAF - and I really need to have them in for nurturing. Apparently Dad’s off for four months on Friday and they were off the wall last time. No resilience at all. But when I’m going to fit them in...”* Laura shrugs and spreads her hands, palms up.

Such conversations remind me of how fundamentally I have changed since starting this research project. All is entirely familiar. I hear the same words, see the same facial expressions, gestures, texts. Yet I experience them differently now. I listen dialogically, interpret critically; I feel I “read” more from each utterance. I feel I can never go back to how I was before.

Laura asks me what I've been up to recently, and I tell her about a conference in Edinburgh, at which a group of teenage service children from a local school had played bagpipes and drums for the audience. I recount how they'd marched in, performed with military precision, exited solemnly and then how they'd burst into squealing and laughter as soon as they were out of the door. I express my disquiet about service children being asked to perform in such a way to an adult conference audience; about how rarely people in the field spend time listening to them. *"Yeah, I think that's really important," she says. "Give 'em a voice."*

I think about eight ordinary and yet extraordinary service children I know, and others I've known over the years; children I will never forget, who shared moments of their lives with me with astonishing generosity. Did they need to be "given" a voice? They may have been excluded from the dialogue about their lives, but they were adept and passionate meaning-makers long before I came along. What I think they needed was time, permission and resources. Our project offered them these, and a space of fellowship in which we could all learn to listen as they worked out where they belonged in the world, explored who they were, and imagined who they might become.

Bibliography

- Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2011). *The ethics of research with children and young people: A practical handbook*. Sage.
- Alexander, R. (2018). Developing dialogic teaching: Genesis, process, trial. *Research Papers in Education*, 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1481140>
- Alfano, C. A., Lau, S., Balderas, J., Bunnell, B. E., & Beidel, D. C. (2016). The impact of military deployment on children: Placing developmental risk in context. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 43, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.11.003>
- Altheide, D. L. (2002). Children and the discourse of fear. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(2), 229–250. <https://doi-org.bris.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/si.2002.25.2.229>
- Aranda, M. C., Middleton, L. S., Flake, E., & Davis, B. E. (2011). Psychosocial screening in children with wartime-deployed parents. *Military Medicine*, 176(4), 402–407. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-10-00202>
- Armed Forces Act. (2011). UK Act of Parliament. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/18/pdfs/ukpga_20110018_en.pdf
- Astor, R. A., De Pedro, K. T., Gilreath, T. D., Esqueda, M. C., & Benbenishty, R. (2013). The promotional role of school and community contexts for military students. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 16(3), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-013-0139-x>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination* (M. Holquist, Ed., C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984a). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed., Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984b). *Rabelais and his world* (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (V. W. McGee, Trans., C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Eds.). University of Texas Press.

- Barnes, J. (2017, December 16). North Korea THREAT: Donald Trump is 'DEADLY SERIOUS' about military strike on Kim Jong-un. *Daily Express*.
<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/892913/North-Korea-news-World-War-3-Donald-Trump-Kim-Jong-un>
- Barnhart, R. (1988). *The Chambers dictionary of etymology*. Chambers.
- Basham, V. M. (2016). Gender, race, militarism and remembrance: The everyday geopolitics of the poppy. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 23(6), 883–896.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1090406>
- Bazerman, C. (2004). Intertextualities: Volosinov, Bakhtin, literary theory, and literacy studies. In A. F. Ball & S. W. Freedman (Eds.), *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning* (pp. 53–65). Cambridge University Press.
- Bezemer, J., & Kress, G. (2016). *Multimodality, learning and communication: A social semiotic frame*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Bibby, T. (2009). How do children understand themselves as learners? Towards a learner-centred understanding of pedagogy. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 17(1), 41–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360902742852>
- Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2009). Meaning-making as dialogic process: Official and carnival lives in the language classroom. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 8(4), 236–253.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348450903130413>
- Blommaert, J., & Dong, J. (2010). *Ethnographic fieldwork : A beginner's guide*. Multilingual Matters.
- boyd, d. (2008). Why youth ♥ social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, Identity and Social Media* (pp. 119–142). The MIT Press.
- Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., Mmari, K., & Blum, R. (2010). School transitions among military adolescents : A qualitative study of stress and coping. *School Psychology Review*,

39(1), 84–105.

Bragg, S. (2011). “Now it’s up to us to interpret it”: ‘Youth voice’ and visual methods. In P. Thomson & J. Sefton-Green (Eds.), *Researching creative learning: Methods and issues*. (pp. 88-103). Routledge.

Bragg, S., & Manchester, H. (2017). Considerate, convivial and capacious? Finding a language to capture ethos in ‘creative’ schools. *Discourse*, 38(6), 864–879.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2016.1227302>

British Educational Research Association and Action and Research Centre. (2014). *Research and the teaching profession: Building the capacity for a self-improving education system*.
<http://www.bera.ac.uk/project/research-and-teacher-education>

Calcagni, E., & Lago, L. (2018). The three domains for dialogue: A framework for analysing dialogic approaches to teaching and learning. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 18, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2018.03.001>

Caputo, J. (2018). *Hermeneutics: Facts and interpretation in the age of information*. Penguin Random House.

Cederbaum, J. A., Gilreath, T. D., Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., Pineda, D., De Pedro, K. T., Esqueda, M. C., & Atuel, H. (2014). Well-being and suicidal ideation of secondary school students from military families. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 54(6), 672–677.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.09.006>

Centre for Social Justice, & Forces in Mind Trust. (2016). *Military families and transition*.
<https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/military-families-and-transition>

Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L. H., Tanielian, T., Burns, R. M., Ruder, T., & Han, B. (2010). Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families. *Pediatrics*, 125(1), 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-1180>

Chandra, A., Martin, L. T., Hawkins, S. A., & Richardson, A. (2010). The impact of parental deployment on child social and emotional functioning: Perspectives of school staff. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(3), 218–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.10.009>

- Chief Secretary to the Treasury. (2003). *Every child matters* (Cm5860). HMSO.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-matters>
- Children's Commissioner. (2018). *Kin and country: Growing up as an armed forces child*.
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/kin-and-country-growing-up-as-an-armed-forces-child/>
- Christensen, P. H. (2004). Children's participation in ethnographic research: Issues of power and representation. *Children and Society*, 18(2), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.823>
- Church, A. (2009). Closings in young children's disputes: Resolution, dissipation and teacher intervention. In N. Thomas (Ed.), *Children, politics and communication : Participation at the margins* (Chapter 8). Policy Press Scholarship Online.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781847421845.001.0001>
- Clark, A. (2001). How to listen to very young children: The mosaic approach. *Child Care in Practice*, 7(4), 333–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575270108415344>
- Clark, A. (2005). Ways of seeing: Using the Mosaic approach to listen to young children's perspective. In A. Clark, A. T. Kjørholt, & P. Moss (Eds.), *Beyond listening: Children's perspectives on early childhood services* (pp. 29–49). Policy Press.
- Clark, A. (2010). Young children as protagonists and the role of participatory, visual methods in engaging multiple perspectives. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1), 115–123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9332-y>
- Clark, A. (2011). Breaking methodological boundaries? Exploring visual, participatory methods with adults and young children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 19(3), 321–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2011.597964>
- Clark, A., & Statham, J. (2005). Listening to young children: Experts in their own lives. *Adoption & Fostering*, 29(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590502900106>
- Clifton, G. (2004). Making the case for the BRAT. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(3), 457–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920410001689733>
- Clifton, G. (2007). *The experience of education of the army child* [Unpublished PhD thesis].

Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

- Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Open University Press.
- Clough, P. (2004). Theft and ethics in life portrayal: Lolly—the final story. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(3), 371–382.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839042000204642>
- Cohen, L. E. (2011). Bakhtin's carnival and pretend role play: A comparison of social contexts. *American Journal of Play*, 4(2), 176–203. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ985587.pdf>
- Collins, D. C. A., & Kearns, R. A. (2001). Under curfew and under siege? Legal geographies of young people. *Geoforum*, 32, 389–403. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185\(00\)00033-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(00)00033-6)
- Conroy, P. (2006). Introduction. In M. Wertsch, *Military brats: Legends of childhood inside the fortress* (pp. xix-xxvii). Brightwell.
- Coser, L. A. (1967). Greedy organisations. *European Journal of Sociology*, 8(2), 196–215.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S000397560000151X>
- Cozza, S. J., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Military children and families: Introducing the issue. *Future of Children*, 23(2), 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2013.0016>
- Cree, A. (2019). 'People want to see tears': Military heroes and the 'Constant Penelope' of the UK's Military Wives choir. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1615414>
- Cross, G. (2004). *The cute and the cool: Wondrous innocence and modern American children's culture*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195156669.003.0006>
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- Crow, J. R., & Seybold, A. K. (2013). Discrepancies in military middle-school adolescents' and parents' perceptions of family functioning, social support, anger frequency, and concerns. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.08.004>

- Dandeker, C., French, C., & Thomas, S. (2005). *The family and military as greedy institutions: negotiating a work-life balance* [End of award report]. <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/esrc-files/outputs/wpoEvUJrrkWRNuQLoVLyXA/oqiQopKs7oKVfoJ46eXRRRA.pdf>
- Davies, B. (1990). Agency as a form of discursive practice. A classroom scene observed. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 341–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569900110306>
- Davies, B. & Davies, C. (2007). Having, and being had by, “experience.” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(8), 1139–1159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407308228>
- Davis, B. E. (2010). Parental wartime deployment and the use of mental health services among young military children. *Pediatrics*, 126(6), 1215–1216. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2010-2543>
- Davis, B. E., Blaschke, G. S., & Stafford, E. M. (2012). Military children, families, and communities: Supporting those who serve. *Pediatrics*, 129(S1), S3–S10. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2010-3797c>
- Denzin, N. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Sage.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2008). *Working together: Listening to the voices of children and young people* (DCSF-00410-2008). <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00410-2008>
- Department for Education. (2010a). *How schools secure the progress of children from the armed forces families: Good practice guidance* (DFE-00481-2010). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-schools-secure-the-progress-of-children-from-the-armed-forces-families>
- Department for Education. (2010b). The educational performance of children of service personnel (DFE-RR011). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-educational-performance-of-children-of-service-personnel>
- Department for Education and Skills. (2006). *Primary framework for literacy and mathematics*

(02011-2006BOK-EN) <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/pdfs/2006-primary-national-strategy.pdf>

- Directorate Children and Young People. (2019). *Service pupil premium: Examples of best practice*. gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium/service-pupil-premium-examples-of-best-practice>
- Draus, P. J. (2001). *Consumed in the city: Observing tuberculosis in the 1990s* [PhD thesis, Loyola University, Chicago]. <https://doi.org/10.16953/deusbed.74839>
- Drummet, A.R, Coleman, M., & Cable, S. (2003). Military families under stress: Implications for family life education. *Family relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 52(3), 279–287. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00279.x>
- Dyson, A. H. (1994). Confronting the split between “the child” and children: Toward new curricular visions of the child writer. *English Education*, 26(1), 12–28. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40172821>
- Dyson, A. H. (1997). *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*. Teachers College Press.
- Easterbrooks, M. A., Ginsburg, K., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Resilience among military youth. *The Future of Children*, 23(2), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2013.0014>
- Ender, M. G. (2005). Military brats: Film representations of children from military families. *Armed Forces & Society*, 32(1), 24–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05277887>
- Engel, R. C., Gallagher, L. B., & Lyle, D. S. (2008). Military deployments and children’s academic achievement: Evidence from Department of Defense Education Activity Schools. *Economics of Education Review*, 29(1), 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2008.12.003>
- England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x>
- Eodanable, M., & Lauchlan, F. (2012). Promoting positive emotional health of children of transient armed forces families. *School Psychology International*, 33(1), 22–38.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034311406819>

- Erstad, O. (2012). The learning lives of digital youth—beyond the formal and informal. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(1), 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2011.577940>
- Erstad, O., Gilje, Ø., Sefton-Green, J., & Vasbø, K. (2009). Exploring ‘learning lives’: Community, identity, literacy and meaning. *Literacy*, 42(2), 100–106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2009.00518.x>
- Esposito-Smythers, C., Wolff, J., Lemmon, K. M., Bodzy, M., Swenson, R. R., & Spirito, A. (2011). Military youth and the deployment cycle: Emotional health consequences and recommendations for intervention. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(4), 497–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024534>
- Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using our selves in research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599–616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407301175>
- Faber, A. J., Willerton, E., Clymer, S. R., MacDermid, S. M., & Weiss, H. M. (2008). Ambiguous absence, ambiguous presence: A qualitative study of military reserve families in wartime. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(2), 222–230. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.2.222>
- Facer, K. (2012). After the moral panic? Reframing the debate about child safety online. *Discourse*, 33(3), 397–413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.681899>
- Facer, K. (2014). What is space for? Towards a politics and a language for the human in education. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 23(1), 121–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2013.839229>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Farrell-Wright, K. (2011). *A qualitative study exploring the impact of UK military deployment on female spouses and their children* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. Cardiff University, Cardiff.
- Fear, N. T., Reed, R. V., Rowe, S. L., Burdett, H., Pernet, D., Mahar, A., Iversen, A. C., Ramchandani, P., Stein, A., & Wessely, S. (2018). Impact of paternal deployment to the

conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and paternal post-traumatic stress disorder on the children of military fathers. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 212(6), 347–355.
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2017.16>

Fielding, M. (2012). Beyond student voice: Patterns of partnership and the demands of deep democracy. *Revista de Educacion*, 359, 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2012-359-195>

Fielding, M. (2016). Why and how schools might live democracy ‘as an inclusive human order.’ In S. Higgins & F. Coffield (Eds.), *John Dewey’s education and democracy: A British tribute* (pp. 114–130). UCL Institute of Education Press.

Flake, E., Davis, B. E., Johnson, P. L., & Middleton, L. S. (2009). The psychosocial effects of deployment on military children. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 30(4), 271–278. <https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0b013e3181aac6e4>

Flewitt, R. (2005). Is every child’s voice heard? Researching the different ways 3-year-old children communicate and make meaning at home and in a pre-school playgroup. *Early Years*, 25(3), 207–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140500251558>

Flewitt, R. (2011). Bringing ethnography to a multimodal investigation of early literacy in a digital age. *Qualitative Research*, 11(2), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111399838>

Flewitt, R., Jones, P., Potter, J., Domingo, M., Collins, P., Munday, E., & Stenning, K. (2018). ‘I enjoyed it because ... you could do whatever you wanted and be creative’: Three principles for participatory research and pedagogy. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 41(4), 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1405928>

Fontana, A. (2003). Postmodern trends in interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Postmodern Interviewing* (pp. 51–65). Sage.

Forces Children’s Trust. (2019). *What we do*. Forces Children’s Trust.org.uk.
<https://forceschildrenstrust.org.uk/what-we-do/#.XaRoUOdKhE4>

Fossey, M. (2012). *Unsung heroes: Developing a better understanding of the emotional support needs of Service families*. Centre for Mental Health.
<https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018->

- Fotel, T., & Thomsen, T. U. (2004). The surveillance of children's mobility. *Surveillance and Society*, 1(4), 535–554. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v1i4.3335>
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The will to knowledge: The history of sexuality. Volume 1.* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448181>
- Foucault, M. (2002a). *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume 3.* (J. D. Faubion, Ed., R. Hurley & others, Trans.). Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (2002b). *The archaeology of knowledge.* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.) Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2002c). *The order of things.* Routledge.
- Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller.* University of Chicago Press.
- Frank, A. W. (2005). What is dialogical research, and why should we do it? *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(7), 964–974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305279078>
- Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: a socio-narratology.* University of Chicago Press.
- Gallacher, L.-A., & Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through 'participatory methods'. *Childhood*, 15(4), 499–516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568208091672>
- Gallagher, M. (2008). Power is not an evil: Rethinking power in participatory methods. *Children's Geographies*, 6(2), 137–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280801963045>
- Garcia, E., De Pedro, K. T., Astor, R. A., Lester, P., & Benbenishty, R. (2015). FOCUS school-based skill-building groups: Training and implementation. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51(1), S102–S116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1001292>
- Gardiner, M. (1996). Foucault, ethics and dialogue. *History of the Human Sciences*, 9(3), 27–46.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519600900302>

- Gee, J. P. (2005). Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces: From the age of mythology to today's schools. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context* (pp. 214–232). Cambridge University Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2018). Affinity spaces: How young people live and learn online and out of school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(6), 8–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718762416>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 266–275. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.40.3.266>
- Giampapa, F. (2011). The politics of "being and becoming" a researcher: Identity, power, and negotiating the field. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 10(3), 132–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2011.585304>
- Gibbs, D. A., Martin, S. L., Kupper, L. L., & Johnson, R. E. (2007). Child maltreatment in enlisted soldiers' families during combat-related deployments. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 298(5), 528–535. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.298.5.528>
- Gilreath, T. D., Cederbaum, J. A., Astor, R. A., Benbenishty, R., Pineda, D., & Atuel, H. (2013). Substance use among military-connected youth: The California Healthy Kids Survey. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 44(2), 150–153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.09.059>
- Glazzard, J. (2012). Tuning into children's voices: Exploring the perceptions of primary aged children about their education in one primary school in England. *International Journal of Education*, 4(3), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v4i3.1933>
- Gordon, (2002). Introduction. In M. Foucault, *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume 3* (pp. xi-xli). Penguin.
- Gorman, G. H., Eide, M., & Hisle-Gorman, E. (2010). Wartime military deployment and increased pediatric mental and behavioral health complaints. *Pediatrics*, 126(6), 1058–1066. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-2856>

- Grant, H. (2019, March 25). Too poor to play: Children in social housing blocked from communal playground. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/mar/25/too-poor-to-play-children-in-social-housing-blocked-from-communal-playground>
- Grover, S. (2004). Why won't they listen to us? On giving power and voice to children participating in social research. *Childhood*, 11(1), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568204040186>
- Gulson, K. N., & Symes, C. (2007). *Spatial theories of education: Policy and geography matters*. Routledge.
- Gutiérrez, K. D. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148–164. <https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.43.2.3>
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Baquedano-López, P., & Tejada, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 6(4), 286–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039909524733>
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Larson, J., Enciso, P., & Ryan, C. L. (2007). Discussing expanded spaces for learning. *Language Arts*, 85(1), 69–77.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(3), 445–471. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.65.3.r16146n25h4mh384>
- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: Problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820500512697>
- Hammersley, M. (2015). Research ethics and the concept of children's rights. *Children and Society*, 29(6), 569–582. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12077>
- Hammersley, M. (2017). Childhood Studies: A sustainable paradigm? *Childhood*, 24(1), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216631399>
- Hammersley, M. (2008, June). *Can you get there from here? The agonies of analysis*. [Conference presentation] Doctoral Students' Annual Conference, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

- Harden, J. (2012). Good sitting, looking and listening: The regulation of young children's emotions in the classroom. *Children's Geographies*, 10(1), 83–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2011.638178>
- Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. *Innocenti Essays* (No. 4). UNICEF International Child Development Centre. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/100-childrens-participation-from-tokenism-to-citizenship.html>
- Hayllar, A. (2018). 'Once we've just connected, we are broken apart': A qualitative exploration of the views of primary-school children from military families. [DEdPsy thesis, University of Bristol]. [https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/theses/once-weve-just-connected-we-are-broken-apart\(7f7e4df7-61c3-47b9-bce5-e7da49a00172\).html](https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/theses/once-weve-just-connected-we-are-broken-apart(7f7e4df7-61c3-47b9-bce5-e7da49a00172).html)
- Heath, S. B., & Roach, A. (1999). Imaginative actuality: Learning in the arts during the nonschool hours. In E. Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 19–34). Arts Education Partnership.
- Heath, S., Charles, V., Crow, G., & Wiles, R. (2007). Informed consent, gatekeepers and go-betweens: Negotiating consent in child- and youth-orientated institutions. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(3), 403–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701243651>
- Heiselberg, M. H. (2017). Fighting for the family: Overcoming distances in time and space. *Critical Military Studies*, 3(1), 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2016.1231986>
- Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A., & Tisdall, K. (2004). Moving the participation agenda forward. *Children & Society*, 18, 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.819>
- Hilppö, J., Lipponen, L., Kumpulainen, K., & Rajala, A. (2017). Visual tools as mediational means: A methodological investigation. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 15(4), 359–373.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X15617795>
- Hisle-Gorman, E., Harrington, D., Nylund, C. M., Tercyak, K. P., Anthony, B. J., & Gorman, G. H. (2015). Impact of parents' wartime military deployment and injury on young children's safety and mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 54(4), 294–301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.12.017>
- Holland, D., Lachicotte, W. J., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural*

worlds. Harvard University Press.

Holland, D., & Valsiner, J. (1988). Cognition, symbols, and Vygotsky's developmental psychology. *Ethos*, 16(3), 247–272. <https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.1988.16.3.02a00020>

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N., & Hillman, A. (2008). Rights, 'right on' or the right thing to do? A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative social work research. *NCRM Working Paper Series*, 07/08, 1–30. <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/460/>

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. J., & Hillman, A. (2010). Power, agency and participatory agendas: A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative qualitative research. *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, 17(3), 360–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210369310>

Holquist, M. (1981). Glossary. In M. M. Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination* (pp. 423–434). University of Texas Press.

Holquist, M. (1983). Answering as authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's trans-linguistics. *Critical Inquiry*, 10(2), 307–319. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448248>

Holquist, M. (2002). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. Routledge.

Holt, L. (2004). The 'voices' of children: De-centring empowering research relations. *Children's Geographies*, 2(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1473328032000168732>

Holzman, L. (2017). *Vygotsky at work and play*. Routledge.

Horton, D. (2005). Consultation with military children and schools: A proposed model. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 57(4), 259–265. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1065-9293.57.4.259>

House of Commons Defence Committee. (2006). *Educating service children, Session 2005–06* (HC 1054). The Stationery Office.

Huebner, A. J., & Mancini, J. A. (2005). *Adjustment among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed: A final report submitted to the Military Family Research Institute and the Department of Defense Quality of Life Office*. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.578.1379&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

- Huebner, A. J., Mancini, J. A., Wilcox, R. M., Grass, S. R., & Grass, G. A. (2007). Parental deployment and youth in military families: Exploring uncertainty and ambiguous loss*. *Family Relations*, 56, 112–122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00445.x>
- Hunleth, J. (2011). Beyond on or with: Questioning power dynamics and knowledge production in “child-oriented” research methodology. *Childhood*, 18(1), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210371234>
- Hymas, C. (2018, August 6). Social media is making children regress to mentality of three-year-olds, says top brain scientist. *Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/social-media-regressing-children-mentality-three-year-olds-says/>
- Iddings, A. C. D., & McCafferty, S. G. (2007). Carnival in a mainstream kindergarten classroom: A Bakhtinian analysis of second language learners’ off-task behaviors. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00508.x>
- Institute of Education. (2019). *Post-War reconstruction: At the IOE*. Institute of Education LibGuides. <https://libguides.ioe.ac.uk/c.php?g=482251&p=3298237>
- Jackson, S., & Scott, S. (1999). Risk anxiety and the social construction of childhood. In D. Lupton (Ed.), *Risk and sociocultural theory: New directions and perspectives* (pp. 86–107). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520778.005>
- Jain, V., Stevelink, S. A. M., & Fear, N. T. (2016). What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses. *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, 160(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jramc-2015-000487>
- James, A. (2007). Giving voice to children’s voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), 261–272. <https://doi.org/10.1525/AA.2007.109.2.261.262>
- Janks, H. (1997). Critical discourse analysis as a research tool. *Discourse*, 18(3), 329–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180302>
- Janks, H. (2018). Texts, identities, and ethics: Critical literacy in a post-truth world. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(1), 95–99. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.761>

- Järvinen, M. (2000). The biographical illusion: Constructing meaning in qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(3), 370–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600306>
- Jensen, P., Xenakis, S., Wolf, P., & Bain, M. (1991). The “Military Family Syndrome” revisited: “By the numbers.” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 179(2), 102–107. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005053-199102000-00007>
- Jewitt, C., & Kress, G. (2003). *Multimodal literacy*. Peter Lang.
- Johnson, H. L., & Ling, C. G. (2012). Caring for military children in the 21st century. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 25(4), 195–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-7599.12003>
- Kellett, M. (2005). Children as active researchers: A new research paradigm for the 21st century? In *NCRM Methods Review Paper*. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/7539/1/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-003.pdf>
- Kelly, J. (2013). Popular culture, sport and the ‘hero’-fication of British militarism. *Sociology*, 47(4), 722–738. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512453795>
- Kitmitto, S., Huberman, M., Blankenship, C., Hannan, S., Norris, D., & Christenson, B. (2011). *Educational options and performance of military-connected school districts: Final report*. <http://www.dodea.edu/Partnership/upload/AIR-Research-Study-2011.pdf>
- Komulainen, S. (2007). The ambiguity of the child’s “voice” in social research. *Childhood*, 14(1), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568207068561>
- Kress, G. (1997). *Before writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy*. Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2011). ‘Partnerships in research’: Multimodality and ethnography. *Qualitative Research*, 11(3), 239–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111399836>
- Kudler, H., & Porter, R. I. (2013). Building communities of care for military children and families. *Future of Children*, 23(2), 163–185. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2013.0019>
- Kumpulainen, K., Mikkola, A., & Jaatinen, A.-M. (2014). The chronotopes of technology-mediated creative learning practices in an elementary school community. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 39(1), 53–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2012.752383>

- LaGrone, D. M. (1978). The military family syndrome. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 135(9), 1040–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.135.9.1040>
- Lapadat, J. C., & Lindsay, A. C. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(1), 64–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049900500104>
- Leander, K. M., Phillips, N. C., & Taylor, K. H. (2010). The changing social spaces of learning: Mapping new mobilities. *Review of Research in Education*, 34, 329–394. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X09358129>
- Lee, C. (2015). *Under the radar: An ethnographic investigation into the experiences and needs of children from Royal Air Force families in a UK primary school* [Unpublished MSc dissertation]. Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.
- Lee, C. (2019). “I ain’t no clue, but we learned it yesterday”: Losing our way with the Year 6 Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling test. *Forum*, 61(3), 401–414. <http://doi.org/10.15730/forum.2019.61.3.401>
- Lee, N. (2001). *Childhood and Society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty*. Open University Press.
- Lemke, J. L. (1995). *Textual politics: Discourse and social dynamics*. Taylor and Francis.
- Lemmon, K. M., & Chartrand, M. M. (2009). Caring for America’s children: Military youth in time of war. *Pediatrics in Review*, 30(6), e42–e48. <https://doi.org/10.1542/pir.30-6-e42>
- Lester, P., & Flake, E. (2014). How wartime military service affects service children and families. *Future of Children*, 23(2), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2013.0015>
- Lieberman, A. F., & Van Horn, P. (2013). Infants and young children in military families: A conceptual model for intervention. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 16(3), 282–293. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-013-0140-4>
- Logan, K. V. (1987). Emotional cycle of deployment. *US Naval Institute Proceedings Magazine*, 113. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1987-02/emotional-cycle-deployment>

- Lyle, D. S. (2006). Using military deployments and job assignments to estimate the effect of parental absences and household relocations on children's academic achievement. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 24(2), 319–350. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499975>
- Macdonald, G. (2017). School-based support for students with a parent on military deployment. *Children Australia*, 42(1), 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2016.9>
- Maclure, M. (2013). The wonder of data. *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), 228–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708613487863>
- MacLure, M. (2009). Broken voices, dirty words: On the productive insufficiency of voice. In A. Jackson & L. Mazzei (Eds.), *Voice in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research* (pp. 97–113). Routledge.
- MacLure, M., Jones, L., Holmes, R., & MacRae, C. (2012). Becoming a problem: Behaviour and reputation in the early years classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 447–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2011.552709>
- Madison, D.S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Sage.
- Malone, K. (2007). The bubble-wrap generation: Children growing up in walled gardens. *Environmental Education Research*, 13(4), 513–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620701581612>
- Manchester, H., & Bragg, S. (2013). School ethos and the spatial turn: “Capacious” approaches to research and practice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 818–827. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413503800>
- Mannion, G. (2007). Going spatial, going relational: Why “listening to children” and children's participation needs reframing. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(3), 405–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300701458970>
- Mansfield, A., Kaufman, J., Engel, C., & Gaynes, B. (2011). Deployment and mental health diagnoses among children of US army personnel. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 165(11), 999–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.123>
- Mario, L., & de Souza, T. M. (2015). Indigenous literacies in literacy studies. In K. Pahl & J.

- Rowse (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (pp. 157–168). Routledge.
- Marjanovic-Shane, A., Meacham, S., Choi, H. J., Lopez, S., & Matusov, E. (2019). Idea-dying in critical ontological pedagogical dialogue. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 20, 68–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.10.001>
- Marshall, B. (2017). The politics of testing. *Research Journal of the National Association for the Teaching of English*, 51(1), 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eie.12110>
- Martin, V. (2007). Dialogue in the narrative process. *Medical Humanities*, 33(1), 49–54. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jmh.2007.000246>
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilient processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.227>
- Masten, A. S. (2014). Global perspectives on resilience in children and youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12205>
- Matusov, E. (2004). Bakhtin's dialogic pedagogy. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 42(6), 3–11.
- Matusov, E. (2007). Applying Bakhtin scholarship on discourse in education: A critical review essay. *Educational Theory*, 57(2), 215–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2007.00253.x>
- Matusov, E. (2009). *Journey into dialogic pedagogy*. Nova Science Publishers.
- Maybin, J. (2007). Literacy under and over the desk: Oppositions and heterogeneity. *Language and Education*, 21(6), 515–530. <https://doi.org/10.2167/le720.o>
- McCullough, J., & Hall, M. (2016). *Further and higher progression for service children: Research paper*. <http://www.winchester.ac.uk/aboutus/wideningparticipation/Documents/UoW>
- McGarry, O. (2016). Repositioning the research encounter: Exploring power dynamics and positionality in youth research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19(3), 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1011821>
- McNamee, S. (2000). Foucault's heterotopia and children's everyday lives. *Childhood*, 7(4), 479–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568200007004006>

- Mercer, N., Wegerif, R., & Dawes, L. (1999). Children's talk and the development of reasoning in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(1), 95–111.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192990250107>
- Military Wives Choirs. (2016). *Military Wives Choirs: How we started*.
<http://www.militarywiveschoirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/How-we-started.pdf>
- Millard, E. (2006). Transformative pedagogy: Teachers creating a literacy of fusion. In K. Pahl & J. Rowsell (Eds.), *Travel notes from the new Literacy Studies: Instances of practice* (pp. 234–253). Sage.
- Miller, D. (1998). *A theory of shopping*. Polity Press.
- Miller, D. (2008). *The comfort of things*. Polity Press.
- Miller, D. (2010). *Stuff*. Polity Press.
- Mills, K. A., & Comber, B. (2015). Socio-spatial approaches to Literacy Studies: Rethinking the social constitution and politics of space. In J. Rowsell & K. Pahl (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Literacy Studies* (pp. 91–103). Routledge.
- Ministry of Defence. (2011). *The armed forces covenant* (DMC00289 11/12).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49469/the_armed_forces_covenant.pdf
- Ministry of Defence. (2016a). *Children of UK armed forces personnel: Education statistics for England, 2014/15*. [Ad Hoc Statistical Bulletin].
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575582/20161208-Adhoc_Statistical_Bulletin-Service_children_educational_attainment_in_England.pdf
- Ministry of Defence. (2016b). *UK Armed Forces Personnel Deployments and Military Presence of UK Regular Personnel*. [Ad Hoc Statistical Bulletin].
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564757/UK_Armed_Forces_Personnel_Deployments_and_Military_Presence_of_UK_Regular_Personnel.pdf

- Ministry of Defence. (2019a). *UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics*.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851974/UK_Armed_Forces_Biannual_Diversity_Statistics_-_1_October_2019.pdf
- Ministry of Defence. (2019b). *UK regular armed forces continuous attitude survey results 2019* (AFCAS 2019).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811689/Armed_Forces_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2019_Main_Report.pdf
- Mmari, K., Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. (2010). Exploring the role of social connectedness among military youth: Perceptions from youth, parents, and school personnel. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 39(5), 351–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-010-9109-3>
- Mmari, K., Roche, K. M., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. (2009). When a parent goes off to war: Exploring the issues faced by adolescents and their families. *Youth & Society*, 40(4), 455–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X08327873>
- Moje, E. B., Ciechanowski, K. M., Kramer, K., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R., & Collazo, T. (2004). Working toward third space in content area literacy: An examination of everyday funds of knowledge and Discourse. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(1), 38–70.
<https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.39.1.4>
- Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>
- Moon, Z. (2016). Pastoral care and counseling with military families. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 70(2), 128–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542305016633663>
- Morson, G. S. (2004). The process of ideological becoming. In A. F. Ball & S. W. Freedman (Eds.), *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning* (pp. 317–332). Cambridge University Press.
- Motta, S. C. (2012). Teaching global and social justice as transgressive spaces of possibility.

- Antipode*, 45(1), 80–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.00995.x>
- Mustillo, S., Wadsworth, S. M., & Lester, P. (2016). Parental deployment and well-being in children: Results from a new study of military families. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 24(2), 82–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426615598766>
- Myerhoff, B. (1978). *Number our days*. Simon and Schuster.
- National Audit Office. (2018a). *Ensuring sufficient skilled military personnel* (HC 947). <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ensuring-sufficient-skilled-military-personnel.pdf>
- National Audit Office. (2018b). *The Ministry of Defence's arrangement with Annington Property Limited* (HC762). <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Ministry-of-Defences-arrangement-with-Annington-Property-Limited.pdf>
- NATO. (2019). *Impact of military life on children from military families*. [Final Report of NATO RTG HFM-258]. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1071759.pdf>
- Nespor, J. (2000). Anonymity and place in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(4), 546–569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600408>
- Nind, M. (2014). *What is inclusive research?* Bloomsbury.
- Noddings, N. (2010). Moral education in an age of globalization. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42(4), 390–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00487.x>
- Noret, N., Mayor, H., Al-Afaleq, H., Lingard, S., & Mair, E. (2014). *The educational attainment of army children*. <https://aff.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/affeducationalattainmentofarmychildrenreport.pdf>
- O'Neill, J. (2012). *Service children: How do they cope with transitions between schools?* <https://www.slideshare.net/joyoneill/joy-oneill-2012-report-based-on-m-sc-research>
- Ofsted. (2011). *Children in service families: The quality and impact of partnership provision for children in service families*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413575/Children_in_Service_families.pdf

- Operation Military Kids. (2019). *Hero packs*. operationmilitarykids.org.
<https://www.operationmilitarykids.org/hero-packs/>
- Oxford English Dictionary. (2019). 'Sacrifice'. Retrieved December, 2019, from
www.oed.com/view/Entry/169572?rskey=pO9SMH&result=2#eid
- Pahl, K., & Rowsell, J. (2011). Artifactual critical literacy: A new perspective for literacy education. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 2(2), 129–151. <https://doi.org/10.5070/B82110050>
- Pain, R. (2006). Paranoid parenting? Rematerializing risk and fear for children, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(2), 221–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360600600585>
- Park, N. (2011). Military children and families. *American Psychologist*, 66(1), 65–72.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021249>
- Pelias, R. J. (2004). *A methodology of the heart: Evoking academic and daily Life*. Altamira Press.
- Pennycook, A. (2007). “The rotation gets thick. The constraints get thin”: Creativity, recontextualization, and difference. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(4), 579–596.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amm043>
- Peuranen, E. (1998). Bakhtin: Soft and hard. In M. Lähteenmäki & H. Dufva (Eds.), *Dialogues on Bakhtin: Interdisciplinary readings* (pp. 28–35). University of Jyväskylä/Centre for Applied Language Studies.
- Pfefferbaum, B., Houston, J. B., Sherman, M. D., & Melson, A. G. (2011). Children of national guard troops deployed in the global war on terrorism. *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress & Coping*, 16(4), 291–305.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2010.519293>
- Pincus, S. H., House, R., Christenson, J., & Alder, L. (2011). The emotional cycle of deployment: a military family perspective. (NB: This document is no longer available online but I have a copy.)
- Public Accounts Committee. (2017). *Service family accommodation* (HC77)
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/77/77.pdf>
- Public Accounts Committee. (2018). *Oral evidence: Annington Homes: Armed forces families* (HC

974).

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/public-accounts-committee/annington-homes-housing-provision-for-armed-forces-families/oral/82824.pdf>

RAF Families Federation. (2013). *RAFFF survey report: Is the covenant all it's cracked up to be?* (NB: This document is no longer available online but I have a copy.)

Ray, S. L., & Vanstone, M. (2009). The impact of PTSD on veterans' family relationships: An interpretative phenomenological inquiry. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 46(6), 838–847. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2009.01.002>

Reed, M. (2005). Strong language: the purpose of dialogue in the development of writing. *Changing English*, 12(1), 85–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684052000340489>

Reed, S. C., Bell, J. F., & Edwards, T. C. (2011). Adolescent well-being in Washington State military families. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(9), 1676–1682. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300165>

Reynolds, E. (2018, January 3). Logan Paul has behaved despicably. But he's part of a wider trend. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/03/logan-paul-youtube-suicide-mental-health-raise-awareness>

Richardson, A., Chandra, A., Martin, L. T., Messan Setodji, C., Hallmark, B., Campbell, N. F., Hawkins, S. A., & Grady, P. (2011). *Effects of soldiers' deployment on children's academic performance and behavioral health*. RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1095.html>

Robinson, C., & Fielding, M. (2007). *Children and their primary schools: Pupils' voices*. Cambridge Primary Review Research Survey 5/3. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203121672>

Rowan-Legg, A. (2017). Caring for children and youth from Canadian military families: Special considerations. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, e1–e6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxx021>

Rowe, S. L., Keeling, M., Wessely, S., & Fear, N. T. (2014). Perceptions of the impact a military career has on children. *Occupational Medicine*, 64(7), 490–496. <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqu096>

- Rowse, J. (2006). Tracing textual crossings. In K. Pahl & J. Rowse (Eds.), *Travel notes from the new literacy studies: Instances of practice* (pp. 195–216). Multilingual Matters.
- Rowse, J., & Shillitoe, M. (2019). The craftivists: Pushing for affective, materially informed pedagogy. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 50(4), 1544–1559.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12773>
- Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. (2009). *The overlooked casualties of conflict*.
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3b75da96e76f168e60913c/t/5ba8dabfeef1a16551ba1195/1537792712624/overlooked_casualties_of_conflict_report.pdf
- Ryan-Wenger, N. A. (2002). Impact of the threat of war on children in military families. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 16, 245–252. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.71.2.236>
- Saltzman, W. R., Lester, P., Beardslee, W., Layne, C. M., Woodward, K., & Nash, W. P. (2011). Mechanisms of risk and resilience in military families: Theoretical and empirical basis of a family-focused resilience enhancement program. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 14(3), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-011-0096-1>
- Samuelson, B. L. (2009). Ventriloquation in discussions of student writing: Examples from a high school English class. *Research in the Teaching of English* 44(1), 52–88.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27784349>
- Scheurich, J. (1997). *Research method in the Postmodern*. Falmer Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2003). *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. Routledge.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2014). Multimodality and language: A retrospective and prospective view. In C. Jewitt (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis* (pp. 205–216). Routledge.
- Seddon, M. (2017, December 4). Have we got just three months to avert a US attack on North Korea? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/04/three-months-avert-us-strike-north-korea-nuclear-missile-kim-jong-un>
- Sefton-Green, J., & Erstad, O. (2017). Researching ‘learning lives’ – A new agenda for learning,

- media and technology. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 42(2), 246–250.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2016.1170034>
- Segal, M. W., Lane, M. D., & Fisher, A. G. (2015). Conceptual model of military career and family life course events, intersections, and effects on well-being. *Military Behavioral Health*, 95–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2015.1009212>
- Semenec, P. (2018). Re-imagining research with children through an engagement with contemporary art. *Childhood*, 25(1), 63–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568217718033>
- Sherbert, V. (2011). “Well, besides the fact that deployment kinda stinks...”: Adolescent voices in literacy during military deployment. [PhD thesis, Kansas State University]. K-Rex. <https://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/handle/2097/12455>
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children and Society*, 15(2), 107–117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.617>
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). What is the “dialogical method” of teaching? *Journal of Education*, 169(3), 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748716900303>
- Sinor, J. (2003). Inscribing ordinary trauma in the diary of a military child. *Biography*, 26(3), 405–427. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2003.0081>
- Skelton, T. (2009). Children’s geographies/geographies of children: Play, work, mobilities and migration. *Geography Compass*, 3(4), 1430–1448. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00240.x>
- Skidmore, D. (2000). From pedagogical dialogue to dialogical pedagogy. *Language and Education*, 14(4), 283–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780008666794>
- Skomorovsky, A., & Bullock, A. (2017). The impact of deployment on children from Canadian military families. *Armed Forces & Society*, 43(4), 654–673.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16670691>
- Smith, J. (2017, April 18). *Future Accommodation Model*. (Hansard: House of Commons Debates, 624) <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-04-18/debates/36F9B1FD-56CB-4EF1-A638-AF9E1656F7Ao/FutureAccommodationModel>

- Smrekar, C., Guthrie, J. W., Owens, D. E., & Sims, P. G. (2001). *March toward excellence: School success and minority student achievement in Department of Defense schools*.
<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/DoDFinal921.pdf>
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Sories, F., Maier, C., Beer, A., & Thomas, V. (2015). Addressing the needs of military children through family-based play therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 37(3), 209–220.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-015-9342-x>
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002). *Telling tales in sport and physical activity: A qualitative journey*. Human Kinetics.
- Spyrou, S. (2011). The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood*, 18(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210387834>
- Stites, M. L. (2016). How early childhood teachers perceive the educational needs of military dependent children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 44(2), 107–117.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0698-1>
- Swain, M. (2001). Examining dialogue: Another approach to content specification and to validating inferences drawn from test scores. *Language Testing*, 18(3), 275–302.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/026553201680188979>
- Swedean, S. K., Gonzales, M. V., Zickefoose, B. A., Bush, A. C., Davis, J. M., Elrod, D. C., & Hsieh, D. T. (2013). Recurrent headache in military-dependent children and the impact of parent deployment. *Military Medicine*, 178(3), 274–278. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-12-00171>
- Thandi, G., Greenberg, N., Fear, N. T., & Jones, N. (2017). Perceived effect of deployment on families of UK military personnel. *Occupational Medicine*, 67, 562–568.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqx132>
- The Royal British Legion. (2017). *Supporting service children in school in England: A best practice guide*. https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/supporting_service_children_in_england_18.pdf?sfvrsn=ce83883b_2

- Thomson, P., Ellison, L., Byrom, T., & Bulman, D. (2007). Invisible labour: Home-school relations and the front office. *Gender and Education*, 19(2), 141–158.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250601165896>
- Thomson, P., & Gunter, H. (2006). From “consulting pupils” to “pupils as researchers”: A situated case narrative. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(6), 839–856.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/30000007>
- Thomson, P., Hall, C., & Russell, L. (2007). If these walls could speak: Reading displays of primary children’s work. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(3), 381–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820701547450>
- Timmis, S., & Williams, J. (2014, April 7-9). *Lost in transition? Making sense of space: time configurations across workplace and educational boundaries*. [Conference contribution]. 9th International Conference on Networked Learning, Edinburgh.
<http://www.networkedlearningconference.org.uk/past/nlc2014/abstracts/pdf/timmispdf.pdf>
- Todd, L. (2012). Critical dialogue, critical methodology: Bridging the research gap to young people’s participation in evaluating children’s services. *Children’s Geographies*, 10(2), 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2012.667919>
- Todorov, T. (1984). *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle* (W Godzich, Trans.). Manchester University Press.
- Turkle, S. (2007). *Evocative objects: Things we think with*. MIT Press.
- UNICEF. (1989). *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.55667949.732620738.1583234902-447317270.1583234902
- University of Winchester. (2016, June 22). *Military children and educational progression - Main film*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEgCZtPHhwU>
- University of Winchester. (2017). *Military service children*. University of Winchester.
<https://www.winchester.ac.uk/collaboration/widening-participation/military-service->

children/#d.en.10988

- van Manen, M. (2006). Writing qualitatively, or the demands of writing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(5), 713–722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732306286911>
- Vološinov, V. (1973). *Marxism and the philosophy of language* (L. Matejka & I.R. Titunik, Trans.). Seminar Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribman, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press.
- Wadsworth, S. M. (2013). Understanding and supporting the resilience of a new generation of combat-exposed military families and their children. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 16(4), 415–420. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-013-0155-x>
- Warming, H. (2011). Getting under their skins? Accessing young children's perspectives through ethnographic fieldwork. *Childhood*, 18(1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210364666>
- Wegerif, R. (2008). Dialogic or dialectic? The significance of ontological assumptions in research on educational dialogue. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(3), 347–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701532228>
- Wegerif, R. (2011). Towards a dialogic theory of how children learn to think. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 6, 179–190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2011.08.002>
- Weller, S., & Bruegel, I. (2009). Children's 'place' in the development of neighbourhood social capital. *Urban Studies*, 46(3), 629–643. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098008100998>
- Wertsch, M. (2006). *Military brats: Legends of childhood inside the fortress*. Brightwell.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action*. Oxford University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2007). Mediation. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky* (pp. 178–192). Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J.V., & Smolka, A. L. B. (1993). Continuing the dialogue: Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Lotman. In H. Daniels (Ed.), *Charting the Agenda: Educational activity after Vygotsky* (pp. 69–92).

Routledge.

- White, A., Bushin, N., Carpena-Mendez, F., & Ni Laoire, C. (2010). Using visual methodologies to explore contemporary Irish childhoods. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 143–158.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356735>
- White, C. J., de Burgh, H. T., Fear, N. T., & Iversen, A. C. (2011). The impact of deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan on military children: A review of the literature. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 23(2), 210–217. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2011.560144>
- Wiles, R., Crow, G., Charles, V., & Heath, S. (2007). Informed consent and the research process: Following rules or striking balances? *Sociological Research Online*, 12(2).
<https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1208>
- Williamson, E., Matolcsi, A., & Yar, K. (2019). *Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in military families: Improving signposting to specialist support*. <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Bristol-Report.pdf>
- Williamson, E., & Price, N. (2009). *Pilot project: Domestic abuse and military families*. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/migrated/documents/finalreport.pdf>
- World Bank. (2019). *Military expenditure (% of general government expenditure) – United Kingdom*. The World Bank: Data.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.ZS?locations=GB>
- Worley, L. (2008). *Visual voices: An exploratory study of the images and stories created by children of the military* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. University of Denver.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical consent form

Name(s): Claire Lee

Proposed research project: PhD Thesis 'Who cares about Service Children?' An ethnographic investigation into the educational, social and emotional needs of children from armed forces families in UK schools¹

Proposed funder(s): ESRC

Discussant for the ethics meeting: Malcolm Reed

Name of supervisor: Malcolm Reed and Frances Giampapa

Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application? Yes

Please include an outline of the project or append a short (1 page) summary:

Summary

This study aims to sharpen our understanding of the factors which contribute to, and undermine, the emotional and social well-being and learning of service children in UK schools. I also aim to develop appropriate and effective methods of researching with children that could be replicated or adapted for use by others.

Service children are defined by the UK government as having 'a parent or parents who are Service personnel, serving in regular military units of all HM Forces and exercising parental care and responsibility' (DfE 2010:4). The literature on the educational experiences of service children in the UK is extremely sparse. I argue that the quality of studies that have attempted to access the children's points of view is compromised by their ethical and methodological weaknesses.

The project builds on the research conducted for my MSc Educational Research dissertation, which I am drawing on as a pilot study. This was undertaken in the primary school in which I was teaching and which has a significant proportion of children from service families. I plan to use an ethnographic methodology, using mainly task-based and participant methods with children. These are designed to allow me to attend to their situated voices. The study is underpinned by a social constructivist approach and the view that children should be

¹ The ESRC was notified of the change in title of my PhD.

recognised as aware, articulate and competent participants in their own right: 'competent participants in a shared, but adult-centred, world' (James et al 1998:184).

I plan to undertake the research in three phases:

- Phase one: participant observation and unstructured interviews with practitioners, ex-service children and parents of service children.
- Phase two: a task-centred project with a group of primary school aged children.
- Phase three: a shared participatory project with a group of secondary children.

I plan to start with open-ended participant observation in the primary school, spending time alongside service children in their regular lunchtime Red Arrows club, and having individual and group conversations with practitioners, parents and ex-service children. I hope to begin to learn about the main preoccupations of this wide group of participants, informed by my previous personal and research experiences.

In Phase 2, I plan to negotiate a series of task-centred activities with a group of primary school-aged service children. This builds on the methods developed in my pilot study. There are many forms these tasks could take: music or drama, storytelling, photography, film, visual art, poetry, fiction or non-fiction writing or a combination. From the tasks we will plan and create a presentation.

With the older children in Phase 3 I plan to use a participatory approach. This will involve teaching the children some research skills. I anticipate that this project will be strongly auto-ethnographic and that the children will distribute and present their findings as a self-contained project as they choose. In addition to the young people's findings, my observations of the process will provide the data for my research.

The data will comprise field notes, recordings and films. I plan to use narrative analysis, transcribing these in detail and attending to the children's use of language, gesture etc. as well as the content of their speech. Additionally, artefacts produced by the children will be treated as texts to further inform the understandings constructed.

The dissertation will report on both the process and the children's views.

Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken (see list of prompts overleaf):

I have undertaken a structured ethical reflection, examining each aspect of the research process in the light of the values I have identified as pertinent to this project: transparency, inclusiveness, care, open-mindedness, critical thinking, reflexivity and commitment. This has enabled me to reflect on potential ethical dilemmas and problems and bring these to the ethical conversation with my supervisor. The ethical reflection document will be uploaded alongside this form.

I understand ethical reflection as an ongoing process which underpins the entire research process, rather than a discrete set of decisions to be made at the start. I shall continue to discuss all aspects of the research with my supervisors, and seek their advice about any ethical problems.

Safety and wellbeing of participants

I taught in the primary school for twelve years and have full support from the head teacher and staff members with responsibility for the nurturing of service children. I also know a number of the children in both schools and their parents. Should there be anything specific I need to know about any child, this information will be provided by the school.

Care is one of the core values in my ethical reflection. I am very conscious of my pastoral responsibilities towards the participants. Key to this project is their well-being and the avoidance of harm. No participant will be coerced or enticed at any stage of the research into doing or saying anything s/he does not wish to. This will be made clear in discussions at the outset, so that participants are also aware of their ethical responsibility towards each other.

The methods chosen are designed around an ethos of care. With adult participants, unstructured interviews and focus group discussions are intended to be open-ended and allow participants to contribute whatever they wish to say. Task-based activities with children are designed to allow them to reflect on their experiences over time, rather than being expected to give instant answers in an interview situation. Activities will be designed to allow the children to give as much or as little personal information as they wish.

The head teacher and class teachers will be consulted about the best times to work with the children in order to avoid disrupting their normal classroom activity too much, as well as the best place to conduct the research to avoid impacting on the staff. The suggestion has been made that the research could begin in the afternoon and continue after school.

This project has potential educational benefit. As a cross-curricular activity, encompassing speaking and listening, writing in different genres, research skills, an understanding of ethical issues and artistic activity, it reinforces curricular objectives, contributes to enterprise education in its widest sense and promotes social and emotional learning. The children who participated in my pilot project also spoke about the ways in which they felt it had helped them, and how they had enjoyed taking part. They requested that the school continue to provide the opportunities created in the project.

While I aim to build a partnership in the research with the children, I shall adopt a leadership role should this be required to avoid harm. Should children become distressed they will be comforted and the activity stopped or changed. As a teacher I am experienced in working with children on sensitive topics and am trained in risk assessment, safeguarding and management of groups. I also have up-to-date DBS clearance. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures will apply to my project. I shall also bear in mind the overlaps and tensions between my 'teacher' and 'researcher' roles, considering how best to manage activities and decisions.

I shall ensure the research sessions are carried out in a friendly and sensitive, organised and orderly way, in order that participants feel safe, heard and can enjoy the process. Research with the children and school staff will take place at school, in their usual surroundings. Parents might be less comfortable in the school setting, so I shall discuss with them where they would prefer the research to take place.

Problems

Should any local difficulties arise, I will discuss matters with my supervisors and seek to find solutions acceptable to all parties. I recognise that research projects do not always run

according to plan; circumstances may constrain what I am able to do. I am also prepared to adapt my research plans should this prove necessary, and reflect on these restraints as potentially informative in themselves.

I shall keep a pastoral eye on the children throughout the project. Should any child show signs of unease or flagging commitment, I shall have a low-key discussion with the child to find out if there is a problem and discuss what can be done to improve matters. Should a child choose to withdraw, no attempt will be made to discourage this, coerce or entice the child into continuing, even though it could harm the project. The school staff and parents will be made aware of this. This is particularly important in a school, which has an ethos which encourages children to commit to clubs or activities for the duration. As part of the project will take place during the school day, when children usually have little choice of activity, it is important that they understand it is optional.

Complaints procedure

By assessing any potential risks in advance and by placing care for the participants at the centre of the project, I hope that I shall be able to avoid this situation. However, as I shall make clear in the initial letter, a clear complaints procedure will be in place.

Participants or parents will be encouraged to discuss problems with me first. If they feel unable to do so, or if a solution cannot be found, they will have two possible routes.

They will have contact details for my supervisors, should they wish to contact either of them. Alternatively, the schools have complaints procedures. In practice, the parents are likely to email or speak to the head teacher or their child's class teacher if they are unhappy about any aspect of the project.

Steps to access and informed consent:

The school is the first gatekeeper and the parents or guardians the second. No child will take part in any research activity and no recording of anything they say will begin until written consent from the parents has been obtained and the children have also given their consent. I intend that all research activity will be overt and that participants will be fully informed before and during the process.

Obtaining consent for research with children:

1. Discussion of project and potential participants with head teacher (or senior leader in the secondary school), taking into account individual children's emotional, social and educational needs.
2. Letter to parents with reply slip and opportunity to meet me and discuss the project. Permission will also be sought for photography, filming and recording of children as well as for contact to be made with the children via email.
3. Meeting with children (once parental consent has been given) to discuss the purpose, process and ethics and invite them to consider participating.
4. Further meetings with head teacher as appropriate
5. I shall set up a new email address on the school system so that transparency is maintained.

Obtaining consent for research with adults:

Following the discussion with the head teacher, I plan to discuss the project with the two members of staff responsible for service children and ask them to suggest parents they think would have an interest in the research. I will then send these individuals a letter explaining the project and what participation would entail. This will be followed by an initial meeting at a convenient time and place to discuss the project, and I shall seek their fully informed consent at that point. Around ten parents would be a small enough number to spend time with, but would represent diverse experiences and understandings. If many more parents express a wish to participate, I shall arrange ways in which this could happen, through focus-group discussions, for example, in addition to interviews, rather than excluding any individuals. Should ad-hoc conversations arise, I shall check whether people are happy for their comments to be included in the research.

Basic information for all participants will include the following:

- The well-being of all participants is central to the project.
- Participation is optional and any participant has the right to withdraw at any stage of the research.
- Anything the participants say will be treated with the strictest confidence.
- Pseudonyms will be used for the participants, the school and the area.
- Any photographs used in publications will be edited to remove identifying features. and quotations from participants will be used anonymously.
- The project is an open-ended one and could evolve in unexpected directions, but that I will consult participants throughout.

During the project I shall maintain a professional attitude, communicating clearly with the school and participants, using language appropriate to the children.

Anonymity and confidentiality

I shall take every precaution to ensure no individual or site can be identified in any research documents, from field notes and my research journal, in which pseudonyms will be used from the outset, to any publications. Photographs will be digitally altered so that faces and school logos are unrecognisable.

In Phase 2 of the research, the use of task-based methods is designed to allow the participants control over what they choose to say. There will be no requirement to reveal any personal aspects of their lives. They may choose, for example, to create impersonal, abstract or fictionalised narratives. Some may, however, choose to speak about their experiences and memories. It is important, therefore, that all members of the group agree to protect each other's anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. Children may need support with this, as they might find themselves under pressure from parents or school staff to discuss the research, and may have little experience of refusing an adult in an imbalanced power situation. In my previous project we agreed that outside the group we might "talk about what we did, but not what people said", and practised this through role play.

The creative process will be shared; we will emphasise that we "own" the end product together. For example, song lyrics might be jointly created and passed between groups of children for reworking. This will be emphasised to the audience at any presentation.

The presentation to parents, staff and other children will take place in school. In my previous research this was a film that included photographs of the children's artefacts, a stop-motion animation, fictionalised diary excerpts, a song, poetry and quotations. It will be emphasised that the product of the research is a shared creation.

In Phase 3 of the research, I intend to share the emergent findings with the children and invite them to work with me in designing the next stage of the project. The aim will be that they can explore the ideas which seem most relevant to them in ways of their choosing. This will involve teaching the children some research skills, including an understanding of the ethical issues of anonymity, confidentiality and avoidance of harm and an exploration of power relations. How, and to whom, they present this project will be a matter for us to decide together, but the same principles will apply. The children will use it to present their shared findings, blurring the boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction'. I shall discuss with the school ways of keeping an eye on any materials beyond the life of the project.

Data storage

Data collection methods will be negotiated with the participants. Field notes, films, recordings and photographs will be worked on and saved on a password-protected laptop, but stored after use on the university's server, using the remote access system, and deleted from the laptop. Paper copies of consent forms will be stored in a file in the school office. Adult contact details will be stored according to school data protection procedures.

There is no need to store children's personal data as contact will be through the schools, and any sensitive personal information communicated verbally. Emails will be stored on a school account used solely for the project, and deleted after completion. Should I need to contact children directly via email, this should not be problematic as the account can be monitored by school. I could copy in the parents or head teacher if necessary. My personal email account will not be used for communicating about the project.

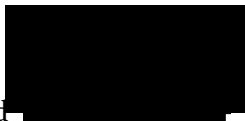
Responsibility to colleagues and academic community

As an ESRC-funded researcher I am fully aware of the responsibility this entails. I shall ensure that I inform myself about the expectations and requirements of both the institution and the ESRC, and that I undertake this project in accordance with these and to the best of my ability. I intend to take every opportunity to learn and play an active part in the research community. I am also aware of my responsibilities towards my supervisors. Transparency and commitment are two of the core values in my ethical reflection. I shall communicate clearly and honestly with my supervisors, keep to deadlines and agreements and respect their experience, acting on their suggestions. I am also aware of the many demands on their time and while I wish to learn as much as I can from them, will avoid burdening them with unnecessary requests.

Exit

I plan to use the final research sessions with the groups of children to reflect on the entire process. Participants will be thanked individually and given a small gift. As I intend to publish the results of the research in an accessible format, all participants and stakeholders will also receive copies of this. The email account will also remain live for a certain time in case any participants wish to communicate further.

Signed: (Researcher)



Signed: (Supervisor) Dr Malcolm Reed

Date: 11 November 2016

Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken (see list of prompts overleaf):

Claire Lee and I discussed in detail the ethical aspects of the proposed research in a meeting on Wednesday 9 November 2016. This report is the outcome of that discussion.

If you feel you need to discuss any issue further, or to highlight difficulties, please contact the GSoE's ethics co-ordinators who will suggest possible ways forward.



Signed: (Researcher) Signed: (Discussant)

Date: 9.11.2016

Evidence that ethics application has been approved:

Archived or 'signed off' applications.

▲ Project title ▼	▲ Submitter ▼	▲ On behalf of ▼	▲ Faculty ▼	▲ Department ▼	▲ Supervisor ▼	▲ Status ▼	☑
'Who cares about Service Children?' An ethnographic investigation into the educational, social and emotional needs of children from armed forces families in UK schools [update] [comment]	Claire Lee	Claire Lee	Faculty of Social Sciences and Law	Graduate School of Education	Malcolm Reed	Signed off	Yes

Appendix 2 Screenshots of the project leaflet provided for participants and letter sent to their parents

Service Children Research Project



INFORMATION AND INVITATION



Important to know

I hope you will join in with this project, but it is entirely your choice. Nobody will try and make you join in, and if you decide you don't want to carry on any more, nobody will try and make you carry on. It's very important that you are happy and have your say.

If you have any questions at all, you can ask Claire Lee at any time.

During the sessions

In our project we will talk about how we want to do our research. This might be filming, recording voices, taking photos and making notes, as well as all the activities we will do together. Anything you say during these sessions will be kept private.

Presenting the research

When we have finished our research, Claire Lee will write up the whole project into a thick document called a thesis. She will also publish some articles for different sets of people to read. So that people can't tell who you are, she will use fake names for you, the school and the area, and any photos will be changed so that no one can identify you. We will also talk about ways we can present what we have found out to the school, parents and anyone else we think might be interested.

What it's all about

What?



I want to find out more about what it's like being a child from a service family in a primary school. All children have different experiences, so it's a chance to hear all your voices. What is it like? How do you want to be cared for?

How?



We will do lots of different activities which we will choose together. These could be making things, taking photos, performing, writing, using IT – whatever we can think of that will give us the chance to say what we want to say.

Why?



It's important that we understand what service children's lives are like so that we can care for them better. The government has promised to support armed forces families better, but very little research has been done, and even less with children themselves.

When and where?



Wednesday afternoons during school time. The project will stop during the summer holidays and carry on next year. We will be based in the [REDACTED] You won't need to bring anything.

Who?



Children from Years 4 and 5 are invited to be part of the research group with Mrs Claire Lee. She is a researcher at the University of Bristol and used to teach at our school. The project is paid for by the Economic and Social Research Council. The RAF Families Federation and the Ministry of Defence are also interested in the project.

How do I get involved?



If you would like to be involved, you need permission from your parents/[carers](#). If you have any more questions you can ask Claire Lee, or email her at claire.lee@bristol.ac.uk. If your parents/[carers](#) would like to talk to her about the project, she would be very happy to meet them.



University of
BRISTOL

Graduate School of Education,
35 Berkeley Square,
Bristol BS8 1JA

26 April 2017

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you know, I am researching the experiences of children from armed forces families in UK schools. I am very grateful that [REDACTED] School is committed to this project, which is one of very few in-depth studies about children from service families in this country. I am based at the University of Bristol; the research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and has the support of the RAF Families Federation and the DCYP.

This letter is to ask for permission for me to invite your child to be part of a focus group of children who will work with me on an exciting arts-based project. This will involve the children doing creative activities such as art, photography, language and drama to explore and present their educational experiences as service children.

Nine children did a similar, small-scale project in 2015. Using clay modelling, art, poetry and fiction, song-writing and stop-motion animation, we produced an informative and moving film which has been used by the school for staff and governor training. The children said they enjoyed the process and also learned a lot.

The research has been carefully planned to be fully appropriate for children and to meet the highest ethical standards. University of Bristol ethics approval has been applied for and granted. Care for all participants is central to this project. The children will be fully informed about the research, and they are free to choose to take part or not. No individual or the school will be identifiable in any publications. The activities will take place during the school day starting in May, and will continue for the next school year.

A particularly important part of my research plan, which comes from my own experience as a service child, is that the children should not be labelled as a group but recognised as individuals with a variety of experiences, and that all their individual voices should be heard. From this research I will be able to report on ways in which policies can better reflect the needs of all service children.

I hope that you will be willing to consent to your child being invited to take part in this project, and should be grateful if you would return the attached slip by 5 May.

Yours faithfully,

Claire Lee.

Appendix 3 Examples of analysis

(1) Screenshot of annotated transcript. (Obscured names were pseudonyms the children gave themselves for the project. I changed these for the thesis to anonymise them further.)

Fortnite
Mum
Packs for chn with deployed parents
Moving house living on base mock interview
Moving in with dad

180418 Fortnite and Mum being away

Me: Did you want to start, [redacted] cause you were starting to say about your news?

[redacted]: Er, yes. Um, I'm moving to a school opposite my house on 7th May now.

[redacted]: Boo!

[redacted]: Yesss!

Me: 8th May, why has it come forward? Do you know?

[redacted]: Well my mum didn't, they didn't give my mum, my mum only gave in her notice like a week ago, because they didn't give her something, I don't know what it was, erm, so

Me: So your mum's leaving here as well?

[redacted]: Yes. Um, what was the other thing I was going to say? Um, and the other thing, oh and, um ... Ooh, yes, and there's a L M G and, have you heard of a game called Fortnite?

[redacted]: Oh yes/yes

[redacted]: Everyone's heard of it.

[redacted]: There's a new one coming up called er

[redacted]: Yeah I know, Light Machine Gun.

[redacted]: Yeah, there's also, people, when they're playing Fortnite, they look up to the sky and there are tilted towers and there's, a, er

[redacted]: Light machine gun

[redacted]: No, what was it? [urgently]

[redacted]: [makes explosion noise]

[redacted]: grenade, a bomb?

[redacted]: No, no

[redacted]: Nuke?

[redacted]: No, what are the things in space called?

[redacted]: Satellites?

Performing reactions

2 weeks away and date changing

Using adult term

school?

politics

kept out of it

common knowledge

not expecting me to know it, prepared to explain

gaming - popular game

privileged knowledge

virtual world reality game

multi-player over internet

in game

weaponry + war


Helping him out in recounting it

(2) Screenshots of field notes and reflective journal page

Nowhere to go 21st June.

Finding a space today was tricky. We started in the staff room, but people kept coming in and out. We decamped to a shady spot just outside the staff room but the cooks were close by. After finding some tables outside (too many people going past) we ended up under a tree on the field.

Apart from the odd bee, we were undisturbed.



Continuity and disruption

I want to think this through, sparked by a comment by Cris - IF you just carry on with your life normally as if they were here?

Can the children's lives be characterised or framed in terms of continuity + disruption?

Continuity	Disruption
School	Parents away + return
Possessions photos	- sleep + diet
Narratives, lineage	- routines + chores
Base life	- sense of safety
Family stability	- access to clubs etc
Internet, pop culture, reading, gaming	- availability of help
Things to look forward to	- discipline + roles
Part of the expected narrative	Moving + community
Staying in touch	- friendships
	- attachment to place
	- curriculum + learning
	- wide family
	Transition to 2ndary school
	Changing shift patterns
	Disruption to sense of safety
	Family conflict

(3) Example of reflective writing

I am struck by the contrast between items which are clearly favourite childhood companions and those which belong more to the realm of adolescence: lip balms, fragrances, pop band merchandise. To me this suggests Amelia is experimenting with how it feels to be part of the world of grown-ups. Using the paraphernalia of adulthood is a physical way of experiencing this. To her the perfume "stinks," but the intrinsic qualities of the objects are less important than what they afford, the feeling of entering a new and intriguing phase in life. At the same time she can retreat from this still alien world for a cuddle with a favourite teddy. These gifts of cosmetics could be seen as a way of channelling Amelia into a certain understanding of female adulthood, which relies on projecting a 'feminine' image and acceptable tastes. A less critical view would understand these gifts as reflecting Amelia's parents' sensitivity to her desire to experiment with new ways of being as she approaches adolescence.

Amelia has moved house and schools more than the others. Out of this group she has been in this school for the shortest time. Like many service children, Amelia frequently lists the places she has lived, seeking a continuous thread through the fractures in her life story. Having her possessions around her gives her, I think, a sense of permanence. She might move house; she might change schools; friends come and go, but Amelia can quickly recreate her familiar environment with her possessions, and be able to feel she is at home. After all, at her age, what can she alter beyond her immediate surroundings? For Amelia, the word 'objects' seems too impersonal: these are 'belongings', belonging to her but also helping her to belong.

(4) Screenshot of concept map



created with mindmeister.com