Deconstructing ‘Readiness’ in Early Childhood Education

Submitted by Katherine Louise Evans to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

In the context of early childhood education, in England and internationally, ideas and practices of ‘readiness’ have been of interest within research, policy and practice for some time. Much critical research, scholarship and activism has focused on exploring developmental aspects of this phenomenon arguing for: more ‘appropriate’ standards of ‘readiness’ against which to judge children’s learning and development; closer relationships between schools, preschools and communities that produce culturally responsive concepts of ‘readiness’; and the critical examination of the relationship between early childhood and compulsory school education. Within this body of work there is significant emphasis on developing and articulating alternative ideas and approaches that can unsettle dominant, normalizing practices of teaching and learning. Within these critical explorations of ‘readiness’ however, there is an avenue of scholarship that, seemingly, is as yet unexplored – one that addresses the concept of ‘readiness’ itself and asks how it may be possible to conceptualize ‘readiness’ in a way that is consistent with, and responsive to, complex processes of teaching and learning. This is not just a shift in practice, or in policy narratives, but is an ontological and epistemological change – a reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ that takes as its starting point a fundamental assumption of the positive and productive force of difference, in learning and in life.

This thesis explores the ontological and epistemological shifts required to move away from ideas of ‘readiness’ that attach progression to a mechanistically linear movement. It develops and articulates an approach that embraces the emergent and unpredictable nature of learning, from which a concept of ‘readiness’ emerges which works with open, non-linear and emergent dimensions of education as necessary aspects of the complex systems within which we work.

The thesis works with the concept of a ‘diffractive methodology’, exploring the concept of ‘readiness’ through ideas and theories drawn from complexity theory, from the immanent philosophy of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari,
and through onto-epistemological ideas of materiality and the entanglement of matter and meaning explored in particular by Barad. Methodologically, this study works within the space opened up by recent developments within ‘post-qualitative’ approaches to research. Working with concepts of ‘sensation’ and ‘affect’ it engages critically with often taken for granted concepts and practices such as: assumptions concerning empirical/theoretical research; ideas of ‘data collection’ and ‘data analysis’; and the production of knowledge in and through experience. Deleuzian philosophy (among other influences) is approached in this methodological context as an open system, as opposed to a totalizing structure. Concepts including ‘sensation’ and ‘affect’ are approached as potentialities, the methodological value of which is affirmed through the ways in which they have been productively put to work in the context of this study in order to produce spaces in which it is possible to think and act in ways that challenge conventional structures.

What is developed in this thesis is a concept of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’, as opposed to a fixed and normalizing identity. It is argued that, through this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ as a central concept within early childhood education, other taken for granted concepts are unsettled, in particular ideas and practices of assessment. In exploring these concepts, the original ideas produced within this thesis, in relation to both early childhood education and research methodology, aim to contribute to the creation of more ethical and inclusive spaces of early childhood education and educational research.
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Introduction

This thesis is about the deconstruction of a concept, the influence of which reverberates throughout the field of early childhood education.

The concept is ‘readiness’.

The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines ‘readiness’ as, “The state of being fully prepared for something.”

In the context of education, this ‘state of preparation’ has come to have significant value, particularly in relation to the aims and purposes of education. Across the world education can be seen to prepare children in different ways, as part of particular diverse societies and cultures. Education has many functions – the production of a workforce with a diverse range of skills and knowledge, the socialization of children and young people into their communities and cultures, and as a significant tool in the enrichment of lives all over the world and the sustainability of that world in ecological, economical and ethical terms.

As preparation for an ethically sustainable future therefore, ‘readiness’ is an important concept. Future generations must be ‘ready’ to negotiate their roles in the world’s continued development, and crucially, to do this ethically. Indeed it is difficult to argue, in this broad context, that ‘readiness’ is not an important concept.

So why does this thesis take the deconstruction and reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ as its focus?

In the context of early childhood education in England, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, ‘readiness’ is an important concept. Particular ideas of ‘readiness for school’ and ‘readiness for learning’ have become common within contemporary discourse surrounding early childhood education and have come to have a significant influence on children’s early
experiences. At the heart of the research that is (re)presented in this thesis however, is a belief that this influence has come to affect children, and the educational communities in which they are situated, in adverse ways that may have potentially damaging long-term effects.

The following narrative, told from my own perspective as the researcher in this project and presented as an aside¹ to the main text, illuminates how this particular focus on ‘readiness’ emerged. The use of personal narrative is used throughout the thesis as a strategy for communicating to the reader the necessary complexity of the process of ‘becoming researcher’ in the context of this project. All names within these narrative ‘asides’ are pseudonyms.

**Aside 1**

I had always wanted to be a teacher. Indeed, I can never remember wanting to do or be anything else. My mother was a teacher and I had spent many days as a young teenager accompanying her into school. It just felt like a natural choice of profession, indeed, it somehow felt like it wasn’t a choice at all. It was just meant to be. I planned my own academic choices carefully around this goal – choosing subjects at school and college that would enable me to pursue a teaching degree at university.

Those early experiences gave me a sense of what I felt education was all about. I saw in my mothers teaching great value given to exploration, to play and creativity. The children I saw in her classroom were children with rights, with voices, and crucially, children with the space for those voices to be heard. These experiences underpinned the values I brought with me as I began my teacher training. Throughout the 4 years I studied and practised to become a teacher I had a vast range of experiences. I specialized in the early years and very quickly developed a strength of conviction about the pivotal role of play and exploration in learning, not just of young children but for all, including

¹ Throughout the text, each aside is differentiated from the main text and from other textual devices by presenting them against a grey background and within a double hairline boarder.
myself as an educator. Throughout my teacher training I formed a passionate belief in the importance of early years education as an opportunity for all children to develop their potential, as a space in which children could explore their own passions and interests and could learn about the world as they interacted with the passions and interests of others.

Throughout my years working as a teacher I became increasingly frustrated with what I saw as the unnecessary formality of the early years education system in England. Whilst on the surface it offered children a play-based context in which to pursue their own interests and fascinations, within this context was embedded very normalizing structures that acted to measure and judge children’s perceived levels of learning and development. Age related expectations for learning and development, across the age range from birth to five years old, acted to define how children were thought of in terms of their levels of ability in the school or nursery context, acting to form identities based on particular, predefined, ideas of who children should be and what they should be able to do and know at particular ages and stages of development.

As a teacher, I struggled with these normalizing structures. For the communities in which I worked many children did not fit the norms of development stated within policy frameworks and assessment documents. Their life experience did not match what was represented within these policy technologies and, as a result, many of the children on paper, were positioned as behind, as falling short of where they ‘should’ be in relation to a normalized trajectory of learning and development. For these children, interventions were made into their school and preschool experience in order to bring them more in line with the prescribed norms. They were not recognized and celebrated for who they were, for the rich knowledge, skills, ideas and experiences they brought to school, but rather were defined by what they lacked, their differences seen as things to be eliminated and redirected to a normalized identity.
The areas in which this idea of deficit, of lack and of difference as a negative quality, was felt most keenly within points of transition. Children’s transition from nursery or preschool to school, and from the early years phase of education to the next stage in primary school, were key times within which these normalized notions of learning and development became particularly dominant. Within these transitions was a particular discourse of ‘readiness’, underpinning the ways in which children were assessed and the aspects of their experience that were considered valuable in relation to their identity within educational spaces. As an early years teacher I found it heart-breaking to watch children who, within the nursery or preschool environment had been so full of life, excitement and passion for learning, become failures in the eyes of a school system that judged them on such a narrow set of criteria. I became more and more frustrated at being asked to shift the practice within preschool to focus more on children’s preparation for school, on adult led activities, ensuring greater ‘readiness’ for the culture of the school environment.

Since my initial teacher training I had continued to read and engage with research and scholarship in relation to early childhood education. The texts I read just fuelled my frustration. I read widely in relation to international practices, exploring, through my reading, the educational cultures of places such as Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy and the approaches developed across many of the Scandinavian countries. What I saw in these approaches was another way. They showed me that the systems within this country, that frustrated me so greatly, were a product of a particular political system, underpinned by particular ideas and assumptions about the role and value of education in society. My engagement with these international practices raised endless questions within my own practice, about the effects of these normalizing systems on children’s early experiences and, perhaps most importantly, whether it was possible to effectively subvert these systems and find other ways of working?
As a way of creating space to engage with some of these questions and frustrations I embarked on a masters degree. What I discovered through my studies significantly challenged my assumptions about research and the relationship of research to practice in schools. My experience of educational research had been as a technology that could be applied to practice – a way of improving practice through the provision of specified programmes and ways of working, guidance on ‘best practice’ and programmes of work to support the teaching of things such as phonics. As I explored different forms of research through the modules I completed, I realized the world of educational research was far more complex and interesting than I had ever anticipated. The most influential aspect of this experience however, was the realization that research was, in fact, lived out every day by educators in settings as they worked with children and young people. In research I found a space in which I could explore the questions that were frustrating me so much in practice – and potentially could make a difference through the opportunities this research context offered.

The research that is explored and (re)presented in this thesis is therefore, in part, a product of these experiences. It has roots in those early experiences watching my mother create ethical and creative classroom spaces, in the values and beliefs that were forged in those and other experiences, in the frustrations that emerged from years of working as an educator and from that involvement in, and exploration of, research. The focus of this research, the reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education, most certainly emerged from my engagement with the many children and families who, over my years as an educator, did not fit the system. Those who were identified as starting school needing to catch up, and whose uniqueness and brilliance was not recognized by a system that failed to see outside of the boxes it created.

The chapters that follow continue this narrative. They take up and explore this problem of ‘readiness’ as a dominant discourse within early childhood education, and propose an alternative way of thinking and living ‘readiness’ within early childhood spaces. In some senses, the presentation of this thesis
is unconventional. It does not begin with a series of defined research questions to which it details a neat process of research, culminating in answers and definite conclusions. Rather, it starts with this problematic notion of ‘readiness’ within early childhood education and uses this as a provocation for a research journey that embraces and responds to unexpected twists, turns and emergences. As an approach to communicating research, it embeds the researcher very much within the research, making no attempt to create objective distance. The thesis is interspersed with personal narratives, an ongoing story of ‘becoming researcher’ that contextualizes the ideas and concepts that are developed in relation to this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’. In some ways the style could be considered auto-ethnographic, an exploration of self in relation to the research that developed. It uses multiple textual devices to communicate to the reader, including: personal narratives constructed as ‘asides’ to the main body of text; fictional stories drawn from embodied experience and juxtaposed with theoretical discussions; and more conventional academic approaches to writing that engage the reader with theory, policy and practice. These devices are woven throughout the thesis, appearing as and when necessary as a provocation to thinking.

In other ways however, the structure of this thesis could be considered quite conventional. It is composed of 3 distinct parts: Part 1, an exploration of literature through which the historical and contemporary context for this work is constructed; Part 2, exploring the development of methodology and positioning the work within a particular methodological field; and Part 3, an extensive discussion and analysis through which the possibilities for reconceptualizing dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ are explored and articulated. Perhaps most importantly, the thesis as a whole produces a contribution to knowledge through its theoretical and methodological developments.

Part 1, ‘Reconceptualizing Readiness’ is composed of 4 chapters which together provide a contextualization for the reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ that is to follow.
Chapter 1, ‘A historical exploration of ‘readiness’ explores the emergence of ‘readiness’ as a discourse within different aspects of society throughout history. The purpose of this chapter is to explore a historical contextualization of ‘readiness’, in the context of early childhood education, as a foundation for the deconstruction of ‘readiness’ that is to follow. In particular, the discussion within this chapter explores conceptions of ‘childhood’ and images of the child in the belief that contemporary concepts of ‘readiness’, and the educational practices informed by them, are fundamentally linked to the multiple ways in which children and childhood are viewed. The discussion within this chapter draws on a range of literature in order to explore differing ideas and discourses of ‘readiness’, articulating some of the ways in which ‘readiness’ has developed in England throughout history and into the present day.

Chapter 2, ‘A contemporary context of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education’ draws on contemporary literature, including research and policy texts, in order to explore the context of early childhood education in England and on a broader, international scale. Drawing on contemporary critiques, this chapter presents an analysis of ‘readiness’ as a concept within early childhood education and explores its influence on policy and practice in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage in England.

Chapter 3, ‘Thinking differently about ‘readiness’ in early childhood education’ builds on the discussion begun in the previous two chapters in order to argue that, whilst important in challenging dominant and potentially damaging understandings of ‘readiness’ in education, many contemporary critiques do not go far enough. Through engagement with contemporary literature, this chapter introduces the concept of complexity reduction, drawing on postmodern, post-structural and post-foundational ideas and theories to argue for a need to move beyond critique of dominant discourses of ‘readiness’, towards a reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ at ontological and epistemological levels.

Chapter 4, ‘A theoretical framework for reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ explores particular philosophical ideas that, throughout this research project,
have sparked engagement in a process of thinking differently. The discussion in this chapter critically explores how these ideas can be useful in reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education. In particular it focuses on an interpretation of the concepts of transcendence and immanence drawn from engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, exploring how an immanent philosophical perspective can open possibilities for thinking differently about ‘readiness’.

**Part 2**, ‘Methodology’ is composed of a single chapter that presents a detailed narrative of the complex methodological processes that developed throughout this research project.

**Chapter 5**, ‘A philosophical ethnography’ engages with contemporary developments in the field of post-qualitative research, situating this project within a wider field of methodological development and innovation. This chapter juxtaposes a discussion of methodological theory and process, with a situated research narrative, contextualizing the processes and practices that developed. Using the textual device of the ‘aside’, the discussion details what emerged, unexpectedly, as part of the original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis. Drawing on work situated with a post-qualitative frame, the methodological processes that developed within this project present an embodied approach to the production of knowledge, bringing together existing ideas and practices in new and innovative ways.

**Part 3**, ‘De/reconstructing ‘readiness’’ is composed of 4 chapters. This final part of the thesis draws on the previous 5 chapters and the ways of thinking made possible through the theoretical and methodological developments, in order to present a reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’.

**Chapter 6**, ‘Readiness as an active-affective-ethical-relation’ begins by detailing a particular problem, emergent in response to the previous chapters. This problem states that, *Dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ rely on the existence of predefined goals, outcomes and targets, against which an individual’s ‘readiness’ can be judged. What are the possibilities for*
understanding ‘readiness’ beyond this closed framework?’ Through continued engagement with concepts inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Chapter 6 explores these questions, constructing a framework for understanding ‘readiness’ differently. This framework explores ‘readiness’ as an active, affective and relational concept, that emerges from lived experience.

Chapter 7, ‘The importance of ethics’ continues the discussion begun in Chapter 6, exploring the particular importance of ethics within this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’. Continuing the engagement with Deleuzian philosophy, this chapter explores the basis on which this reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’ can produce and sustain ethical relationships within contexts of early childhood education, and through these relationships can work to maximize the potential of all children.

Chapter 8, ‘Readiness-and-assessment’ explores the possibilities for reconceptualizing readiness and assessment as inseparable elements of an educational event, elements that are continuously emerging through ongoing active, affective, relational and ethical encounters. This chapter explores possibilities for thinking and acting differently in relation to assessment, as a site through which ‘readiness’ emerges and can be productively reconceptualized within day-to-day experiences in early childhood settings. Drawing on contemporary practice from contexts such as Italy and Canada, the chapter offers some ideas for alternative ways of working that enable the emergence of ‘readiness’ as an active-affective-ethical-relation.

Chapter 9, ‘A moment of pause and a view to the future’ offers a tentative conclusion to the thesis. It articulates contexts of educator professional development within which the ideas developed within this research project have begun to have an influence. Thinking forward, it proposes a space within initial teacher education where this concept of ‘readiness’, and the methodological innovations developed, could have a significant and sustainable influence on practice. Articulating a notion of theory as practice it suggests future avenues of research and practices through which the ideas
developed here could be practicably taken forward into educational spaces, having an influence on the work of teachers and early childhood educators, and by extension, on the experiences of children within early childhood spaces.

The hope is that this thesis will provoke ways of thinking differently about ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education. The ideas, theories and praxis developed throughout the chapters offer an original contribution to the field of early childhood education in the creation and articulation of new ways of thinking about ‘readiness’ and, through the exploration of ‘readiness-and-assessment’, new ways of engaging with these ideas in and through practice. In particular this thesis aims to make people stop and think, and to complexify the ways in which ‘readiness’ is conceptualized and experienced within the day-to-day experience of educational communities.
Part 1

Reconceptualizing ‘readiness’
Chapter 1: A historical exploration of ‘readiness’

The purpose of this chapter is to explore a historical contextualization of ‘readiness’, in the context of early childhood education, as a foundation for the decontextualization of ‘readiness’ that is the subject of this thesis. In particular, this discussion will explore conceptions of ‘childhood’ and images of the child in the belief that contemporary concepts of ‘readiness’, and the educational practices informed by them, are fundamentally linked to the multiple ways in which children and childhood are viewed. In a sense therefore, this chapter is an exploration and analysis of the past in order to understand what is happening in the present and to develop new possibilities for thinking and acting in the future.

The discussion begins by drawing on four conceptions of ‘readiness’, outlined in the work of Meisels (1999) and developed by Brown (2010). It will argue that these dominant, yet very different, concepts underpin how it is currently possible to think about ‘readiness’. This discussion is then developed as a framework in which to understand some of the ways in which ‘readiness’ has developed in England throughout history and into the present day.

In exploring concepts of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education, this study recognizes schooling in particular as central to the construction of a particularly dominant notion of ‘childhood’ (Hendrick, 1997a). It is argued in this chapter that contemporary discourses and practices of ‘readiness’ are fundamentally linked to educational institutions, as political sites where such discourses are produced and reproduced by a range of social actors, including policy makers, educators and children themselves. In developing an understanding of the historical foundations of childhood and discourses of ‘readiness’ therefore, this discussion pays particular attention to the institutionalization of childhood through schooling and its impact upon the relationship between children and wider society.
Four conceptions of ‘readiness’

Meisels (1999) proposes a four-part framework for understanding ‘readiness’. He identifies common conceptions as being underpinned by different assumptions: idealist/nativist; empirical/environmental; social constructivist; and interactionist.

Within an idealist/nativist frame, Meisels (1999) considers that ‘readiness’ is constructed as an internal, organismic process, within which behaviour, development and learning are controlled by endogenous factors and within which environmental factors have very limited influence. As Brown (2010) identifies, this conception situates ‘readiness’ within the child, paying little to no attention to the role of the environment. The child is ‘ready-to-learn’, or ‘ready’ to perform certain roles in society, when their level of maturational development determines. Deviation or delay in this level of development is therefore down to biological factors inherent in the child.

In contrast to this, an empirical/environmental concept of ‘readiness’ focuses on external evidence of, and influences on, learning, development and behaviour. This particular framing can be likened to a ‘cultural transmission model’ or a process of qualification (Biesta, 2010a), within which emphasis is put on the acquisition of particular skills and experiences as precursors to future school and life ‘readiness’. Brown (2010) defines this concept as focusing on the child’s need to “engage in a particular set of experiences to be ready for school” (p136), thereby tasking early childhood education with the responsibility of developing these skills, knowledge(s) and experiences in order to be ‘ready’ for a particular school environment. Framed in this way, ‘readiness’ can be constructed as a predefined transition point between one context, or environment, and another, a point which, crucially, can be defined by stable and universal criteria, derived from the context children are entering.

The social constructivist perspective described by Meisels (1999) shifts the focus away from the child themselves towards the community in which they are situated. Discourses of ‘readiness’ are considered to be products of the
social and cultural situations from which they emerge, impacted by the specific values and expectations within a particular setting. Absolute and universal definitions of ‘readiness’ are abjured in favour of a construction of ‘readiness’ as “in the eye of the beholder” (Meisels, 1999, p. 49). As Brown (2010) states, informed by a social constructivist perspective, “the readiness equation is dependent on the social context in which the child operates, and as such, a child can be ready in one community and not another” (p. 136). From a sociocultural perspective therefore, even within a given context, ‘readiness’ could be viewed differently by different communities.

The fourth definition of ‘readiness’ advanced by Meisels (1999) considers it to be a ‘bi-directional’ concept, focusing on the interaction between the child and their environment. Meisels (1999) states that, as an interactional construct, ‘readiness’ is defined by the way in which “the child’s activity alters the expectations of the environment even as the environment modifies what the child is able to accomplish” (p. 48). This interactionist construct is therefore defined by a reciprocal relationship between the child and their environment, whether that be the educational setting or wider society. Brown (2010) identifies that, in an attempt to avoid constructing a single and fixed standard of ‘readiness’, as implied through nativist and environmental constructs, much contemporary research appeals to this interactionist perspective. Brown (2010) highlights how contemporary scholarship has tended to attempt a move towards constructions of ‘readiness’ that explore it as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Whilst Meisels (1999) four concepts provide a useful frame for understanding diverse ways of thinking about ‘readiness’, they are by no means an exhaustive list. Brown (2010) extends these understandings to include the work of contemporary, critical researchers and scholars such as Cannella (1997) and Grieshaber (2008). He draws on their work in order to highlight a need for constructions of ‘readiness’ to be subjected to critical examination and questioning in order to uncover “underlying conceptions of things such as power or the framing of the child, family and practitioner” (Brown, 2010, p. 137).
What these different understandings of ‘readiness’ highlight is that there is no single and fixed concept to which we can appeal within education. What the framework developed by Meisels (1999) and extended by Brown (2010) indicates is that ‘readiness’ is conceptualized in different ways, both within/between different contexts, and also over time. In order to provide a context for the discussion of ‘readiness’ that is the subject of this thesis therefore, this chapter explores the emergence of ‘readiness’ in the context of the history of childhood and the shifting roles of children within society. Influenced by sociological perspectives such as those advanced by Prout & James (1997), this discussion considers ‘childhood’ itself to be a social construction, produced out of particular historical and social situations and influenced by a range of variables such as class, race and socio-economic status. The discussion developed in this chapter takes the view, as highlighted by Nutbrown et al. (2008), that there is not one history of childhood, but a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences that influence how childhood today is lived. In particular, it is important to acknowledge that the historical experiences and perspectives explored in this chapter are situated in a Western, largely European, and most often Anglo context. This sociological influence also underpins the belief that conceptions of childhood and the relationship between children and society are fluid, and have shifted and changed constantly throughout history (Cunningham, 1995; Hendrick, 1997a).

In beginning this thesis with a discussion of historical developments, the intention is to create a context for the ideas developed within this research project, drawing on the notion that we can use history both as a means of understanding present ways of doing, thinking and being in education, and also to inform future developments, ideas and actions (Nutbrown et al., 2008).

**Constructions of childhood**

A study of the history of childhood indicates that the ways in which childhood is understood today may be quite different from constructions of the past. Aries (1972) identifies the beginning of the concept of ‘childhood’ as emerging
around the 16th century. Prior to this time, Aries (1972) claims that a concept of childhood simply did not exist. He describes a medieval society which, although not short of children, lacked a notion of ‘childhood’. As Qvortrup (2005) writes, “children were plentiful and visibly there but did not constitute a separate conceptual category, that is, there was no particular awareness of them” (p. 2). During this period, Qvortrup (2005) considers, children’s societal presence in their infant years was as “small animal like creatures” (p. 2), during which they were considered too fragile to have any meaningful role in wider society and in adult life. Once a child was considered able to live without the constant care of a mother, nanny or cradle rocker however, they became part of society, entrusted with the responsibilities of the adult world, however dangerous or inappropriate by contemporary, Western standards. Aries (1972) claims that children lived a public life from a very early age, entrusted with duties like adults and with no consideration of them belonging to a different conceptual category, with different needs. Wyness (2006) writes that prior to the 16th century there was a distinct lack of sentiment and an indifference towards children as a separate sector of society.

Aries (1972) portrayal of the Medieval child however has been criticized for its present-centeredness (Pollock, 1983). Indeed, it is argued that a concept of childhood did exist in Medieval society, just one that was so different to modern conceptions we cannot recognize it today (Pollock, 1983). Heywood (2001) suggests that childhood in the Middle Ages may not have been ignored in the way described by Aries, but loosely defined, existing as unstructured and unspecified in character. Despite such critiques however, Aries (1972) conception of the development of a concept of childhood is important for this study as it highlights the nature of childhood as a dynamic social construction, rather than a fixed and essential phenomenon. As Prout (2005) states, “in the post-Aries intellectual landscape, it became possible to think of childhood as a variable and changing entity” (p. 51) and consequently to challenge dominant perspectives in this area, searching for multiple understandings and conceptions.
The discussion developed in this chapter also considers that it is unduly simplistic to polarize historical societies in terms of the absence or presence of childhood as a conceptual category (Heywood, 2001). Drawing on this perspective, it is also considered unproductive to treat the development of concepts of ‘childhood’ as a simple linear progression through history. Instead, this discussion considers the “ebbing and flowing” (Heywood, 2001, p. 20) of notions of childhood, their relation to discourses of ‘readiness’ and the societal turning points that have effected particular cultural constructions.

The following sections are organized around five key themes, emergent from the analysis of literature engaged in throughout the chapter. These themes are: segregation and separation; protection, participation and marginalization; a national childhood; science and development; and a ‘new’ sociology of childhood. Within each theme, discussion focuses on key social and political influences effecting shifts in the construction of childhood, making particular reference to discourses and conceptions of ‘readiness’.

**Segregation and separation**

Aries (1972) identifies, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the emergence of a ‘coddling’ period in relation to young children in some sectors of society. This ‘coddling’, in evidence in particular among the middle and upper classes, emerged in response to what Aries (1972) identifies as a “new concept of childhood…in which the child, on account of his sweetness, simplicity and drollery, became a source of amusement and relaxation for the adult” (p. 129). This view of children and childhood is exemplified, according to Aries (1972), in the art and iconography of the 16th and 17th centuries, in which “the child or infant- at least in the upper classes of society – was given a special costume which marked him out from the adults” (p. 129). An increasing distinction between adults and children was therefore becoming apparent, a distinction within which children’s innocence and vulnerability was highlighted. Aries (1972) saw children as having a decreasing role in post-medieval society, equating an increase in protection with a decrease in participation, perhaps based on a notion that children’s innocence meant they were not ‘ready’ to
participate in adult society. Indeed, it has been identified as one of the great paradoxes of Aries’ thesis that children had more visibility in society when childhood did not exist as a concept (Qvortrup, 2005).

Whilst this increasingly sentimental treatment of children began in the middle and upper classes, Aries (1972) notes that by the end of the 17th century, ‘coddling’ had come to have a presence in the lower and working classes. This widespread trend, from participation to protection and segregation, has also been identified by deMause (1974), who equates the participation of children in Medieval communities with mistreatment and hardship, tracing a pattern in the treatment of children towards a more caring, nurturing and humane attitude in post-medieval societies.

The ideas and perspectives that underpinned the coddling period of the 16th and 17th centuries extended into the 18th and 19th centuries as children were increasingly denied participation in wider social activity, as they were considered too innocent, weak and vulnerable. The late 18th century in particular saw such notions come to prominence again with the emergence of particular Romantic views of the child. These views were perpetuated through literary work of the day, for example, as Reynolds (online) identifies, through the romantic poetry of writers such as William Blake and William Wordsworth. For the romantics, childhood was a time of goodness, “associated with a set of positive meanings and attributes, notably innocence, freedom, creativity, emotion, spontaneity and, perhaps most importantly for those charged with raising and educating children, malleability” (Reynolds, online). Perhaps the best known proponent of the romantic childhood is Jacques Roussau (1762) in his text Emile. Rousseau’s view of childhood was as innately good. He considered children to be born innocent and saw in the society of man a risk to this innocence. He states, in the introduction to Emile, “Coming from the hand of the Author of all things, everything is good; in the hands of man everything degenerates” (1762, p. 11). Rousseau did not, however, advocate a complete separation of the child from the world, seeing experience of nature as of vital importance in the development of the child’s natural capacities and temperaments:
“He among us who best knows how to bear the good and evil fortunes of this life is, in my opinion, the best educated; whence it follows that true education consists less in precept than in practice. We begin to instruct ourselves when we begin to live; our education commences with the commencement of our life; our first teacher is our nurse. For this reason the word "education" had among the ancients another meaning which we no longer attach to it; it signified nutriment” (1762, p. 14).

Rousseau’s romantic notion of the innate goodness of children, and the need to preserve this, underpinned a concept of education as nurturing, of cultivation through experience, in which, what he saw as the natural characteristics of childhood were preserved as children were ‘made ready’ to cope with the harsh challenges of wider adult society.

This particular romantic view of children and childhood therefore highlighted perceived differences between children and adults. Within Rousseau’s articulation of his educational philosophy in Emile, he indicates a sense of childhood as a time of preparation, of developing children’s ‘readiness’ to engage robustly with the world, whilst preserving the qualities of goodness with which they were born. He states,

“Experience teaches that more children who are delicately reared die than others. Provided we do not exceed the measure of their strength, it is better to employ it than to hoard it. Give them practice, then, in the trials they will one day have to endure. Inure their bodies to the inclemency’s of the seasons, of climates, of elements; to hunger, thirst, fatigue; plunge them into the water of the Styx. Before the habits of the body are acquired we can give it such as we please without risk” (Roussau, 1762, p. 20).

What Rousseau is advocating therefore, can be interpreted as a managed form of risk. The separation of children from society through education therefore enabled children to be exposed to ‘trials’ and ‘inclemency’s’ in a manner that did not ‘exceed the measure of their strength’. In terms of an understanding of ‘readiness’ therefore, it can be interpreted that children were considered ‘not ready’ for society until they had experienced formative education, through which their capacity to cope with the challenges of the world could be nurtured in a way not possible with adults,
“...when once it has reached its full vigor, any alteration is perilous to its well-being. A child will endure changes which a man could not bear. The fibres of the former, soft and pliable, take without effort the bent we give them; those of man, more hardened, do not without violence change those they have received. We may therefore make a child robust without exposing his life or his health; and even if there were some risk we still ought not to hesitate. Since there are risks inseparable from human life, can we do better than to throw them back upon that period of life when they are least disadvantageous?” (Roussau, 1762, p. 20).

From the 16th century onwards, influenced by such romantic and sentimental views, it can be considered that children had a decreasing presence in society. This was not, however, fuelled exclusively by romantic and sentimental attitudes and the desire to protect children’s innate goodness and innocence. There was considerable negative reaction to the coddling activities of the 16th and 17th centuries. Rousseau himself cautioned about the negative effects of the over protection of children:

“Countries in which children are swaddled swarm with hunchbacks, with cripples, with persons crookkneed, stunted, rickety, deformed in all kinds of ways. For fear that the bodies of children may be deformed by free movements, we hasten to deform them by putting them into a press. Of our own accord we cripple them to prevent their laming themselves” (Rousseau, 1762, pp. 15–16).

Another source of critique for the coddling of children came from moralistic views of childhood, views which considered childhood, not as a time of innocence and goodness, but as a period of immaturity in which children were in need of discipline and training (Corsaro, 1997). Aries (1972) identifies that around the end of 17th century, the “fondness for childhood and its special nature no longer found expression in amusement and ‘coddling’, but in psychological interest and moral solicitude” (p. 131). In contrast to the romantic views of childhood, Aries (1972) identifies the moralists and scholars of the time as finding children wanting, seeing childhood as an age of imperfection which only time could cure. Moral reformers argued that children were born with the stain of original sin and therefore required redemption and
training through, often religious, education and instruction in order to procure a good and moral life.

Whilst these views of children and childhood are in many ways contrasting, they produced similar effects in terms of children being separated and segregated from wider society. In relation to a concept of ‘readiness’, it can also be considered that these perspectives all situate ‘readiness’ as an inherent characteristic of the individual, in what Meisels (1999) might identify as an idealist/nativist construct. Whether it was because of their perceived immaturity or their innocence, in many societal contexts children were considered ‘unready’ to participate in the public world until their “physiological and constitutional structures” (Meisels, 1999, p. 47) were sufficiently developed. The role of experience and environment were not denied in children’s developing ‘readiness’ for society, however, as Meisels identifies in his definition of an idealist/nativist framework, the primacy of ideal aspects of development was emphasized over other elements. The impact of this perspective, placing primacy on children’s “inner nature and essential self” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 45) was the removal of children from public spaces due to a belief that this ‘inner nature’ was either too vulnerable and good, or too untamed to be of use in the world at large. Qvortrup (2005) identifies the impact of such confinement as, sociologically speaking, generating a severing of childhood from an “encompassing encounter with adulthood” (p. 2). Whether through a belief in the need for protection or redemption, children were considered ‘not ready’ to engage in meaningful participation in the social fabric. Through their increasing exclusion from dominant sectors of society, children were forced into a position of waiting, anticipating a time when, through a combination of practices of protection, training, discipline and correction, they were considered ‘ready’ to be useful participants in society.

**Protection, participation and marginalization**

Hendrick (1997a) identifies how shifts in the construction of childhood had particular social impact for the working classes. Prior to the emergence of ‘childhood’ as a separate conceptual category, Hendrick (1997a) identifies
that these children had typically taken up working roles in society, contributing significantly to the financial survival of their families. As Hendrick (1997a) states however, the 17th and 18th centuries saw objections to what was coming to be seen as the exploitation of children through child labour. Significant efforts were made to separate children from environments that were considered to be physically or morally harmful, such as the street or factories, confining them instead in places of comparative safety such as the school or the home. In the midst of these changing attitudes to ‘childhood’, children were losing their position as ‘useful’ participants. Whereas once children had been considered able to work side by side with adults, this emerging status implied that it was only with delay and preparation that they could be considered ‘ready’ for useful participation in society (Qvortrup, 2005). As already stated however, this shift was not a universal phenomenon. Whilst by the late 19th century schooling had become compulsory in England, as Heywood (2001) identifies, truanting remained a problem with many working class children continuing to work in business, factories or on the land after school. There were also, states Heywood (2001) particular groups of children who were left out, who slipped through the cracks of the school system and continued to work in sweatshops and factories instead of attending school.

In a manner similar to the romantic philosophies that espoused children’s innate goodness and vulnerability, increased drives to protect children through the 18th and into the 19th century were in part a reaction to fears over experiences of violence and hardship in wider society. In some sectors of society, this was a significant shift. While children, when viewed as small adults, may have had both a right and a duty to be active participants in their communities, there is an implication that accompanying this status was a lack of protection and a risk of exploitation. The historical development toward segregating children and childhood could therefore be seen as a double-edged sword for some children. On the one hand it influenced increased physical protection and concern for children’s future prospects, whilst on the other it rendered children increasingly dependent and subject to adult control. Qvortrup (2005) develops this point, stating that children’s development as dependents was not exclusively a positive or a negative one. He states that
giving children a status on par with adults overlooked the fact that they were physically smaller and socially and mentally less experienced. Qvortrup (2005) writes that by overlooking actual relations of power with adults, children were in fact endangered. He also highlights, however, the need to balance the protection of children with their right to conceptual autonomy, warning that the historical emergence of an emphasis on children’s alleged vulnerability may in fact have been used by more powerful segments of society to silence and marginalize children and aspects of childhood that did not fit the ‘proper’ ideological mould.

This discourse of children as weaker, more vulnerable and consequently in need of special treatment through protection and reduced participation in society may therefore, in some contexts, have been used as a political tool. There are many significant examples, both historical and contemporary, of children’s power and presence in society provoking adult reactions of silencing and marginalization. Perhaps the most well known contemporary example is the story of Malala Yousafzai. A young Pakistani girl, Malala grew up with a passion for learning and a belief in her right to an education (Malala Fund, online). In 2009 she began writing an anonymous blog for the BBC Urdu service, for which, after being featured in a documentary for The New York Times, she was exposed as the author (ibid). In 2011, Malala received Pakistan’s National Youth Peace Prize, giving her national recognition for which the Taliban leaders voted to kill her (ibid). Malala’s story, documented on the Malala Fund website, details the global outcry over the unsuccessful attempt on her life:

“The Taliban’s attempt to kill Malala received worldwide condemnation and led to protests across Pakistan. In the weeks after the attack, over 2 million people signed a right to education petition, and the National Assembly swiftly ratified Pakistan’s first Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill” (Malala Fund, online).

Globally therefore, it can be seen how attempts have been made to marginalize children who do not fit a particular image of who or what particular sectors of power think they should be, whether that be innocent, weak,
subservient, dutiful, studious etc. Somerville (1982) identifies how, in England, this dominant model of an ‘acceptable’ childhood was developed in relation to particular notions of middle class domesticity, which to children from other sectors of society effectively marginalized characteristics of their own childhood experience that did not fit the valued ideal.

In England, the narrative of protection and shifts in children’s status as participants in society saw perspectives of working class children as wage earners shift, as children “came to be regarded as victims, as ‘slaves’, as innocents forced into ‘unnatural’ employment and denied their ‘childhood’” (Hendrick, 1997b, p. 39). According to Hendrick (1997b) this perspective became so widespread that by the mid to late 19th century, the wage earning child was no longer the norm. It is important to note however that the shifts and changes in the status, value and role of children in society did not develop as a straight forward progression away from the working child, towards an image of the child as a pupil, in preparation for a future as a wage earning adult member of society. In the lower classes, a working childhood continued much longer than in the middle or upper class sectors of society, largely through the necessity of the child’s income for family survival. It is also worth acknowledging that this increased protection and the shift towards compulsory schooling was not necessarily welcomed by children themselves. Hendrick (1997a) identifies how many working class children found the delay of their entry into adult society tedious as, until they were able to contribute financially, their opinions counted for very little within a working class home.

The notion of children as victims, forced into employment that contradicted their inherent innocence, fed into a culture of separation. Positioning children within institutions such as schools effectively worked to deny them their previously visible role in the societal division of labour (Qvortrup, 2005), influencing a shift in the nature of children’s ‘proper’ labour from largely manual, in the workplace, to increasingly cognitive, in the school. Protection in childhood came to be seen as fundamentally linked to successful progress in later life (Dahlberg et al., 2007). ‘Childhood’ as a stage of life became linked to ‘readying’ for the next stage, within which progress and ‘readiness’
could be denoted by “the acquisition of appropriate skills, the accomplishment of successive stages or milestones and increasing autonomy” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 45). Returning to Meisels (1999) descriptions of ‘readiness’, this growing conception can be considered to be underpinned by a combination of idealist/nativist and empiricist/environmental ideas. By placing children in institutions such as schools, there was a recognition that, whilst children were considered to possess innate characteristics which were in need of protection and nurturing, it was important to protect these from potentially harmful environmental factors. The role of the adult educator was, therefore, not just to nurture the child’s natural unfolding (Meisels, 1999), but to enable this unfolding to happen by protecting them from harmful external influences or indeed excluding them from particular cultural and political experiences. The institutionalization of childhood in England through compulsory schooling therefore provided the means to work towards the development of a standardized notion of what it meant to be ‘ready’ for society and to function productively as part of a national workforce.

**An emerging ‘National’ childhood**

The trend for separating children and adults in society influenced the development of a lengthened childhood, the exact duration of which increased throughout history with the introduction of formal schooling, for all social classes, and the gradual extension of the school leaving age. The progressively long school cycle saw the emergence of schooling as a defined stage between infancy and adulthood within which children, structurally organized according to age groupings, could be subject to a combination of discipline, nurturing, cognitive development and control. Hendrick (1997b) identifies how schools, on claiming moral and legal right to inflict physical and moral discipline, reinforced the idea of the child being in need of a particular form of control and punishment in order to be ready for a good and productive adult life. Schools required, on pain of punishment, particular behaviours and attitudes, through which the child’s vulnerability, ignorance and deference to adult authority was established and reinforced.
By 1870, schooling was widely considered to be an accepted stage in the process of growing up and the preparation for adulthood. Established through the work of a variety of social reformers, including lawyers, priests and moralists, characteristics of childhood such as innocence, ignorance, dependence and incompleteness became widespread conceptions. In England, the enforcement of schooling through acts such as the 1870 (Gillard, 2013) and 1918 (Fisher, 1918) education acts saw this idea of childhood become largely national. The image of the working child in society had been reconstructed as the ‘proper’ childhood identity shifted from that of wage earner to pupil, with children thus being separated from, and readied for, a particular social milieu. Hendrick (1997b) describes how the community knowledge, once valued in children as cultural participants, was thrown aside by the school system in its expectation of children as adopting a position of ignorance and conformity. The child was now considered ‘not ready’ for participation in socially significant activity, requiring special treatment through the quarantine of schooling before being allowed to join the world of adults (Aries, 1972). The value of childhood was therefore changing. The notion of the child as a social investment with regard to future parenting, economic competitiveness and a stable social democracy (Hendrick, 1997b) was becoming increasingly prominent.

The value placed on childhood was also affected by the growth of capitalism. Heywood (2001) recognises how middle class parents within a capitalist society had an incentive to ensure that their (male) children did not waste their inheritances and grew up with the skills required to be successful in a profession. Children were considered to hold the key to a successful and prosperous national future and educational projects of the 19th and 20th centuries dedicated themselves to the socialization and training of children in the skills and practices necessary to compete in this future. Prout (2005) identifies how economic change in the last part of the 19th century began to see demands for skills at which children were not adept. Whereas previously children’s labour had been largely physical, seeing an almost immediate economic return for the efforts among the working classes, the industrial revolution saw the nature of this labour change in line with the emergence of a
new, future-oriented mentality, valuing instead the kind of mental labour now associated with being a school pupil. The notions of protection and redemption that had underpinned early moves towards the segregation of children from adult society developed into a demand for the protection and training of a future workforce. As an instrument of socialization, the school formalized and institutionalized the separation of children from wider society and confirmed upon them a specific identity, for which the proper place was the classroom. This identity was endowed with particular needs and characteristics, different from those of adults, and enforceable through the regime of compulsory schooling within which a ‘proper’ childhood was considered to be one of commitment to learning the skills essential for a prosperous adult society.

It can be claimed therefore that, within a capitalist society, notions of ‘readiness’ developed a particularly utilitarian focus, becoming increasingly aligned with the acquisition of particular knowledges and skills, drawing links between childhood experiences and the production of a stable, well-prepared and competitive national workforce (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Drawing again on Meisels (1999), such discourses of ‘readiness’ could be considered to have an empiricist/environmental focus, being tied to the reproduction and acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and values, enabling the individual to successfully and competitively participate in local and global markets. Within this context therefore, ‘readiness’ could be considered part of a model of cultural transmission (Meisels, 1999) focusing on the acquisition of “specific skills or experiences that are valued as precursors to successful school [and life] experience” (p. 48), defined within the frame of a national childhood and underpinned by national values and priorities.

**Science and development**

Another significant influence on the image and identity of the child and childhood in England, emergent through the 19th and 20th centuries, has been the Child Study Movement. Notions of an English national childhood, inspired by society’s need for a particular type of future workforce, were supported
through the claims made within child studies to the status of a particular type of science. Prout (2005) recognizes how, through Charles Darwin's interest in childhood and development, the subject of child study became saturated with notions of biological universality. Hellal & Lorch (2010) identify how, during the 19th century, childhood became an increasingly interesting area for empirical study, in particular the child’s early years of life, from birth to three years old. They identify how,

“Natural historians and scientists began to publish diary studies of an individual child, often their own, whose progress in language (and often other social behaviours) had been followed closely over an extended period of time. In these works the process of language acquisition was seen as reflecting the developing child’s mind, and the role of instinct and imitation in learning new behaviours was investigated” (p. 2).

The emergence of childhood as a focus of empirical study was attributed in particular to Darwin’s studies of his own children and his “Biographical Sketch of an Infant”, (Darwin, 1877), published in the psychological journal Mind. The significance of this, in terms of the development of childhood, was the focus, prompted by Darwin, on children as an object of scientific study, and on childhood as a stage of life meriting scientific study in its own right. As Hellal & Lorch (2010) identify, Darwin’s interest in child development brought questions concerning the development of children’s behaviours, distinctions between children’s instinctual and learned behaviours and the emergence of certain behaviours and skills, such as language development, “from rudimentary patterns to increasing competence” (p. 6), into the sphere of serious scientific study. By the late 19th century, they identify, child study was established as an important area of research into human development.

Rose (1990) indicates how the child study movement supported a view of development in young children that appeared to repeat the stages of cultural evolution and development from primitive to civilized societies. So called ‘primitive’ societies were considered to have a lot in common with the natural characteristics of the child, being simple and irrational in their beliefs (Prout & James, 1997). This comparison of children with ‘primitive’ cultures can also
be linked to the image of the ‘natural child’, considered to be in need of protection from negative influences, claiming that nature wanted children to be children before entering into adulthood (Hendrick, 1997b). This is, incidentally, a view shared by many of the modern day campaigns to ‘reclaim childhood’, such as the Save Childhood Movement’s ‘Too Much, Too Soon’ campaign (discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

Childhood as a period of development and progression became a widely held theory under the influence of scientific theories and conceptions of the ‘child as nature’. Childhood was considered to possess its own unique characteristics, ways of thinking, feeling and seeing, and its own form of reason, not yet as well developed as the intellectual and rational reason of adulthood (Heywood, 2001). Aries (1972) argues that early thinking on morals and the role of education in civilising and preparing children for later life laid the groundwork for the discipline of child psychology, which, since the time Aries was writing, has had a great influence on the ways in which childhood is framed and understood in contemporary times. Conceptions of the scientific child emergent in the 19th century have become a central influence on the way in which childhood and education are constructed in the contemporary era, promoting a view of the child as regressively incomplete the younger they are, forcing them into a position of preparation and waiting for adult life.

The influence of this developmental conceptualisation of childhood has had significant implications for notions of ‘readiness’ within contemporary educational and childhood discourse. Prout & James (1997) identify the developmental approach as comprising a self-sustaining model, delineated by features such as: childhood as a period of apprenticeship for a rational adulthood; childhood as a pre-social period of difference; and childhood as a biologically determined stage on the path to full human status. Views of naturalness and the psychological child, influenced by the legacy of Darwinian science, have come to represent an evolutionary model of child development within which progression can be equated with development from simplicity to complexity and from irrational to rational thought and behaviour (Prout &
James, 1997). In particular, a chronological concept of time is central to this way of thinking about childhood. Rousseau (1762), in Emile, discusses the child’s development as progressing through particular stages: pre-12 years, during which development is likened to an animal-like state of pre-rational development; 12-16 years, during which rational thought starts to emerge; and post-16 years, characterized as the beginning of adulthood.

Notions of time can be seen to have produced, controlled and ordered the lives of children in contemporary society, exerting particular constraints upon children’s biological selves, related to perceived characteristics of children at particular times of childhood and of life. One of the most powerful facets of this concept of time is the notion of age and its influence of Western conceptions of childhood. Understandings of childhood in relation to age can be seen to have created fixed limits and boundaries around how children are perceived at different times of their lives. This can be seen in norms such as: grouping children by age within the school system; the ages at which children experience educational transitions; and the expectations of children within such transitions.

Within the 19th and 20th centuries, psychological study, for example through the work of Piaget, has had an influence on defining a normal developmental trajectory for children, encompassing the typical functioning and behaviours of children at particular times of their lives. Significantly however, through establishing a common theory of ‘normal’ development, the child study movement also constituted a frame for what was abnormal, pathological and in need of intervention (Prout, 2005). The compulsory schooling of the late 1800’s put an entire population of children at the disposal of a variety of scientific experts, and Hendrick (1997b) identifies how, just as children found themselves being constructed as school pupils under the influence of institutionalized education, they also found themselves examined under the influence of science. Childhood became increasingly enveloped in a world of scientific experts who began to equate child study with solutions to problems in society, thus giving childhood and child study social and political import. Within the confines of social spaces such as the school, the scientific child
gained a high degree of visibility through the scientific discovery of particular needs and the construction of a set of parameters making up the architecture of childhood in structural and scientific terms (Qvortrup, 2005).

The medical orientation of the institutions associated with the child study movement popularized the view that not only were children’s conceptions of the world different from those of adults, but also that there were marked stages in the ‘normal’ mental development of children. Aries (1972) identified the way in which, moving into the 20th century, psychological and scientific conceptions of childhood were popularized and promoted to parents and educators through a mass of popular literature, including influential works by such as Piaget and Inhelder’s *Psychology of the Child* (1969/2000). This book in particular had a significant influence on the way in which, not only conceptions of the developing child, but notions of the development of knowledge were understood within education. In this sense, it was not just psychological images of the child that were changing, but epistemological ideas as well. The latest psychological thinking about the proper upbringing of children was reflected in popular texts, written in the language of child psychology, promoting, in particular, ideas such as stages and phases of development and of parent and child bonding. Piaget’s work in particular had a significant impact on ideas of development as based on movement from one defined stage of development to another. In the ‘Psychology of the Child’ Piaget & Inhelder (1969/2000) state that, “If the child partly explains the adult, it can also be said that each period of his development partly explains the periods that follow” (p. 3). Perhaps the most significant legacy of Piaget’s work is his belief that the development of knowledge, and of the child, follows predictable patterns and progresses through common and universal stages. In his conclusion to the ‘Psychology of the Child’ he states,

“The integration of successive structures, each of which leads to the emergence of the subsequent one, makes it possible to divide the child’s development into long periods or stages and subperiods or substages which can be characterized as follows: (1) Their order of succession is constant although the average ages at which they occur may vary within the individual, according to his degree of intelligence or within the social milieu. Thus the
unfolding of the stages may give rise to accelerations or retardations, but their sequence remains constant in the areas (operations etc.) in which such stages have been shown to exist. (2) Each stage is characterized by an overall structure in terms of which the main behavior patterns can be explained. In order to establish such explanatory stages it is not sufficient to refer to these patterns as such or to the predominance of a given characteristic … (3) These overall structures are integrative and non-interchangeable. Each results from the preceding one, integrating it as a subordinate structure and prepares for the subsequent one, into which it is sooner or later itself integrated.” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969/2000, p. 153).

This notion of the development of knowledge as following predictable stages has been hugely influential in early childhood education in England, emphasizing standardization and favouring a despatialized, decontextualized and universal childhood. The legacy of such technologies of knowledge, influenced by such psychological and epistemological beliefs, has been what Prout & James (1997) describe as the growing imposition of a particularly Western concept of childhood for all children, which for those children who don’t fit the predetermined trajectory of development, can be particularly problematic.

Scientific discourses of childhood and ‘readiness’ could again be primarily related to Meisels’ (1999) conception of ‘readiness’ as an idealist/nativist concept, defining ‘readiness’ as the outcome of ‘normal’ maturational processes in the mind and body of the child. Whilst the study of childhood and the development of children did take account of environmental factors, for example Vygotsky’s (1978) work on the fundamental influence of social interaction on the development of knowledge and cognition, it can be argued that primacy has been given to endogenous factors and internal dynamics of development. 20th and 21st century developments in early childhood education can be seen to be based on a combination of social and psychological beliefs about development, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. It is important to note however, in the context of this discussion, that a key legacy of the emergence of the scientific child has been a belief in childhood as a natural phenomenon, influencing views of the child as abstracted, decontextualized and normalized, with progression and
development as innate processes following predefined trajectories. Underpinned by such beliefs, the development of the child and of knowledge are therefore considered to be reducible to ‘normal’ and predictable laws that act to construct ‘readiness’ as the outcome of ‘normal’ development, linked with successful transition from one life stage to the next.

20th and 21st century critiques

The lasting legacy of the child study movement, and its preference for a 19th century idea of scientific knowledge, was its strong emphasis on biological and natural routes of development and behaviour (Prout, 2005). This legacy has been dominant within the early childhood field, underpinning conceptions of children and child development, for much of the 20th and 21st centuries. The scientific frame that dominated child study became closely entwined with the development of social policies and practices concerning children. This linking of social and biological dimensions of childhood, however, has been critiqued by some as forming a ‘bio-political’ regime within which the state has sought to define and regulate normality (Rose, 1999). Hendrick (1997b) implicates the child guidance clinics of the 1920s and 1930s in the social scientific construction of the ‘normal’ child, through their treatment of ‘nervous’, ‘delinquent’ or ‘maladjusted’ children. Their research and practices, grounded as they were in the psychological and scientific notions of the era, played a significant role in distributing a new understanding of childhood within professional circles, underpinned by medical and psychological knowledge bases. The mid-20th century saw a continuation of psychological discourses being translated into theories of socialization. Under the influence of positivist science, notions of ‘naturalness’ and universality portrayed within scientific discourse offered an explanation for the processes whereby children learned to participate in society (Prout & James, 1997). The mid to late 20th century however saw a rise in alternative and critical perspectives, addressing the study of childhood and dominant conceptions of the child. In particular, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen significant (Western) critiques of dominant perceptions of the relationship between social, psychological and biological aspects of childhood and the problematic ways in which this
relationship has been translated into policy and practice (for example Fleer, 2005; Lubeck, 1994). Taking a critical perspective, Grieshaber (2008) has called developmental theories, and in particular Piagetian stage theories, “weapons of mass seduction” (p. 508) within the early childhood field, highlighting the hegemonic status of such theories and beliefs. Such critiques, emergent from across the landscape of academic study in this field, highlight that, although certain perspectives consider biological immaturity in children to be a fact of life, the ways in which this immaturity is interpreted, made meaningful, and the effects it has on children’s educational and social experience, is a matter of culture (Prout & James, 1997). Crucially therefore, such ideas can be considered to be social and cultural constructions (Hendrick, 1997b) and are therefore open to legitimate questioning and debate.

The emergence of a new paradigm for understanding children and childhood was crystallized in the 1970s through what came to be known as the ‘new sociology of childhood’, which began to see children as active, knowledgeable and socially participative within their peer groups and wider communities. The movement of the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (Prout & James, 1997) sought to address a long ignored deficit in the historical record of the study of childhood, through a focus on children as influential partners in the construction of their own unique and culturally determined childhood experiences. Heywood (2001) states that as views of childhood opened up through this period and views of childhood as a social construction became more prominent, an increasing number of alternative fields of study emerged. As space was made for alternative view-points, including a range of post-foundational perspectives of childhood (which will be explored in more detail in chapter 3), it became easier to mount what Heywood (2001) describes as a radical critique of dominant notions of children and childhood within society. Considering childhood as a social construction ruled out the possibility of a definitive discovery of its essential nature or natural characteristics. Within these alternative frames therefore, childhood could begin to be considered, not as comprised of predetermined characteristics waiting in the wings to be discovered, but as a complex and dynamic phenomenon, emergent from the
very social, cultural and historical contexts within which it was situated and as an important phenomena in its own right.

The conceptions of childhood that developed as part of these ‘new’ sociological perspectives could be linked with what Meisels (1999) terms ‘social constructivist’ conceptions of ‘readiness’. In her discussion of the cultural construction of child development for example, Fleer (2006) advocates a conception of childhood that foregrounds cultural context and social relationships, recognizing the limitations of relying on perceptions that consider development to be a predictable, stable and sequential phenomenon. Other proponents of a social constructionist view of childhood, such as Corsaro (1997), have emphasized the importance of recognizing the active role of the child in constructing childhood discourses and the importance of interactions and relationships in this process. In relation to Meisels’ (1999) framing of ‘readiness’ this is closest to what he defines as an interactionist perspective, recognizing that the child and the environment in which they are situated have a reciprocal relationship in response to which ‘readiness’ develops. This perspective, Meisels (1999) states, “integrates an emphasis on child development with a recognition that the perceptions of the individuals in the child’s environment shape the content of what is taught, learned and valued” (p. 49). This perspective recognizes that the child is active in their milieu, however it holds onto a belief that there are clear and predictable standards by which children’s progress and development can be measured and assessed, assuming “a set of clear and explicit standards that admit a range of continua in their realization” (Meisels, 1999, p. 50).

Shifting conceptions of childhood and the conceptualization of ‘readiness’

Through exploring the history of childhood as a concept and social phenomenon, it is hopefully clear that there is not one definition or set of understandings through which childhood and children’s development can be understood. In exploring some of the shifting conceptions of childhood throughout history, this chapter has aimed to identify particular social contexts
within which understandings of ‘readiness’ have developed. Rather than a detailed chronological account, this discussion has endeavoured to capture a sense of significant developments in thinking around childhood that have influenced the ways in which children have been perceived and treated throughout history and into contemporary society. This historical contextualization lays the foundation for the discussion that unfolds in the following two chapters, which explore the contemporary context of ‘readiness’ within early childhood education internationally, and more specifically, in relation to developments within pedagogy and practice in England. Drawing on contemporary critiques, Chapter 2 will present an analysis of ‘readiness’ as a concept within early childhood education and its influence on policy and practice, in particular in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage in England. Building on this discussion, Chapter 3 will argue that, whilst important in challenging the dominant and potentially damaging legacy of psychological understandings of ‘readiness’ in education, these contemporary critiques do not go far enough. Framed through a discussion of these dominant discourses as mechanisms of complexity reduction, and drawing on postmodern, post-structural and post-foundational ideas and theories, this chapter argues that it is necessary to move beyond critique, towards a reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ at ontological and epistemological levels.

The aims of these first three chapters are therefore: to identify why dominant ideas of ‘readiness’ and associated practices are considered to be problematic; to contextualize this thesis within contemporary discussions and research/professional narratives; and to identify logics through which it is possible to reconceptualize such understandings, moving to new and radically different ways of thinking about and experiencing ‘readiness’ in early childhood education.
Chapter 2: A contemporary context of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education

Whilst this chapter will deal mainly with the contemporary context of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education in England, it is important to first set this within the wider landscape of early education internationally, and more specifically in the context of this discussion, in the Western world. In 2001, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published the first of its Starting Strong reports (OECD, 2001), which explored how, within 12 OECD countries, children’s early development and learning was supported by policies, services, families and communities. The aim of the report was to increase and strengthen the knowledge base on which early childhood education was built, by detailing “the range of approaches adopted by different countries, along with the successes and challenges encountered” (OECD, 2001, p. 7). The report recognized significant differences across these countries in the structure of policies and provisions for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including differences in the ways in which children and the purposes of ECEC were viewed. The report recognized that within most countries, official policy was shaped by a multiplicity of perspectives and objectives. In relation to ‘readiness’, the imperative in many countries to “balance views of childhood in the ‘here and now’ with views of childhood as an investment with the future adult in mind” (OECD, 2001, p. 38), was acknowledged as a key point. In relation to this, “enhancing school readiness and children’s later educational outcomes” (ibid.) was recognized as a significant factor in ECEC policy development. In 2001, the OECD commissioned a second review, expanding the international scope of the first to include 8 more countries. The report (OECD, 2006) associated with this review identified a specific trend towards notions of ‘school readiness’ as significant factors impacting policy development and decision making across a number of European and English-speaking countries. Reporting on the

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2 Portions of this chapter have been previously published in an earlier version in the following peer reviewed journal: Evans, K. (2013). “School Readiness”: The Struggle for Complexity. LEARNing Landscapes, 7(1), 171–186.
recommendation, made within the 2001 Starting Strong report, for the development of ‘Strong and Equal Partnerships’ within and across phases of education systems, the 2006 report details the different policy options that have emerged internationally from this recommendation. Two contrasting approaches were identified in terms of pedagogical traditions and associated policy implications. The report found that,

“France and the English-speaking world have adopted a “readiness for school” approach, focusing on cognitive development in the early years, and the acquisition of a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions that children should develop as a result of classroom experiences.” (OECD, 2006, p. 57).

Underpinned by such approaches, the report states, “Contents and pedagogical methods in early and primary education have been brought closer together generally in favour of teacher-centred and academic approaches” (ibid.). In contrast to this, the report identified, “In countries inheriting a social pedagogy tradition (Nordic and Central European countries), the kindergarten is seen as a broad preparation for life and the foundation stage of lifelong learning.” (ibid.). The focus for these countries is identified as “supporting children in their current developmental tasks and interests” (ibid.), without too much deference to their development as proceeding towards a particular future as a member of a defined culture or workforce.

Defined as a ‘pre-primary’ and ‘standards-based’ approach (OECD, 2006), the policy implications of the ‘readiness for school’ discourse are recognized as being characterized by a focus, in early childhood education, on the “knowledge and skills useful for school, viz., literacy, math and scientific thinking” (OECD, 2006, p. 61). This focus was identified as dominant across countries such as Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom (OECD, 2006). In many cases, including in the context of the UK, the content and structure of early childhood education was defined by the relationship of this phase with primary school education, seeing the contents and methods commonly associated with this next phase.
pushed down into early childhood through a process defined by the OECD as 'schoolification'.

Crucially, the OECD reports (2001, 2006) recognise that these pre-primary and standards based approaches to ECEC are subject to significant critique for promoting practices that are unsuitable for young children through the 'schoolification' of early childhood education. The Starting Strong reports recognize however, that it is over simplistic to polarise these two approaches to early education. In the 2006 report, these approaches are presented as different curricular emphases that merge into one another as part of a continuum. The report states,

“At one end of the continuum, the focus is on broad developmental goals, e.g. physical and motor development; socio-emotional development; personal and social skills; artistic and cultural development; and authentic (through lived situations) approaches to literacy, number and science thinking” (OECD, 2006, p. 63).

It goes on to state,

“At the other end of the continuum, the emphasis tends to be placed on more focused skills and school-like learning areas, e.g. mathematical development, language and literacy skills, with children’s life in the centre and the range of experiences offered to them playing a more secondary role” (OECD, 2006, p. 64).

This continuum, in recognising that the field of early childhood education policy and practice is too complex to be defined by a single approach or philosophy, provides a useful device through which to interpret developments in early childhood policy and practice in England. The following discussion will therefore aim to draw out some of the tensions that are perceived to be inherent within contemporary policy frameworks, in relation to understandings and practices of ‘readiness’ with reference, where appropriate, to the OECDs continuum of policy and curricular emphases.
Early childhood education in England

Early childhood education and care in England has undergone significant changes throughout the past 20 years in relation to policy, provision and practice. In 1996, based on increasing recognition of the importance of children’s early experiences in terms of their future education and development (as evident for example in the recommendations of the Rumbold Report, ‘Starting with Quality’ (DES, 1990)), the government of the day introduced a set of guidelines intended to support early (pre-statutory) education settings in their work with young children. These guidelines, known as the Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (SCAA, 1996) were devised as goals for children’s learning and development by the time they reached compulsory school education, which began during the school term after the child’s fifth birthday (SCAA, 1996). The emphasis of these goals was on “early literacy, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills” (SCAA, 1996, p. 1), and the ways in which children’s experiences contributed to their development in the areas of ‘Knowledge and Understanding of the World’, ‘Physical Development’ and ‘Creative Development’. The framework provided guidance for educators, but was clear in stating that it did not advocate a particular style of pedagogy or teaching approach, leaving this for educators to decide for themselves, based on their professional knowledge and experience. The function of the desirable outcomes, as a benchmark for children’s successful progress into compulsory school education, was highlighted through an annex to the document detailing the key features of progression from pre-compulsory education through to the end of key stage 1. The function of these statements, as markers of normal and desirable development, was emphasized through the statement, “Although not designed for this purpose, in practice, Level 1 is often used by teachers during the key stage as an indicator of progression towards Level 2 and as a marker of expectation after one year in Key Stage 1” (SCAA, 1996, p. 8). The Desirable Outcomes therefore provided a standardized idea of progress and achievement for all children engaged in early childhood education settings across England.
Linked to the introduction of these outcomes was the first phase of the then Conservative government's Nursery Voucher scheme, which entitled 4-year old children access to part-time nursery places up to a value of £1100, across a range of early education settings (Kwon, 2002). In the research report preceding the establishment of the voucher scheme, it was stated that, “The Government sees the scheme as a development of pupil-led funding in nursery education and as a way of increasing parental choice and boosting provision” (Gillie & Allen, 1996, p. 7). Among the aims of the scheme was stated the entitlement of “all four year olds to three terms of good quality pre-school education” (Gillie & Allen, 1996, p. 8). In order to become eligible for the funding on offer through the voucher scheme, early childhood settings had to prove they were providing quality experiences for children, through evidence that they were moving children towards the Desirable Outcomes, readying them for participation in compulsory school education.

Whilst the Nursery Voucher scheme was short lived, being replaced by the incoming Labour Government in 1997, these developments marked a period of significant investment in early childhood education in England, and a focus on children’s formative experiences as a key element of social and educational policy. This increased focus and investment was evident in the continued free entitlement to nursery education for 4 year olds, and eventually 3 year olds, and in the development of the Sure Start programme as an intervention aimed at tackling social disadvantage in young children (Grauberg, 2014).

A discourse of ‘quality’ early childhood provision as an essential precursor to future academic and social success was developing. Through policy guidance and frameworks for early childhood education, such as the Desirable Outcomes, a particular notion of what a successful early childhood experience looked like was emerging. A discourse of ‘readiness for school’ was also emerging, tied to specific outcomes, the achievement of which was considered to enable children to participate productively and make the desired progress through the first few years of their compulsory school education. Over the 20 years since the introduction of the Desirable Outcomes, early
childhood education and care has remained on the political policy agenda. A common theme throughout has been the inclusion of goals and outcomes, related to specific curriculum areas, as indicators of progress. The original Desirable Outcomes remained relatively unchanged as they were replaced in 1999 by the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999), becoming part of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000). The publication of the Curriculum Guidance (QCA, 2000) marked the ‘Foundation Stage’ as a distinct area and time of children’s formal educational experience, from the age of 3 until the start of Key Stage 1. The Curriculum Guidance retained the 6 areas of learning and development laid out within the Desirable Outcomes, although re-framing these outcomes as Early Learning Goals (QCA, 2000). The guidance clearly stated that, whilst the early learning goals established expectations for most children to reach by the end of the foundation stage, they were not a curriculum in themselves (QCA, 2000). In establishing these goals as an indication of a “secure foundation for future learning” (QCA, 2000, p. 26), they fed into a discourse of ‘readiness for school’, providing a benchmark for what children should know and be able to do as a pupil in Key Stage 1. Progression through the Foundation Stage was also defined by a series of ‘stepping stones’ that indicated typical routes of progress towards the Early Learning Goals. These were not age related, however they were colour-coded, establishing a particular trajectory of development, which could be taken as a norm and against which children could be compared in terms of their individual progress and development.

The notion of Early Learning Goals has remained a feature of early childhood policy guidance in England since their inception with the Desirable Outcomes. In 2008 the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage was revised to become the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008), merging guidance for teaching and learning for 3 to 5 year olds with the Birth to Three Matters guidelines (SureStart, 2002) for the care and education in England of children from babies, through to three year olds. This new policy framework stated as its aims: to set standards for learning, development and care of young children; to provide equality of opportunity; to create a framework for partnership working with parents; to ensure quality and consistency in the
sector; and to lay a secure foundation for future learning (DCSF, 2008). The same 6 areas of learning and development were retained, and the Early Learning Goals emphasized as statutory, feeding into the end of stage assessment protocols, within which children’s progress was assessed against 13 assessment scales that together formed the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (QCA, 2008). The link between the profile as an assessment tool and a discourse of readiness (both of the child and the school) was made clear in the profile handbook, which stated,

“The primary purpose of the EYFS profile is to provide Year 1 teachers with reliable and accurate information about each child’s level of development as they reach the end of the EYFS, enabling the teacher to plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet all children’s needs” (QCA, 2008, p. 2).

For each assessment scale, children were given a judgement from 1 to 9, representing their level of progress within that particular curriculum area. As a summative assessment mechanism, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile produced a standardized judgement of each child’s learning and development in relation to specific goals, enabling comparison of progress and achievement both on an individual level and of the ‘quality’ of provision provided by early childhood settings.

As Brooker (2014) identifies, ‘quality’ had become a watchword in research and policy making and something that, from the late 1990s “was beginning to be consolidated by means of research based instruments such as ECERs [Early Childhood Environmental Rating scale] (Harms and Clifford, 1998)” (p. 8). ‘High quality’ early childhood education provision was linked explicitly to the achievement of other social, economic and political goals, something highlighted in the 2011 review of the Early Years Foundation Stage, led by Dame Clare Tickell. The review stated, “Investment and interventions in the early years are generally more effective in improving outcomes than investments and interventions later in life” (Tickell, 2011a, p. 4). Tickell went on to state that, “the return on public investment in high quality early years education is substantial, leading to decreased social problems, reduced inequality and increased productivity and GDP growth” (ibid.). The value of
early childhood education as an investment, not only in the future of the child but in the future of the nation, is significant in considering the development of a particular discourse of ‘readiness’. Prior to the 2011 review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (Tickell, 2011a; 2011b), the term ‘readiness’ was not explicitly used within policy guidance and frameworks. In her independent report however, Tickell (2011b) introduced the concept as an explicit focus for what early childhood education should be aiming to achieve, providing “the right foundation for all children, including the disadvantaged and vulnerable, and preparing them for good progress through school” (Tickell, 2011b, p. 19). Whilst Tickell opts to use the term ‘unreadiness’, rather than ‘readiness’ in her discussion, the priority and status given to the notion of early childhood education ‘readying’ children for the future is clear. She states that, “The evidence is clear that children who are behind in their development at age 5 are much more likely than their peers to be behind still at age 7, and this can lead to sustained but avoidable underachievement” (Tickell, 2011b, p. 20). The discourse of ‘readiness’ as a definable and measurable construct is also clear through Tickell’s support of universal summative assessment as a tool for gathering data on children’s readiness to begin formal schooling at age 5.

This discourse of ‘readiness’ as something definable and measurable in individual children carried through into the revisions made to the Early Years Foundation Stage as a result of the evidence presented within the Tickell review. The 2012 iteration of early childhood education policy, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012), encompassed official standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to the age of 5. As a statutory framework, the 2012 version of the EYFS stated that it “set(s) the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe” (DfE, 2012, p. 2). The position accorded to ‘readiness’ as an outcome of the EYFS was explicit within this document, stating that, “It [the EYFS] promotes teaching and learning to ensure children’s ‘school readiness’ and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life” (ibid.). Based on the recommendations of the Tickell review (Tickell, 2011a; 2011b), the revised
EYFS split learning and development into 7 areas, each of which fell under one of two key strands. One of these strands contained a series of three ‘prime’ areas, which were: ‘Communication and Language’, ‘Physical Development’ and ‘Personal, Social and Emotional Development’. These prime areas were considered "particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building the capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive” (DfE, 2012, p. 4) and educators were encouraged to focus provision for the under three’s on these areas in particular. The other four areas of learning and development: Literacy, Mathematical Development; Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design; were known collectively as ‘specific areas’. These 'specific areas' were considered to build on the foundation provided by ‘appropriate’ development in the three 'prime areas' and focused on more specific knowledge and skills, such as reading, writing and knowledge of numbers. It was expected, that when working with the very youngest children, providers would focus on the three prime areas, with the balance shifting to a more equal focus on all areas as children grew and developed across the Early Years Foundation Stage.

In addition to the seven areas of learning and development, which identified what children were expected to learn, including relevant Early Learning Goals across each area, educators were also expected to reflect on how children learn, with reference to three particular ‘characteristics of effective teaching and learning’: ‘playing and exploring’; ‘active learning’; and ‘creating and thinking critically’ (DfE, 2012, p. 7). These characteristics were intended to focus early childhood educators on the ways in which children are considered to learn most effectively between the ages of birth and five years old and on the most effective ways of ‘teaching’ in order to support children in their achievement of the Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2012). Within planning and guidance of children’s learning educators were expected to reflect on the different ways that children learn in relation to these characteristics, for example; children investigating, experiencing things and 'having a go'; concentrating and keeping going in the face of difficulties; and developing their own ideas, making links and developing strategies for doing things (DfE,
Assessment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage was expected to include information about children’s development against the Early Learning Goals, and also a commentary on their skills and abilities in relation to the Characteristics of Effective Learning. The intention of these assessments was stated as informing “a dialogue between Reception and Year 1 teachers about each child’s stage of development and learning needs” (DfE, 2012, p. 11). Children were categorized as either meeting, exceeding or not yet reaching the early learning goals, being assigned a judgement of ‘emerging’, ‘expected’, or ‘exceeding’ in relation to each of 13 goals. Whilst supported by guidance materials that clearly state, “Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways” (Early Education, 2012), the early learning goals, as a summative assessment mechanism, continued to provide a means of making normative judgements about whether children were ‘ready’ for the more formal learning they were expected to encounter in Year 1.

Current policy guidance for early childhood education in England has changed very little since the publication of the 2012 Statutory Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012). The most recent publication of the framework (DfE, 2014) retains all of the features of the 2012 version in relation to Learning and Development, with the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013) remaining statutory as a summative assessment for all children, expected to be completed within the final term of the school year in which the child reaches five years of age. A discourse of ‘readiness’ is strongly evident within current assessment arrangements, the primary uses of which are considered to be: Informing parents about their child’s development against the Early Learning Goals and the characteristics of their learning; supporting a smooth transition to Key Stage 1 and effective communication between early years and Year 1 educators; and to help Year 1 teachers plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet the needs of all children (STA, 2013, p. 7). In addition to these functions of assessment, it is stated that,

“a secondary purpose of the assessment is to provide an accurate national data set relating to levels of child development at the end
of the EYFS which can be used to monitor changes in levels of children’s development and their readiness for the next phase of their education both nationally and locally” (STA, 2013, p. 7).

This idea of ‘readiness’ as something that can be normatively assessed is a consistent theme throughout this current version of early childhood policy in England. There are, however, tensions between this idea of normative assessment and the belief that children develop in their own ways (Early Education, 2012) something that, it can be claimed, creates an incoherence within the Early Years Foundation Stage that is difficult for educators to navigate in their day to day practice.

Aside 2

I remember clearly sitting in the cold school hall on one of a dozen plastic chairs arranged in a circle in the middle of the room. At the time I was the local nursery teacher and it was the beginning of the academic year. I had arranged a meeting with the local school to discuss the children who had left my nursery at the end of the last year and were now six weeks into their school careers. The intention of the meeting was to come together and share experiences of working with particular children in order to further support their transition into school. Also present at the meeting were representatives from the local education authority, who were working closely with the school to provide support in ‘raising’ educational standards. I remember the feeling of frustration as children were talked about as points on a scale, as concerns were shared about children who were not reaching required or expected levels of development in mathematics and literacy. Children were normalized and categorized into groups according to which age/stage band they were considered to have reached and individual children’s successes and challenges were talked about only in terms of whether they were demonstrating the specific skills and attributes detailed in the EYFS and whether it was felt they were on track to meeting the early learning goal at the end of the year. Particularly frustrating was the apparent lack of interest in the children themselves, in their ideas, experiences, fascinations and creativity. I remember a colleague of mine, in response to great concern being expressed
over a particular child being able to sit still on the carpet with the whole class and concentrate for the duration of a teacher led session, making reference to documentation produced during his time in nursery, that showed him sustaining focus on highly complex activities for periods of over one hour. This was met with the response that this level of focus was only within activities he had chosen and developed himself, and now he was in school he needed to learn to behave appropriately in 'classroom situations' in order to get the most out of his learning. Discussion continued in this vein, focusing on how to bring particular children in line with expected behaviours and expectations and which support strategies could be put in place to ensure children were moving 'properly' between specific milestones of learning and development. On more than one occasion I felt that my practice as a nursery teacher was called into question, that I was criticized (although not explicitly) for not drilling children in how to sit still and keep quiet for increasingly long periods of time. I remember thinking, is this what being ready to begin school is all about, have I somehow got it wrong? I remember wondering where the spaces were in this discussion for individual children’s passions and creativity, for the development of teaching strategies that focused on the complexity that the children themselves brought to the school environment, as opposed to how they could be brought to conform to expected and predicted identities and characteristics. Looking back on this event I now recognize that this focus may have been well intentioned and derived from a desire to support all of these children to reach the goals and outcomes considered necessary to their future success. My overwhelming feeling was however, and continues to be, that the complexity, difference and diversity that these children brought into the school environment was being silenced, that the joyful passions I knew they possessed were being systematically suppressed and channelled along pathways that could only ever lead to a narrow and limited form of success, or else, failure.
Readiness in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The discourse of ‘readiness’ that underpins the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014; STA, 2013) is complex. As already identified in Chapter 1, Meisels (1999) highlights this complexity, identifying four dominant conceptions of ‘readiness’: idealist/nativist; empiricist/environmental; social constructionist; and interactionist. Among the challenges of working with the Early Years Foundation Stage however, is that there is not a consistent set of assumptions through which ‘readiness’ and wider notions of pedagogy are presented and interpreted. In particular, elements of idealist/nativist and empiricist/environmental conceptions are evident, which can be related respectively to discourses of ‘readiness for learning’ and ‘readiness for school’. An idealist/nativist frame understands ‘readiness’ as a phenomenon that occurs within the child, dependent on inherent, maturational processes. With strong links to ‘readiness for learning’ (Kagan, 2007), ‘readiness’ in this context relates to developmental progression within which children are considered ‘ready’ and able to undertake specific learning once they have acquired particular developmental capacities. This focus on maturational development is evident in the construction of pedagogical progression advocated by the Early Years Foundation Stage, which states that, “As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning ready for Year 1” (DfE, 2014, p. 9). There is an implicit assumption here that development precedes and determines learning and that a child’s level of maturational development determines what they are ‘ready’ to learn and how they are ‘ready’ to learn it. This maturational concept of ‘readiness’ is also evident within the structuring of the non-statutory guidance materials associated with the Early Years Foundation Stage, namely the Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Early Education, 2012) and the Early Years Outcomes (DfE, 2013). Whilst the Development Matters acknowledges that children develop differently it maintains a use of norm referenced developmental statements to suggest a ‘typical’ trajectory towards each of the Early Learning Goals. The guidance within the Early Years Outcomes is more explicit in its
normative function, promoting its use “throughout the early years as a guide to making best-fit judgements about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, may be at risk of delay or is ahead for their age” (DfE, 2013, p. 3). These materials and their ‘best-fit’ age bandings enforce typical trajectories of learning and development, resulting in the achievement of specific goals that indicate a child’s ‘readiness’ for learning in Year 1.

As identified however, the complex nature of ‘readiness’ within the Early Years Foundation Stage means that it cannot be understood with reference to just one notion or conceptual frame. In contrast to the idealist/nativist frame evident within the focus on maturation and normative trajectories of development, there is also evidence of ‘readiness’ as an empiricist/environmental concept (Meisels, 1999). Within this frame, ‘readiness’ is emphasized as an apparatus that provides the child with the skills, knowledge and experiences they are considered to need to be ready for formal schooling (Brown, 2010). This is evident within statements of purpose including, in relation to the Statutory Guidance (DfE, 2014), that it “defines what providers must do … to promote the learning and development of all children in their care, and to ensure they are ready for school” (DfE, 2014, p. 7, emphasis added), and in relation to the Early Learning Goals, that they should “summarize the knowledge, skills and understanding that all children should have gained by the end of the Reception year” (ibid). In contrast to the nativist focus on ‘readiness for learning’ (Kagan, 2007), this environmental model can be related to a discourse of ‘readiness for school’. Kagan (2007) identifies this as a more ‘finite’ construct than that of the developmentally driven ‘readiness to learn’. It may be considered a more concrete form of ‘readiness’ in that it focuses on external influences and observable evidence of learning and development. The desired end of this form of ‘readiness’ is to “guide the development of children’s capabilities” (DfE, 2014, p. 7) through a combination of adult-led and child-initiated learning opportunities. Through a process of socialization, children’s engagement with other people and with their environment is expected to underpin the learning and development of key skills, capabilities and behaviours needed to become ‘ready for school’.
Crucially, the complexity of the ways in which ‘readiness’ has been conceptualized within the Early Years Foundation Stage means that these contrasting conceptions do not operate in isolation. They interact, contradict and impact upon each other, contributing to understandings and interpretations of ‘readiness’ in practice. It must also be acknowledged however, that these conceptions are among a multiplicity of understandings of ‘readiness’, as will be explored throughout this thesis. It can be argued, however, that these are the most dominant contemporary influences on ‘readiness’ as a policy discourse and therefore have particular significance for the way in which this concept is currently understood and enacted within mainstream early childhood education contexts. The complexity of ‘readiness’ is highlighted even more if we return to the spectrum of ‘readiness’ discussed within the OECD (2006) Starting Strong report. Considering this spectrum, it is not as simple as positioning these dominant conceptions of ‘readiness’ in singular, static or isolated positions. Rather, each discourse may be considered to appear in multiple positions at once and those positionings to be constantly shifting. A discourse of ‘readiness for school’ may place equal emphasis on the achievement of broad developmental goals and focused cognitive goals in the socialization of children into school culture. Equally, a discourse of ‘readiness for learning’ may value the learning of discrete cognitive skills and knowledge, for example in the areas of literacy and numeracy, equally with more developmental aspects. It is unlikely to be the case, therefore, that a particular conception of ‘readiness’ will adopt a simple and static place on this spectrum. The contradictions within the EYFS, in the ways in which ‘readiness’ is represented and understood, mean that as a policy framework, it may adopt a dynamic positioning on this spectrum, its location changing depending on the aspect of pedagogy and practice that is being focused on and the particular element of the framework that is of interest in a particular context.

A political rhetoric of ‘readiness’

Another strong forum through which a dominant narrative of ‘readiness’ is constructed and communicated is within political discourse. In addition to
policy frameworks and associated guidance documents, government commissioned reports, speeches and Ofsted reports carry significant messages about the discourses of ‘readiness’ that are considered valuable from these perspectives.

In recent years, successive governments in England have expressed significant concern over children’s ‘readiness’ to start compulsory schooling and to engage positively with the opportunities offered to them when they arrive there. Often, these concerns have been reported in the national press in relation to specific groups of children, for example ‘summer born’ children (Shepherd, 2013) and boys (Adams, 2011). This concern has been particularly evident within political discourse and decision making emanating from political speeches and government commissioned reports over the past 5 years. In a speech made in 2011, the then English Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, declared that as a nation, “we need to make sure that children arrive in school ready to learn” (Gove, 2011). The apparently escalating political anxiety over children’s ‘readiness for school’ and the related concept of being ‘ready to learn’, was clearly demonstrated through Gove’s concern that, on starting school, “…a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil. Many cannot sit still and listen. Many can scarcely communicate orally, let alone form a question” (ibid.). In this speech, Gove alluded to a concern over the kind of ‘readiness for school’ discourse described in preceding sections of this chapter, within which children are considered to be emerging out of the Early Years Foundation Stage not properly socialized into school culture and without the knowledge and skills considered necessary for positive and productive participation as a school pupil. In his speech at the launch of Ofsted’s early years report in 2015, Sir Michael Wilshaw echoed similar concerns, in particular relating to the ‘school readiness’ of children from poorer and more disadvantaged backgrounds. He identified that, “At the age of five, there is already a yawning gap in school readiness between the most advantaged and the poorest children” (Wilshaw, 2015, online). This ‘gap’ was highlighted through reference to children’s social and developmental capacities, identifying a concern that, “the poorest children are less likely to be able to follow
instructions, make themselves understood, manage their own basic hygiene or play well together” (ibid.). Wilshaw’s concern was not only for these social and developmental capacities however, but in relation to more discrete, cognitive achievements as well, stating, “By age five, many children have started reading simple words, talking in sentences and adding single numbers. Far fewer of the poorest children can do these things” (ibid.). Wilshaw’s solution to this problem echoed the kind of ‘schoolification’ discourses highlighted by the OECD (2006). He stated that, “Children who are at risk of falling behind need particular help though, and it remains my view that schools are often best placed to deliver this” (Wilshaw, 2015, online). Celebrating the proven ability of a growing number of primary schools to narrow the gap between poorer children and their peers in areas such as reading and other core skills (Wilshaw, 2015), he proposed that schools open their doors to children from a much younger age, for “how much greater would be the impact if children joined the school not at aged four, but aged two?” (Wilshaw, 2015, online). Whilst Wilshaw does not strongly advocate imposing a formal pedagogy on younger children through their earlier association with schools, indeed he insists that very young children should learn without any loss of freedom, excitement or imagination, his views, and by extension the views of Ofsted, still place particular value on children’s ‘readiness for school’ as an outcome of early childhood education. The discourse of socializing children into school culture is evident as he talks about the crucial role of schools in improving children’s readiness, and their role in reaching out and working with early education providers “to make sure children are ready for school” (Wilshaw, 2015, online). The emphasis is on children becoming ‘ready’ for the school environment as a one-way, rather than a bidirectional, relationship – a form of ‘readiness’, therefore, that can be measured according to children’s achievement of particular, normative goals and outcomes, whether these be in terms of broad developmental goals, focused cognitive goals, or a combination of the two.
Aside 3

For some children starting school is a positive experience. For others, however, the transition is not so smooth. Toby had not always had an easy time at nursery and relied heavily on the relationships he had built with key people. He had attended nursery full time for many years and routines and experiences had been adapted in order to provide an environment within which he could know success. His transition to school had been carefully planned with his new teacher, however I was anxious about how he would take to this new environment and to the increased structure and different expectations. Through discussions with his new class teacher I was acutely aware of her concern that it would be significantly more difficult to adapt the traditional routines and expectations of the school environment than it was in nursery. She was concerned over the much lower ratio of adults to children and worried that he would struggle with the culture of whole class participation and the increased proportion of time he would be expected to participate in adult-led activities, over which he would have little or no control. I remember talking to his class teacher after Toby had been in school for a few months. She emotionally told me that he was now attending school part time, that it had been decided that he was not ‘ready’ for full-time attendance. She told me about her feeling of failure that she could not provide an environment that supported him, but that the expectations on her, on how she would perform as a teacher, would not allow for her to make the adjustments she felt were needed. She told me of the pressure to deliver whole class literacy and numeracy sessions and the expectation that all children participate. She told me of her struggle to support Toby under the very great expectations of the school culture and shared her concern that she could not see, in this environment, how he could ever be successful. At four years old, in this academic world, he was already a failure!

An outcome of escalating anxiety from politicians and bodies such as Ofsted has led to increasing intervention by government in early childhood education and care (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). Since 2010, a number of large
scale, ‘evidence-based’ reports have been commissioned by the English government, focusing on the importance of the early years in preparing children to be successful in later life. These reports are based on the belief, as expressed by Wilshaw (2015), that “Early years has the potential to drive social mobility for a whole new generation” (online). Among the most significant of these reports for early childhood education were: ‘The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults’ (Field, 2010), which focused on ‘readiness’ as contributing to closing the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children and families; ‘Early Intervention: The Next Steps’ (Allen, 2011), which highlighted the importance of early intervention in terms of producing “high levels of ‘school readiness’ for all children” (p. 46); and ‘The Early Years: Foundations for life, Health and Learning’ (Tickell, 2011a), commissioned as a review of early childhood education in England, which focused explicitly on the need for policy and practice that fosters children’s ‘school readiness’ as an outcome of early childhood education. In response to the government’s interpretation and use of the recommendations of these reports there has been mounting tension among the English early childhood sector that an increasing focus on a specific notion of ‘readiness’, outlined here as being underpinned by idealist/nativist and empiricist/environmental concepts, has aligned ‘readiness’ with normative developmental and cognitive goals, knowledge and skills. The concern is that this focus is leading to children being measured against a “‘deficit model’, a set of inappropriate, one-size-fits-all standards of ‘readiness’ for school” (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011, p. 1).

These concerns are connected with the kind of ‘schoolification’ identified by the OECD (2001, 2006) and by Moss (2012, 2013) in his discussion of the relationship between early childhood and compulsory school education. The 2001 OECD Starting Strong Report warned of “a risk of downward pressure from a school-based agenda to teach children specific skills and knowledge in early years” (p. 41). The 2006 OECD report built on this concern highlighting that the ‘readiness for school’ discourse dominant in many countries was attractive as it held out “the promise to education ministries of children entering primary school already prepared to read, write, and being able to
conform to normal classroom procedures” (OECD, 2006, p. 63). Underpinned by the notion of ‘schoolification’, this ‘school-based’ agenda has focused strongly on the raising of standards and outcomes for children at later points in their school careers, in particular in the areas of reading, writing and mathematical knowledge and understanding. Significantly, the downward pressure of these goals for education has been critiqued as bringing inappropriate practice into early childhood education, subjecting children’s formative experiences to a “conservative and impoverished form of education” (Moss, 2012, p. 15).

**Contemporary critiques of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The explicit focus on ‘readiness’, and ‘school readiness’ in particular, as an outcome of the Early Years Foundation Stage has met with significant and passionate critique in recent years. These critiques, emanating from various sources including academic, media, professional and campaign groups, have focused on various aspects of this ‘readiness’ discourse, including: the damaging effects of tensions between contradicting theoretical understandings within the Early Years Foundation Stage framework; the impact of normalizing assessment practices on children’s development and wellbeing; the construction of an ‘ideal’ in relation to the young child as a learner and school pupil; and the implications for the value of early childhood of a discourse that places such significant emphasis on preparation for later school experiences.

**Mixed messages**

Brooker (2014) writes about the mixed messages contained within the Early Years Foundation Stage documents. She identifies what she considers to be a tension between the ‘guiding principles’ of the framework and its assessment goals. Brooker (2014) identifies the stated aims of the framework as claiming to believe that,
“every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured; children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships; children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs... and children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates” (Brooker, 2014, p. 12).

She identifies, however, that whilst these principles imply and affirm a view that “children grow and develop in different ways, at different paces and even in different directions” (ibid.), the early learning goals, through which children’s progress is measured, tell a very different story. The goals themselves, Brooker (2014) cautions, leave little room for the kind of difference or diversity that is supposedly valued according to the aims of the framework. They are instead aligned with a view of ‘equality of opportunity’, within which all children are expected, indeed it could be considered their right, to progress towards the same goals, at the same rate. Rix & Parry (2014) consider that through such mixed messages, the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework actually undermines its own aspirations. They state that “The competing theories that underpin ideas about children and notions of development...are entwined in such a way as to undermine their usage” (Rix & Parry, 2014, p. 206). They identify what they consider to be three broad underlying theoretical views drawn on within the Early Years Foundation Stage and its supporting documentation: a sociocultural perspective that considers development to occur within a social context that itself develops in response to those within it; an interactionist perspective that considers development to occur on an individual basis through interaction with a range of social and environmental factors; and an individualist perspective that understands development as happening within individuals and in isolation from the things around it (Rix & Parry, 2014). These different theoretical perspectives explain to some extent the mixed messages identified by Brooker (2014). Within the aims of the framework (DfE, 2014; DfE, 2012), perspectives on children’s learning appear to emerge out of sociocultural ideas, valuing social interaction, relationships and the environment. Assessment procedures however can be aligned with an individualist perspective, assessing learning in the individual, as distinct
from the environment in which they are situated. Rix and Parry (2014) offer an example of this tension:

“Take a practitioner faced with a child who is not engaging in social activities in the prescribed way. The framework encourages them to assess that child individually and to create an individual support programme for them. The practitioner is not encouraged to assess the collective situation including the wider social expectations and pressures that constrain their own options and practice.” (Rix & Parry, 2014, p. 206).

Whilst on the one hand therefore early childhood policy frames children’s early learning experiences as based within social networks and cultural contexts, they are assessed according to individualized goals and outcomes that reduce that learning to part of an agenda of standardization and normativity.

This has been a significant point of critique in relation to ‘readiness’ within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Whitebread and Bingham (2014) write about the pressure placed on early years educators, through the way in which ‘readiness’ is defined according to the Early Learning Goals, to introduce formal approaches ever earlier in children’s educational experience in order to make them ‘ready for school’. In relation to children starting, and being ‘ready’ for, school Whitebread and Bingham (2014) identify confusion over whether this means the start of children’s Reception year, which for many children is the first year of Primary school, or the transition from Reception into Year 1, which marks the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They state,

“contradictions abound where the Reception year is also described in policy and curriculum documents as still being within the Foundation Stage, theoretically functioning as a ‘transition’ year for the child, in which they are being prepared gradually, using appropriate teaching methods, for entry into Year 1” (Whitebread & Bingham, 2014, p. 181).

There are therefore (at least) two distinct transition periods within the Early Years Foundation Stage at which discourses of ‘readiness’ have an effect, and it can be claimed that the policy and guidance documents themselves are ambiguous regarding which of these transitions is being discussed at various points within the policy narrative. What is clear however, from critiques of the
discourse of ‘readiness’ within the Early Years Foundation Stage, is that the dominance of this discourse of ‘readying’ children for a next phase or stage, whether that be the school environment or a shift in pedagogy as children progress from the early years to Key Stage 1, has a potentially damaging effect through the impact of ‘schoolification’.

*A future oriented narrative*

The ‘schoolification’ of early childhood pedagogy and practice, influenced by dominant discourses of ‘readiness for school’ and for ‘more formal’ pedagogical approaches has been critiqued strongly by campaign groups such as Early Childhood Action, the Save Childhood Movement and the Too Much Too Soon Campaign. In an open letter to the Telegraph newspaper (Save Childhood Movement, 2013), representatives of the Save Childhood Movement strongly criticized government intervention in early childhood education, stating that,

“Instead of pursuing an enlightened approach informed by global best practice, successive Ministers have prescribed an ever-earlier start to formal learning. This can only cause profound damage to the self-image and learning dispositions of a generation of children” (online).

There is genuine and impassioned concern that the kinds of practices that are engendered by dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ are damaging to many children and will ultimately leave many marginalized from positions of success within the education system and wider societal contexts. The ‘schoolification’ that is the subject of much of this critique is considered particularly damaging as it positions early childhood as valuable only in its ability to prepare children for later experiences, such as becoming adequately socialized into a school context. In the document ‘*Unhurried Pathways: A New Framework for Early Childhood*’ (Early Childhood Action, 2012), it is stated that the developing narrative of ‘school readiness’ threatens the early childhood field’s “hard-won understanding that early childhood is a phase of development *in its own right*, and should not be defined and thought about merely in terms of the future ‘goal’ of readiness for school (p. 8). The document, which was published in
response to the revisions to the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2012, considers that the trend towards ‘schoolification’ as an effect of a dominating discourse of ‘school readiness’,

“…is a symptom of a ‘too much, too soon’ ideology, which assumes that it is helpful for adults to attempt to speed up young children’s cognitive development, encouraging them to acquire specific skills (such as literacy and numeracy skills) at an ever-earlier age, quite possibly at the expense of social and emotional development” (Early Childhood Action, 2012, p. 8).

Rix & Parry (2014) are also critical of this future oriented discourse, stating that, “The EYFS therefore is not justified on the basis of now, but on what will come. It is about the future and not the present” (p. 210). Continuing their discussion of the inherent tensions within the Early Years Foundation Stage, they state that “This is a very particular view of education and one that does not fit with many of the pedagogical suggestions” (ibid.). Indeed, as Brooker (2014) identifies, the first point of the introduction to the EYFS framework in both the 2012 and 2014 versions, states that a “secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right” (DfE, 2014; DfE, 2012). As Brooker, (2014) identifies,

“This statement is soon forgotten, however, as the document makes clear its overriding imperative: to ‘ensure children are ready for school’ and to give them the basic knowledge and skills ‘to benefit from the opportunities ahead of them’” (p. 11).

In Brooker’s critique, she identifies what she considers to be the real goal of early childhood education policy, “the preparation of children for their future roles as learners and earners” (ibid.).

*Constructing the ideal learner*

The anxiety over the future oriented nature of early childhood policy narratives is concerned primarily with the focus on a particular, defined future. It is highly unlikely that anyone would argue that children should not progress, what is of concern is the normative agenda and standardized systems that are used to measure that progress, such as the Early Learning Goals. The
problematic nature of defining a fixed standard of ‘readiness’, is identified by Whitebread & Bingham (2014). They state that “‘Readiness for school’ implies preparing a child to reach a fixed standard of physical, intellectual and social development that prepares them to meet school requirements and assimilate formal curricula, typically embracing specific cognitive and linguistic skills” (p. 187). The identity of the child who is ‘ready for school’ is critiqued as being “based on the premise that the National Curriculum in Year 1 is ‘set’ and children must be prepared to fit into it” (p. 187). Bradbury (2013) explores a similar line of critique, through her research focusing on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013) as a statutory summative assessment mechanism in England. She explores how notions of an idealized ‘good learner’ operate within early childhood classrooms and how, through these notions, children are “constituted as ‘becoming’ subjects of schooling, not yet fully formed” (p. 6). Bradbury (2013) critiques statutory summative assessment in the early years, claiming that it “has the power to shape who is understood as successful” (p. 6). Through such mechanisms, Bradbury cautions that children are constituted, to varying extents, as good learners, with the assessment frameworks specifying “a model of the ideal that every child should strive towards” (ibid.).

Aside 4

I remember observing a teaching student who was on placement in my nursery class leading a music activity with a group of children, all of whom were due to start school in the coming autumn term. Part of this group was a young girl about whom the nursery team had raised concerns regarding her “readiness” to start school. I watched as the student teacher tried hard to involve her in the activity but the girl repeatedly wandered away from the small circle of other children, choosing other resources and spaces to be in at that moment. After a few attempts to bring her back to the group, the frustrated student gave up and left her, crouched beside a nearby table where she had found a small selection of play people. As the observation continued my attention was drawn repeatedly back to this child. She watched as the group
sang and acted out counting songs and I could hear her humming the tunes, interspersed with lines from the songs. As the group mimed frogs jumping, one by one into a pool, she made her play people jump off the table one by one. It struck me that she was just as engaged with the content of the group activity as any of the children still in the circle; she had just chosen her own manner of participation.

Reflecting on this episode now, sometime later and in the context of ‘readiness’, I can see how my concerns over this child’s “readiness” for school, as her nursery teacher, were deeply invested in normative notions of ‘readiness’ as being linked to following adult direction and performing a particular type of participation. As a process of becoming ready however, the complexity of this child’s participation can be seen. Presented with a challenging situation she developed her own strategy for successful participation. Each time she moved away from the group she remained within visual and auditory range, continuing to listen and respond to the group from the alternative spaces she had chosen. Presented with a problem, that of sitting with the group throughout this activity, she had constructed her own creative response: In that moment she had created the context for her own readiness to participate.

Crucially, and the crux of Bradbury’s (2013) critique, “The nature of the ideal matters because it reveals the not-ideal – the abject, rejected, inadequate or impermissible learner identity” (p. 6). If we consider the Early Learning Goals as being underpinned by a discourse of ‘readiness for school’ therefore, and following Bradbury’s critique, it can be claimed that they are active in excluding some children from positions of success very early in their school careers. Rix and Parry (2014) develop a similar critique, warning that the statements contained within the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment mechanisms act to “narrow developmental pathways and create a limited range of everyday expectations” (p. 207). These expectations are presented in a normative way, despite, as Rix & Parry (2014) identify, children having hugely different everyday experiences. They are critical of the principles and
practices of assessment within the Early Years Foundation Stage having a primarily diagnostic function, with the focus of assessment being “to identify the individualistic in-child deficit rather than the environmental, social and cultural factors that may be impacting on the child’s learning” (Rix & Parry, 2014, p. 208). They highlight once again the inconsistencies within the framework where, despite claiming to recognize that all children learn in different ways and at different rates (DfE, 2012; DfE, 2014), the ‘progress’ highlighted within assessment,

“…is not progress that is relative to the individual child; it is not that they have worked out their own way of solving a problem or have made something happen that they have not made happen before…Lack of progress against these measures becomes a ‘cause for concern’ and flags up the need for remedial action” (Rix & Parry, 2014, p. 208).

In a document offering early years policy advice in relation to ‘Assessment, Transitions and Readiness’ (BERA/TACTYC, 2014), the potentially damaging effects of early childhood assessment (underpinned by a narrative of ‘school readiness’) are highlighted. It cautions that,

“The percentage of children achieving a ‘good level of development’ in 2012 was 64%; under the revised new Profile this dropped to 52% in the subsequent year (DfE, 2012; 2013). Thus according to the revised 2013 EYFS Profile, which focuses upon raised thresholds in maths and literacy, a much higher proportion of children have not achieved a ‘good level of development’ and are therefore deemed to have ‘fallen behind’ in their first year of schooling. Such negative labelling of children at a young age is inappropriate and undermines the central EYFS principle which states that children are ‘strong and competent learners from birth’” (BERA/TACTYC, 2014, p. 1).

This ‘good level of development’, a performance measure used by the DfE to assess the proportion of children achieving ‘as expected’ by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, in part indicates whether an individual is considered to have achieved the required levels of learning and development to transition smoothly into Key Stage 1. It can be considered to play into the diagnostic functioning of early childhood assessment, through both summative (the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile) and formative means.
universal targets, such as the Early Learning Goals, embeds a notion of a ‘typically developing individual’ against which all children can be compared (Rix & Parry, 2014). As Rix and Parry (2014) highlight, this creates an assessment process that is normative and summative, with observations being used to ‘build a picture’ of individual children’s progress that can be set against particular developmental statements, “to plan and review how things are going and to assess whether there has been progress” (p. 208). A major critique of this normalized approach to assessment however, is that it does not benefit all children, as it assesses only against an idealized norm. As highlighted in the policy advice developed by BERA/TACTYC, “Assessment needs to benefit all children and not to focus resources on getting some children through to ELG. The current model puts some children, especially boys, in a deficit position” (p. 1).

Ready schools

Whilst critiques of dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ within the Early Years Foundation Stage focus on many different angles of this debate, a common rhetoric is that “Schools should be ready for the children who arrive and not make children ready for them” (BERA/TACTYC, 2014, p. 2). This discourse of ‘ready-schools’ as opposed to ‘ready-children’ has become a central theme within much critique of the narrative of ‘readiness’ that has become embedded in early childhood education in recent years. Moyles (2014) states,

“The emphasis from government always appears to be on it being the children’s, parents’ and pre-schools’ ‘responsibility’ to make children ‘ready’, but what about the schools’ responsibilities to ensure they are ready to receive young children, and educate and care for them in a developmentally appropriate way?” (Moyles, 2014, p. 6)

Statements such as this highlight the drive behind such debates, to shift the onus from children’s early years’ experience preparing them for school, to schools developing their own understanding of the needs of the children who appear through their doors. This narrative can also be extended to the transition from the early years to Key Stage 1 and a focus on schools ensuring
The UNICEF (2012) definition of ‘school readiness’ highlights this multifaceted understanding through three particular dimensions: “children’s readiness for school, schools’ readiness for children, and families’ and communities’ readiness for school” (p. 6). Critiques of the dominant ‘readiness for school’ discourse within the Early Years Foundation Stage tend to focus around a concern that too much emphasis is placed on children’s, and to some extent families’ readiness, and not enough focus placed on the school side of this relationship. Elyatt (2011) identifies that,

“What is now beginning to be recognized by many educators is that it is not the child that needs to be ready for school, but the school that should be ready for the child. Instead of trying to fit the child into some externally created norm, with all the dangers of imposing developmentally inappropriate expectations, there is a call, instead, for schools to focus on strengthening children’s confidence in their own developing intellectual powers and positive dispositions towards learning” (p. 8).

The developmentally inappropriate expectations of schools, and in particular “the curriculum-centred approach evident in many Key Stage 1 classrooms” (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011, p. 4) has been criticized by some as being developmentally inappropriate, leading to “a situation where children’s basic emotional and cognitive needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the opportunity to develop their metacognitive and self-regulation skills, are not being met” (ibid.). This line of critique is based on a belief that school culture, and the increasingly formalized pedagogical approaches once children move out of the Foundation Stage, imposes developmentally inappropriate expectations, which can lead to children falling behind their peers if they fail to achieve the normative standards set. The belief that children must be ‘ready-to-learn’ in progressively formalized ways when they reach the end of the Foundation Stage is countered by critiques such as Whitebread and Bingham (2014) who consider that “The cognitive neuroscience and psychological evidence of recent decades shows clearly that all children, at all ages, are ready to learn” (p. 185). The significant
question, they consider “is not whether a child is ready to learn, but rather what a child is ready to learn and what sort of teaching methodologies will best support the child’s learning” (ibid.). Fundamentally therefore, this critique is based on the notion that the increasingly formal pedagogical approaches within Key Stage 1 and even beyond are inappropriate for young children and have the effect of pushing a formalized agenda down into early childhood, in the manner of ‘schoolification’, in a bid to ensure as many children as possible are ‘ready for school’. In some cases, this has been criticized as creating a paradox whereby,

“The EYFS suggests that the more developed the child becomes, the more emphasis will be upon adult-led activities. However if too few of these developmental statements are in evidence, this too requires increased adult involvement, with a focus upon a next step in development, aiming to overcoming perceived weaknesses” (Rix & Parry, 2014, p. 213).

*Relationships between early childhood and compulsory school education*

This critique of schools, and of the Key Stage 1 curriculum, as not being ‘ready’ for children is identified by Moss (2013) as being symptomatic of a very particular notion of the relationship between early childhood education (ECE) and compulsory school education (CSE): a relationship of ‘readying for school’. Within this relationship, Moss (2013) states,

“ECE assumes a subordinate role of preparing young children to perform well in CSE, by governing the child effectively to ensure that he or she acquires the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to be a successful learner in compulsory education, for example ready for the rapid acquisition of literacy and numeracy and able to participate in classroom regimes” (p. 9).

It is this subordinate relationship, the result of pressures to ‘schoolify’ early childhood education, that is the subject of much of the critique recognized in this chapter in the context of the Early Years Foundation Stage and early childhood education in England. Moss (2013), however, recognizes two other relationships between ECE and CSE. One of these is the idea of a ‘strong and equal partnership’, marked by co-operation between schools and early
childhood settings and characterized by “a mutually beneficial dialogue...between ECE and CSE...based on each sector having something to offer the other” (Moss, 2013, p. 15). This ‘strong and equal partnership’ is often what is called for within discussions of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education, seeking to open channels of communication between schools and early education settings in order to facilitate shared understanding between professionals in these sectors (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), 2013). Moss (2013) however, considers that this relationship still carries inherent risks to the early childhood field and to the children within it. He states, “A strong partnership may not necessarily be an equal one, especially give the powerful gravitational pull of compulsory school…the partnership can bring benefits, but it may also entail dangers” (p. 15). A more productive relationship, according to Moss (2013) is one premised on the “vision of a meeting place” (p. 19). Based on a Swedish academic paper by Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi (1994, cited in Moss 2013), the notion of a ‘meeting place’ is of a space in which polices, practices and assumptions relating to early childhood and compulsory school education are brought together and opened up in the hope that new and shared understandings will emerge. Moss (2013) describes this as “not the dominance of one or other of the partners, not downward pressure from CSE or upward pressure from ECE, neither schoolification nor pre-schoolification” (p. 27). Instead, what is proposed “is the creation, through co-construction, of new, shared understandings – of the child, of the teacher, her role, of knowledge, of learning (Moss, 2013, p. 28). What this ‘vision of a meeting place’ does is refuse to take for granted any set of assumptions about children, childhood, education, learning etc., whether these emanate from early childhood or school based sectors. It opens out all beliefs and values to critical dialogue, with the aim that through this process, new understandings will be arrived at that are the result of co-construction and democratic discussion.
Opening ‘readiness’ to radical critique

It could be argued that the critiques identified in this chapter, whilst they highlight the difficulties faced by children and educators as a result of tensions surrounding the dominance of particular discourses and understandings of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education, do not go far enough in terms of creating spaces in which ‘readiness’ itself can be thought of differently at a conceptual level. In order to move these debates forward, it is necessary to engage in what Foucault (1988) describes as ‘radical critique’. Foucault considers that,

“… criticism (and radical criticism) is absolutely indispensible for any transformation. A transformation that remains within the same mode of thought, a transformation that is only a way of adjusting the same thought more closely to the reality of things can merely be a superficial transformation” (Foucault, 1988, p. 155).

The focus of many of the critiques identified in this chapter, for example: notions of ‘too much, too soon’; the developmentally inappropriate nature of compulsory school curricula; and the effects of ‘schoolification’; it can be argued, are made from within the same logic as the practices they are arguing against. They continue to be underpinned by linear notions of progress, where concern is over the expectations on children being imposed too soon, rather than the conceptual basis of those assumptions itself being inappropriate as a foundation for understanding education, development and learning. Where critiques do go beyond these linear understandings of progress however, they have rarely made their own paradigmatic assumptions explicit. It is argued in this thesis that what is required to move these debates concerning ‘readiness’ forward is a ‘radical critique’ of the very conceptual ground on which such ideas are based. Critique by itself however can only shift things so far. As identified in previous papers,

“In itself, identifying dominant constructions of ‘readiness’ as potentially damaging has limited potential to change these dominant perceptions. In order to affect change in the landscape of early childhood education it is necessary to go beyond critique to suggest alternative concepts” (Evans, 2015, p. 36).
The question at the heart of this thesis is, therefore,

“...if dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ are a problem, what is the alternative? How can we think, talk and live ‘readiness’ without reference to the predetermined, normative standards, fixed goals and outcomes that [potentially] make it a majoritarian, identity driven term and construct it as a potentially exclusionary concept?” (Evans, 2015, p. 36).

In setting the context for this radical critique, the following chapter will explore contemporary research and scholarship in the field of early childhood education that is attempting to engage with different ways of thinking. As a framework for discussion, the chapter will explore and critique dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ through an understanding of complexity reduction (Biesta, 2010), drawing on various post-foundational theories in an attempt to open space for thinking differently about ‘readiness’.
Chapter 3: Thinking differently about ‘readiness’ in early childhood education

Building on the narratives of critique identified in the preceding chapter, this chapter aims to explore contemporary work seeking to engage with different ways of thinking in order to develop radical critique of dominant practices and pedagogies in early childhood education. As a framing device, this discussion explores contemporary critiques of ‘readiness’ through a narrative of complexity reduction (Biesta, 2010), seeking to identify why it is so important, in deconstructing dominant conceptions of ‘readiness’, to move beyond conventional and normative ways of thinking. The discussion also draws on the philosophy of Jacque Ranciere (1991) as a catalyst for engaging with new and different conceptions of ‘readiness’. The literature on which this chapter draws could be broadly considered to be ‘post-foundational’ in that it “recognises that any phenomenon – early childhood education and care for example – has multiple meanings, that any knowledge is perspectival, and that all experience is subject to interpretation” (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008, p. 7). It therefore includes work that engages in postmodern, post-structural and post-colonial thought, amongst others.

A new image of thought

It can be argued that among the most detrimental effects of the ‘schoolified’ discourses of ‘readiness’ identified in the preceding chapter, are the operation of these discourses as mechanisms of complexity reduction. Lenz Taguchi (2010) suggests that in relation to education, policy makers very often look for simplistic, general structures and one dimensional standards for practices that would seem to provide consistent and equal quality for all, by treating and evaluating everyone according to the same normative and universal standards. One area in particular in which these general and predictable standards have been critiqued is in relation to notions of quality in early childhood education. Dahlberg et al. (1999; 2007) in particular have dedicated a large body of work to the critique and reconceptualization of notions of quality in early childhood education. This work is particularly relevant to the discussion of ‘readiness’ developed in this thesis, in its call to
engage with what Dahlberg and Moss (2009) describe as a ‘new image of thought’ (p. xix). This ‘new image’ is one that recognizes the importance of difference and complexity in relation to the landscape of early childhood education and opens space to think and talk about often taken for granted concepts, such as quality and ‘readiness’, differently.

In their critique of ‘quality’ in early childhood education, Dahlberg et al. (1999; 2007) have shown how opening space for thinking differently can produce radically new ways of thinking and acting. In relation to ‘quality’, their work advocates a shift from a decontextualized concept, which may be accepted “as a universal truth that is value and culture free” (1999, p. 94), to a way of thinking that they define as ‘meaning making’, a practice of thought that opens space for “explicitly ethical and philosophical choices, judgments of value, made in relation to the wider questions of what we want for our children in the here and now” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 107). This is a profound shift in logic and one that moves from a modernist discourse of quality, one that values predictability and control, towards ways of thinking and acting that value diversity, messiness and complexity as components of ‘meaning-making’, as a process that opens up multiple possibilities for thinking and acting differently in the field of early childhood education. What this shift in ways of thinking creates is the potential to open up a space to engage with ontological and epistemological difference, in which there is the possibility for reimagining taken for granted ways of thinking and being.

By engaging with this idea of a ‘new image of thought’, this discussion will aim to move beyond ideas of general standards and practices, to engage with ‘readiness’ as part of a radical critique. It will begin by identifying why dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ can be thought of as mechanisms of complexity reduction, before engaging with some contemporary critiques of ‘readiness’ from across the world, which can be identified as working within what Dahlberg and Moss (2009) describe as this ‘new image of thought’.
'Readiness’ as a mechanism of complexity reduction

Biesta (2010) argues that one of the most prevalent ways in which complexity is reduced within educational contexts is through the assessment practices that contribute to deciding which outcomes of learning count. In the context of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012; 2014), as already argued in this thesis, this effect of complexity reduction can be linked with particular dominant discourses of ‘readiness’. Understanding the Early Learning Goals as summarizing “the knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the Reception Year” (DfE, 2012, p. 4), it can be interpreted that these goals act to validate the particular trajectories of learning and development, considered ‘officially’ to be important in terms of children’s ‘readiness’ for Key Stage 1. In terms of complexity reduction however, this validation becomes problematic. By selecting certain desirable characteristics of ‘readiness’ in relation to learning and development, the Early Learning Goals, by definition, act both to invalidate and exclude other characteristics that may be considered, in this policy context, irrelevant or less desirable in terms of ‘readiness’ in a school environment, and to negate other aims within the Early Years Foundation Stage that tend towards more open and emergent outcomes.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012; 2014) is a particularly interesting example of the type of complexity reduction discussed by Lenz Taguchi (2010) and Biesta (2010). As already identified, one of the overarching principles of the framework is that “every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning” (DfE, 2012, p. 3, emphasis original). As Biesta (2010) identifies however, if it is granted that learning is a ubiquitous phenomenon, in which children are constantly engaged, then the use of assessment processes that make reference to specific goals and outcomes can be seen as a very specific way to channel or tame that leaning. The notion of ‘taming’ is also explored by Olsson (2009), who states that a lot of effort is put into the ‘taming’ of children’s subjectivities through processes of “predicting, controlling, supervising and evaluating according to predetermined standards” (p. 6). These predetermined standards act to fix representations of
‘readiness’ and do not allow room for movement or flexibility in terms of how ‘readiness’ is understood in the context of children’s early education experiences. Within such a conceptualization, ‘readiness’ can be understood as part of a mechanistically linear hierarchy, within which children move progressively towards a threshold of ‘readiness’ which, when passed, leads to a higher level of learning and development. This concept of ‘readying’ for a predefined next stage is discussed by Moss (2013), who considers that within mainstream discourse,

“For education to ‘deliver’ on ‘efficiency and equity’, precise and predefined standards of performance must be set at each stage of the educational process, ‘effective’ (evidence-based) technologies must be applied to achieve them and to assess achievement, and each part of the education system must be devoted to preparing students for the next stage of progression” (p. 10).

Within such a system, Moss (2013) considers, “ECE is then locked into a system that expects children to achieve a succession of prescribed standards, serving as a ‘foundation’ that readies children for the stage of education that is to follow” (ibid). Disrupting this linear notion of progression has been the subject of much contemporary research and scholarship engaging in the kind of thinking opened up by the ‘new image of thought’ described by Dahlberg and Moss (2009). Nicholson et al. (2015) discuss this particular understanding of linearity as emerging from modernist epistemologies. Modernism, they state, “reflects historically Eurocentric middle-class values where progress is conceived as a linear, sequential, and measurable process that occurs in clearly outlined steps often hierarchical, over time” (Nicholson et al., 2015, p. 195). These beliefs, they consider, are evident in much of the mainstream contemporary discourse concerning ‘readiness’, such as “the push for the construction of evidence-based indicators that reflect universalized development age- and stage-based assessments of children’s skills and abilities” (ibid.). They contrast these modernist epistemological beliefs, which can be argued underpin the framing of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014), with postmodern ways of thinking, which attempt to challenge the privileging of ‘objective ‘truths’, and a rational hierarchical process of human and societal progress” (Nicholson et al., 2015,
The value of engaging in postmodern thought processes, according to Nicholson et al. (2015), is that it has the potential to destabilize taken for granted notions of ‘readiness’, “recognizing that multiple ‘truths’ about readiness exist, even if they are not politically privileged” (pp. 195–196). A key feature of postmodern conceptualizations of ‘readiness’ is, therefore, their potential for disruption. Falchi and Weiss Friedman (2015) consider that reconceptualizing discourses of ‘readiness’ has the potential “to disrupt the narrative of children’s development as evenly paced, measurable, linear, academic progress” (p. 112). Disrupting narratives of ‘readiness’ may therefore open possibilities for unsettling assumptions about learning and development more generally including, as Falchi and Weiss Friedman (2015) argue, “How educators and families think and talk about readiness” (p. 112). Crucially this is not disruption for the sake of disruption. Engaging in such postmodern thought processes opens space for thinking differently, in ways that are open to difference and diversity and create more ethical spaces for early childhood education.

The reduction of complexity that, it is argued in this discussion, is symptomatic of dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ within English early childhood education, is highlighted in Moss’s (2013) claim that current systems of early childhood education in England are aligned with “a dominant narrative of normativity and performativity in which the purpose of education is conformity to predetermined performance criteria” (p. 5). Such a system, it can be argued, acts to foster a hierarchical concept of ‘readiness’ that assumes, not only that early childhood must serve the needs of subsequent stages of education, but that practices and pedagogies are only of value in relation to how ‘effectively’ they achieve specific goals and outcomes for all children. Ball (2003) suggests that central to the functioning of such performative regimes is the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures and categories of judgment. He suggests that the operation of performative technologies, such as curriculum frameworks and assessment criteria, are instrumental in reducing complexity in educational environments. He considers that, whilst complex organisations such as schools are multifaceted and diverse environments, within a performative regime it is likely
that the choice of what is to be privileged and cultivated will be informed and
driven by priorities and constraints set by the policy environment. Among
these constraints may be the philosophical tensions identified as existing
within the Early Years Foundation Stage, in particular the friction created by
juxtaposing views that “every child deserves the best possible start in life and
support that enables them to fulfil their potential” (DfE, 2012, p. 2), with
assessment procedures that measure all children against fixed goals and
outcomes, potentially positioning some children at a deficit, as perpetually
falling short of a pre-specified identity and level of development.

_Bridging the ‘readiness’ gap_

The reliance, within early childhood educational policy, on fixed goals and
outcomes as markers of progress and development, creates a concept of a
‘gap’ in children’s educational and wider life experiences. Concern over this
‘gap’ has already been alluded to in the previous chapter, in speeches such as
Wilshaw’s (2015) Ofsted address. Researchers such as Durden (2015),
however, have questioned this concept of a ‘gap’ in relation to ideas of
‘readiness’ in early childhood education. She asks of the early childhood field,

> “How are we as early childhood educators, scholars, and researchers moving beyond the rhetoric of closing the achievement gap through early tracking and assessment, to critically reflecting on whether we are closing the gap between our own instruction and children’s potential toward excellence?” (p. 77).

Durden (2015) considers that the rhetoric of ‘closing the gap’ between more
and less advantaged children is unhelpful, as it is so often rooted in fixed
ideas of identity and progress, based on experiences more familiar and readily
available to more advantaged families. Rather than focusing on bringing all
children up to a fixed standard of ‘readiness’, whether for school or for a shift
in pedagogical approach, what Durden (2015) argues is that “A shift in belief
and language must occur in which we move from ‘closing the gap of the at risk
and disadvantaged child’ to ‘closing our cultural and knowledge gap as
educators’” (p. 79). Durden (2015) is particularly concerned with exploring
how early childhood education programmes set themselves up to be ‘ready’
for the diversity and difference brought by their students. Her focus is the
‘readiness’ of institutions and educators, rather than the children themselves.
Her starting point for exploring ‘readiness’ is the assumption that “all children
bring with them to school skills and experiences at a level of complexity, depth
and cultural creativity that no standardized measure could assess” (2015, p.
77, emphasis original). Her overarching question, based on this assumption,
is whether teachers and institutions are “ready to educate these children”
(ibid. emphasis original). Durden therefore shifts the focus of discussions
around ‘closing the gap’, in terms of school ‘readiness’, from the children to
the educators and institutions with which they come into contact. She
advocates thinking differently as a way of moving beyond taken for granted
ways of seeing and doing, arguing that to make substantive changes in the
ways that ‘readiness’ is conceptualized and enacted, “We need a professional
early childhood educational community that is critically conscious and
reflective of the ways in which early childhood programs and schools have the
power to perpetuate societal injustices and oppression” (Durden, 2015, p. 79).

Leafgren (2015) picks up on a related theme in her discussion of children who
are socially and politically marginalized within the American Midwest. She
notes a ‘rift of difference’ between children who enter the school system
perceived as performing as expected, in a manner that equips them to
participate fully in the opportunities available for them, and children who are
‘other’ to this social ideal, children who “do not match up to what the teachers
believe children should be and be able to do” (Leafgren, 2015, p. 95). Where
work such as that by Leafgren (2015) and Durden (2015) progresses the
rhetoric of ‘closing the gap’ in relation to ‘readiness’ is in their insistence that
the problem lies, not in the ‘readiness’ of individual children, families or
schools, but in dominant discourses, societal beliefs and practices and the
effects these have on early childhood practice and pedagogy at an
eristemological level. They challenge those working within the field of early
childhood education to interrogate their own ways of thinking about children,
childhood, learning and development in order to unsettle and disrupt
traditionally accepted ways of thinking and acting. This moves beyond the
argument for ‘ready-schools’ as it requires educators to challenge their own epistemological and ontological assumptions about childhood, progression, learning, education etc., rather than simply shifting the goal posts for successful qualification or socialization into school culture. Durden (2015) argues that a professional standard within early childhood education should be “our ability to critically reflect on how we are contributing to the dismantling of an educational system that is becoming more and more reflective of the visible and invisible inequities in our society” (p. 81). Similarly, Leafgren (2015) requires that, as educators, we reflect on the ways in which institutional discourses “create lists of skills and knowledges that are considered worthwhile and then place the onus for being ready to meet this ubiquitous and tedious list of prerequisites for school ‘success’ on the children and their families” (p. 104). Work such as this is important as it emphasises that without critically interrogating our beliefs and understandings of concepts such as ‘readiness’ or ‘equality’, we can never move beyond surface level critique of technical practices, to the ontological and epistemological levels where real change takes place. In part, this is about deep level personal reflection, having the courage as educators to dismantle our beliefs and be open to what emerges and the diverse ways in which this can affect our day-to-day practices. Leafgren (2015) provides a beautiful example of such reflection:

“There are hundreds of stories to tell of the children in my classrooms and in the hallways of the schools where I taught: stories of laughter and tears; stories of children who were ready – ready to bring and share their kindnesses, energy, brilliant ideas, sacrifice, deep regard, unbelievable insights, conflicts, tensions and absolute joy. I could tell of Jackie who ‘healed’ me in the hallway when I was so weak with laughter I could not move; of Gavin, a kindergartener, who raised the issue of lynching and wondered how people could think of such things; of Aisha who cried when we wrote Blues songs and asked why we could not sing ‘the Pinks’; of Jalen who, at five years of age, stood in front of entire school and taught them the entire African pledge, and who learned every child’s African Day name after only one day and used them to understand each child’s place in the classroom community; of DeMonte who gently corrected me when I was teasing a student teacher by wiggling a worm in front of her (she was afraid of worms); of Julian who helped Reuben up from the floor and was punished for getting out of line (Leafgren, 2009). There are many stories to tell of children – already learning long
before they entered school – and of the lessons they taught me.”
(Leafgren, 2015, p. 105, emphasis original)

Reflections such as this would encourage us, therefore, to focus on what children bring with them to school and the ways in which we can affirm the ways they are already ready; to learn, to socialize, to become unpredictable subjects of the communities of which they are a part; rather than seeing a gap or deficit based on normative notions of what children ‘should’ be able to do and be on entry to school, or as they progress through particular educational transitions, such as the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

Within the kind of post-foundational research and scholarship discussed in this chapter, there is a paradoxical trend recognized, that is particularly evident in the kind of ‘closing the gap’ discourses discussed above. Lenz Taguchi (2010) alludes to this inherent inconsistency across early childhood communities, arguing that in many cases, the more the complexity of early childhood settings increases, through a “push for increased inclusion of children and families with diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, social and economic backgrounds” (p. 14), the greater the desire seems to be for processes of reduction and increased control that risk shutting out the very inclusion, equality and social justice they aim to achieve. Lenz Taguchi (2010) identifies that such a hierarchical model of education will always begin by defining the outcome upon which educational practice is to be built, starting with what is to be achieved and assessed. Based on such understandings, the effectiveness of pedagogical practices can only be understood as corresponding to the outputs they generate and their accordance with prescribed goals and outcomes. The logic of this system therefore rests upon an ontological certainty about the value of particular aspects of knowledge and modes of expression and their position within a fixed hierarchy.

A representational schema

Writing about dominant representational theories of knowledge and learning, Lenz Taguchi (2010) highlights how, within many educational environments, 78
“knowledge constructs are more or less fixed conceptual and meaning-bearing units that are presented by the teacher to the student for him/her to pick up” (p. 17). Gustafson (2010) argues that the static nature of such technical foci within education forms a closed system of knowledge, directing children and teachers towards particular ways of doing and being that are considered high status. Within such a closed system, education can be conceptualized as a controllable and predictable technology. The effectiveness of inputs can be understood as corresponding to the outputs they generate and their accordance with prescribed goals and outcomes. This assumption, as identified by Whitebread and Bingham (2011), is the very thing that makes a discourse of ‘school readiness’ so appealing to governments as it “seemingly delivers children into primary school ready to conform to classroom procedures” (p. 4). What this discourse produces, in terms of its effects within early childhood education, has been critiqued by Moss (2013) as being a governance of the child, “to ensure that he or she acquires the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to be a successful learner in compulsory education” (p. 9). Within this discourse, early childhood education can be perceived as occupying the “lowest rung on the educational ladder, the first step of a linear progression consisting of a sequence of predefined goals” (ibid). The setting of such clear, measurable standards for what children are expected to know and be able to do at different stages of the education system is claimed to represent a “view of education that is strongly instrumental in rationality, strongly reproductive and transmissive in pedagogy, and strongly technical in practice” (Moss, 2012, p. 10). Built into such thinking about education is, according to Lenz Taguchi (2010), a clear vertical and hierarchical direction of the relationships in teaching and learning, “with the one who knows’ in a position over and above ‘the one who does not already know’ and is to be educated” (p. 17).

A new image of thought: where are we starting from?

In exploring ways to move beyond notions of ‘readiness’ as a hierarchical and deterministic concept, the theoretical insight of Jacques Ranciere opens space to think differently, and provides a useful frame through which to
interpret contemporary discussions of ‘readiness’ and related pedagogical debates.

In the translator’s introduction to ‘La Maitre Ignorant’ (Ranciere, 1991), Ross (1991) identifies in Ranciere’s work a similar paradox within education to that identified by Lenz Taguchi (2010): that whilst seeking to eliminate ‘incapacity’ through expert teaching and explication, education actually divides the world into “the knowing and the ignorant, the mature and the uninformed, the capable and the incapable” (Ross, 1991, p. xx). Ross (1991) describes Ranciere’s view of this ‘pedagogical fiction’ as working through a representation of inequality in terms of time and velocity, in terms of ‘slowness’ and ‘delay’. The temporal structure of this ‘delay’ can be perceived as acting to keep the learner constantly a few steps behind the educator, communicating the message that “a little further along…a little later…a few more explanations and you’ll see the light” (Ranciere, 1991, p. xx). This is significant in terms of contemporary discussions of ‘readiness’, which are seeking to challenge the idea that it is a time specific phenomenon. Dockett and Perry (2015) for example, challenge this idea through their research developing a Position Statement on transition. They consider that children have a fundamental entitlement not to be labelled as ready or unready. What they argue for is a conceptualization of transition “as a process that occurs over time, rather than a perceived state of readiness” (2015, p. 133). By viewing the different transitions children experience in their early years as phenomena that evolve over time, they recognize children’s competencies as constantly evolving in relation to social context, in a manner that encourages early childhood educators to focus on possibilities and potentials, rather than perceived limitations or deficits (Dockett & Perry, 2015).

Moss (2013) identifies the existence of this intellectual hierarchy as a fundamental assumption underpinning dominant theories of ‘readiness’ within early childhood education. He recognizes that this hierarchical notion of ‘readiness’ is very often expressed in the language of education systems, “with learning and knowledge becoming successively more demanding, more complex and more important” (Moss, 2013, p. 4). Ranciere’s work in ‘La
"Maitre Ignorant" questions the logic upon which such hierarchical assumptions may be built and the educational practices and discourses that find their justification in that logic. Ranciere (1991) is highly critical of any educational relationship in which one party assumes the role of ‘master explicator’. Ranciere (1991) argues that the business of the ‘master explicator’ within such a hierarchical system is “to transmit his knowledge to his students so as to bring them by degrees, to his own level of expertise” (p. 3). The task of the ‘master’ within an educational relationship is, according the Ranciere, to ensure that others within that relationship avoid the “chance detours where minds still incapable of distinguishing the essential from the accessory, the principle from the consequence, get lost” (Ranciere, 1991, p. 3). Education, and more specifically the act of teaching based on this principle, can be understood to involve the simultaneous transmission of learning and the formation of minds by leading those minds along an ordered progression from the simplest forms of knowledge to the most complex. Learning therefore assumes a building block approach in which learners must have mastered one set of skills or gained a particular body of knowledge before they are ‘ready’ to move on to the next, more complex level. The master’s secret within this system is to use his own, higher level of knowledge and understanding to recognize the distance (gap) between the taught material and the person being taught, between learning and understanding, between the learner and what is to be learned (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This distance is prevalent in contemporary notions of ‘closing the ‘readiness’ gap’, as discussed in this chapter. The key point we can take from Ranciere’s work is that this ‘distance’ is not natural or inevitable, but is both created and abolished by the ‘master explicator’ themselves. Having thrown a veil of ignorance over everything that is required of the student to learn, the educator then appoints themself to the task of lifting it (Ranciere, 1991). As Ranciere states, “Until he came along, the child has been groping blindly, figuring out riddles. Now he will learn” (1991, p. 7). Understandings such as this help to highlight the inconsistencies within frameworks such as the EYFS (DfE, 2012; 2014), which claim to value all children’s prior learning and experience, recognizing that children are learners from birth, but at the same time creating specific standards for them to aspire to and ultimately be judged against. The
crucial point of this argument is that it ignores or considers less valuable the children’s own preferred trajectories of learning and development or lines of enquiry in relation to the standards of knowledge prescribed by the curriculum.

The intervention of a ‘master explicator’ (which in the context of this discussion can be understood as the educational structures and frameworks that order early childhood education as much as the educator themselves) is key in Ranciere's conceptualization of a knowledge hierarchy. He uses the example of a child learning to speak to illustrate this point. What human children learn best, he identifies, is their mother tongue. Through exposure to spoken language “They hear and retain, imitate and repeat, make mistakes and correct themselves, succeed by chance and begin again methodically, and, at too young an age for explicators to begin instructing them” (1991, p. 5). The explicative system, Ranciere observes, seemingly ignores this power for autonomous learning. It is only on entering the explicative order that the child’s true learning is considered to begin. Ranciere’s point is illustrated when he says,

“And only now does this child who learned to speak through his own intelligence and through instructors who did not explain language to him – only now does his instruction properly speaking begin. Now everything happens as though he could no longer use the same intelligence he has used up until now.” (Ranciere, 1991, p. 6)

The beginning of this relationship between master and student, between those who possess knowledge and those who don’t, marks a redefinition of ‘understanding’ in relation to learning. Outside of the explicative order, ‘understanding’ is something the child can achieve through their own intelligence, in interaction with others and their environment. Inside the system however, it becomes something unobtainable without the explanations of a master or the guidance of predefined structures. Whereas previously ‘understanding’ was something that emerged unexpectedly from the child’s experiences as part of their world, now that understanding can only be illuminated by the master, a more experienced, more intelligent other who can keep the child on the ‘right track’, understanding the ‘right things’, in the ‘right
ways’. The success of this pedagogical system rests on the maintenance of a hierarchy of intelligence, on a division between an 'inferior' intelligence that is simple, irrational and needs educating, and a 'superior' intelligence that proceeds by method and reason and is whole and complex in its makeup.

Dahlberg (2013) warns of the dangers of this hierarchical relationship and of taking children’s ‘failures and inadequacies’ as starting points for their learning. She points to the way in which many children are made to feel, from an earlier and earlier age, that they cannot handle the requirements the education system places on them – ‘they learn that they cannot learn’. Ranciere identifies however, that in such a system, "It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such" (1991, p. 6). This resonates with Bradbury’s (2013) argument, cited in the previous chapter, that policy frameworks and the practices they engender act to create particular student identities, constituting some children as ‘unready’ in a school context through perceived gaps between individual children and predefined goals for achievement and progression. Olsson (2009) is highly critical of the reliance of prescribed outcomes that she considers underpin the global field of early childhood education. She critiques the idea that “learning processes seem very often to be judged and evaluated from an already set outcome” (Olsson, 2009, p. 6), a phenomena that, she claims, acts to tame the learner and the learning process through practices of control. From these perspectives it is possible to see that whilst the designations used to describe the ‘ready child’ appear to define a pre-existing subject, represented through predetermined learning goals, it is in fact through this very act of designation that the subject is constituted so.

The educational relationship that Ranciere (1991) depicts is resonant in what Nicholson et al. (2015) describe as “Modernist answers to addressing ‘readiness gaps’” (p. 196), within which children are helped to progress toward a normalized ‘ideal’ standard of learning and development through the actions of more experienced and knowledgeable others. Moving beyond this way of
thinking, as Nicholson et al. (2015) identify, requires a shift, beginning to work within a postmodern logic. As a result of such a shift, they argue,

“... stable, logically ordered compilations of developmental indicators would be repositioned as adjustable texts, continuously permeated with contextualized revisions and refinements that emerge in contingent response to the lived and evolving experiences of children and the political and historical contexts that influence their families and communities” (Nicholson et al., 2015, p. 196).

The kinds of postmodern assumptions that Nicholson et al. advocate would allow for the creation of educational relationships through which children can bring into being their ‘strongest possible selves’ (Recchia & Franz Bentley, 2015) and within which “conceptualizations of readiness would value local stories and experiences and plan for unexpected possibilities that unfold in a world that cannot wish away uncertainty nor be neatly ordered” (Nicholson et al., 2015, p. 196).

Alternative ways of thinking and being

The purpose of this chapter has been to identify why it is considered necessary, in the context of this thesis, to think outside of the normative, modernist logics that have come to underpin our education system and notions of ‘readiness’. This is where Ranciere’s work is particularly useful. He does not just critique and contest what he sees as damaging dominant systems of education, but offers some insights into how these systems and their underlying philosophies might be rethought. In particular, Ranciere (1991) explores the possibilities for engaging with alternative ways of thinking, being and doing, that recognise and celebrate difference and diversity and that start from a presupposition of equality, rather than notions of gaps or deficit. He attempts to shift the parameters of traditional educational relationships, within which there are those who know and can do and those who can only aspire to know and do, opening instead to a relationship based on equality of intelligence. Gustafson (2010) describes this relationship of equal intelligences as a “form of exchange of ideas and action where what
one gives is reciprocated” (p. 93). This understanding of equality is reflected in the discourse of a ‘strong and equal partnership’ that Moss (2013) offers as an alternative to ‘readiness’ in the relationship between early childhood and compulsory school education, a relationship based on mutually beneficial dialogue and on each sector having something to offer the other. Starting from an assumption of equality, an assumption that all children have something valuable to bring into educational contexts, resonates with work such as that by Recchia and Frantz Bentley (2015). In exploring what it means to be ‘ready’ for kindergarten, their research focuses on the ways in which an emergent curriculum can help prepare children to “bring their strongest possible selves into the kindergarten classroom” (Recchia & Franz Bentley, 2015, p. 141). Their idea of emergent curriculum is one in which,

“… curriculum is seen as emerging from the play, talk, and interests of the children in the classroom. Based upon teachers’ interactions with, and observations of, the children, smaller investigations as well as large-scale projects are co-constructed” (Recchia & Franz Bentley, 2015, p. 142).

What they found within their research was that children who had experienced this kind of emergent curriculum entered kindergarten with the expectation that their learning be meaningful and with the skills to seek out meaningful learning opportunities for themselves. What they reported were children who interpreted the school setting as a positive space and who demonstrated open and engaging habits of mind that enabled them to access and make their own meaning across social, structural and academic elements of the school environment (Recchia & Franz Bentley, 2015). The interesting element of Recchia and Frantz Bentley’s research, in the context of the discussion in this chapter, is that the children entered the school context with an expectation that they would encounter learning experiences that were meaningful for them. Their ‘readiness’ was defined by their eagerness to learn and to seek out these experiences within collaborative relationships and interactions, rather than through externally imposed expectations and requirements. Identifying ‘readiness’ with particular ‘habits of mind’, including ‘Engagement of Self’; ‘Social Adeptness and Flexibility’; and ‘Reading and Navigating Environments’ (Recchia & Franz Bentley, 2015), highlights the importance of
considering the perhaps less tangible aspects of ‘readiness’, such as children’s capacity for wonder (Pinedo-Burns, 2015). Recchia and Franz Bentley (2015) therefore redefine ‘readiness’ to focus on such ‘habits of mind’, but, it can be argued, still retain a concept of what it means to be ‘ready’. Where the discussion in this thesis aims to contribute to and extend this body of work is to explore how ‘readiness’ can be productively conceptualized as an entirely open and emergent construct, as part of a process of subjectification (Biesta, 2010).

**Responding to wonder**

In her narrative exploration of the importance and value of wonder in early childhood classrooms, Pinedo-Burns (2015) states that, “A discourse of readiness focuses the teachers’, the children’s, and the families’ attention to the preparedness and the future, taking all the attention away from the beauty and wonder offered by the *now*” (p. 176). By starting with predefined goals and outcomes, attention is focused on activity that will progress children towards this point. The danger however, as identified by Pinedo-Burns (2015), is that in doing this we miss opportunities for unexpected discoveries to take place and in the process communicate key messages to children about what is of value in terms of their educational experience. She exemplifies this with a reflection from her own experiences as a teacher, recalling an encounter with a group of children in which she was asked by a young girl named Paloma, “How do the clouds all know when it’s time to rain? How do they all know together that it’s time to rain?” (Pinedo-Burns, 2015, p. 174). She recalls her response,

“It is the end of the school day. Once again I am losing my race against the clock. It is late and I need to get the children dismissed and on with their day. Flummoxed, I seek to explain the relationship between barometric air pressure, rain and the dew point” (Pinedo-Burns, 2015, p. 174).

This response as a teacher, to a child’s question, can be understood as symptomatic of the kinds of assumptions about knowledge that, it has been argued in this and the preceding chapters, underpin dominant concepts of
‘readiness’ in early childhood education. The teacher’s response is to answer the child’s question only with reason, with information and facts from which the children will learn. What Pinedo-Burns (2015) points out in her reflections however, is that this way of approaching learning actually disregards children’s competencies and capacities for wonder and for the generation of knowledge themselves. She states,

“I did not listen to Paloma’s question. I did not listen to Paloma. She was not asking me about the scientific reason for precipitation. She was inviting the classroom community to share in wonder about the weather, clouds, and rain. By seeking to answer her question with information I closed down an opportunity to embrace one child’s sense of wonder about the world and the weather” (Pinedo-Burns, 2015, p. 174).

Whilst answering Paloma’s question with facts and reason may perform an important function in sharing and developing knowledge in this context, Pinedo-Burns (2015) recognises that providing this as the only response closes down multiple possibilities for Paloma to develop as a learner. She argues that instead of focusing on ‘readiness’ as relating to specific knowledge and skills, we should focus our attention on “the process, the moment, the wondering, not the outcome, standard, or the foundational skill” (p. 176). She argues that as educators, we need to find ways of thinking differently about the ways in which we interact with children to open up opportunities for wonder within their daily experiences. She states,

“As early childhood educators, we have the opportunity to shape the experiences of the students in our care beyond readiness for the next steps in education to advocate for and foster opportunities for wonder in our classrooms and beyond” (Pinedo-Burns, 2015, p. 177).

**Thinking beyond ‘readiness’**

What the work discussed in this chapter has in common is its insistence that we need to find ways of thinking differently about ‘readiness’, in the hope that these new ways of thinking will lead to more equitable practices for all children within contexts of early childhood education. In developing new ways of
thinking about, and therefore experiencing ‘readiness’ however, we need to engage with what Dahlberg and Moss (2009) describe as ‘new images of thought’, ways of engaging with the world and concepts within it at an epistemological and ontological level. In the context of this discussion, this involves breaking through ways of thinking that align ‘readiness’ with notions of standardization, normative progression, and the reduction of complexity in children’s experience through adherence to fixed goals and outcomes of assessment. The main argument made here is that these goals and outcomes, fixed as predefined, universal and normative criteria, create a standard of achievement that transcends children’s actual lived experience. Within a modernist ideology that assumes learning and development progress in sequential, mechanistically linear forms, which can be assessed and measured in clear steps over time (Nicholson et al., 2015), this standardized notion of ‘readiness’ makes sense. As has been exemplified in these past three chapters however, these ways of thinking, and the practices they produce, have been increasingly critiqued for creating exclusionary and marginalizing standards that either position certain children as failing before they have even begun their educational career or lead to certain ways of being and thinking being marginalized because they do not conform to a predefined standard of ‘readiness’.

The argument with which this chapter ends therefore, is that we need to explore ways of thinking differently. By thinking differently about the assumptions that underpin concepts such as ‘readiness’, possibilities are opened up for acting differently, for finding new ways of being and for unsettling the ‘foundations’ upon which dominant discourses of early childhood education are built.
Chapter 4: A theoretical framework for reconceptualizing ‘readiness’

The focus of this chapter is to explore the possibility of opening space to think differently about ‘readiness’ in early childhood education, recognized as so important within previous chapters. This is achieved, in particular, through engagement with the theoretical concepts of immanence and transcendence, drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and his collaborations with Felix Guattari as a catalyst for engaging with what Dahlberg and Moss (2009) describe as a ‘new image of thought’. Thinking with the philosophies of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, is useful as it enables engagement in a process of thinking differently about ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education, allowing consideration of the question, proposed by Colebrook (2002) “What would it be possible to think without assuming some pre-given (or transcendent) model?” (p. 126).

The following discussion explores particular philosophical ideas that have sparked engagement in this process of thinking differently, and critically explores how these ideas can be useful in reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education. The following sections, therefore, focus on a Deleuzian interpretation of the concepts of transcendence and immanence, exploring how an immanent philosophical perspective may open possibilities for thinking differently about ‘readiness’.

Philosophical relations of transcendence and immanence

Williams (2010) identifies that “Immanence and transcendence are terms about the relations that hold at the heart of different metaphysics” (p. 128). With regard therefore to the question of ontology, the question of being, transcendence is considered, in the context of this discussion, to refer to what is ‘beyond’, ‘outside’ or ‘other’ (Smith, 2003). As a mode of thought, this interpretation of transcendence relates to “normative or universal values, that which is before or beyond experience” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 90). Within such a transcendent ontology ‘we’, as human subjects, are established as part of a hierarchy within which we are separated from the world around us.
and from something considered to exist beyond, or outside, our own state of being. Lenz Taguchi (2009) identifies that most people would talk about this transcendent ‘outside’ either “as universal and unchangeable laws or simply God” (Kindle edition, loc. 1204). However it is articulated, this principle of transcendence relies on a belief in something beyond or before experience, and through which experience comes to have order and meaning. Colebrook (2002) identifies that the notion of ‘truth’ is often a common form of transcendent thought. The world is considered to be formed in relation to universal truths and “instead of seeing what we say and do as productive of relations between ourselves and the world, we imagine that there is some meaning or truth awaiting interpretation, revelation or disclosure” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 71). The concept of a transcendent ‘outside’ to life and experience therefore assumes that being is produced from a series of original and ultimate conditions that are considered to be universally true and that give meaning to life from some “grand position of detached judgement” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 86). From the perspective of transcendence, human and non-human bodies become understood and defined according to their perceived forms and the relation of those forms to particular dominant, transcendent concepts, as the foundation for their being. According to this kind of transcendent ontology, the development of bodies and their resultant forms can be understood only as a bounded function of a fixed outside that establishes beginnings and endings and moves through a deterministically linear trajectory defined by the limits that this boundary imposes. The development of bodies can therefore be understood as a determination of an ultimate foundation, derived from transcendent values such as “reason, God, truth, or human nature” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 90). In relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012; 2014), this ‘transcendent outside’ can be understood as being represented by the goals and outcomes that act to define the child and the dominant, modernist notions of knowledge on which they are built.
A fundamental effect of transcendent thought is the establishment of a deterministic hierarchy and the deterministically linear organization of time and space, in what could be defined as ‘transcendent contexts’, such as a notion of a ‘real world’ that transcends lived experience. Original and ultimate conditions are assumed to explain life and are therefore assumed to exist in a temporal hierarchy as prior to, and generative of, experience. Crucially, there is considered to be a stable, conscious subject who experiences the world and from that experience moves toward a greater state of completion and actualization. The relation of a distinct subject to the ‘world’ is therefore considered to be a matter of knowledge (of a particular set of representable facts) and judgement (by an experiencing self to whom these facts are represented) (Colebrook, 2002). There is considered to be a stable world that exists in space and time, populated by consciously experiencing subjects, for which children can be prepared to participate through education. This ‘world’ is transcendent in that it exists ‘outside’ the subject, who in turn is separate from and ontologically prior to experience and to other experiencing subjects. Therefore, whilst experience may be considered to be subjectively constructed, the subject who experiences is perceived as stable and consistent, being defined by their relation to the original and ultimate conditions that transcend it.

In much Western thought therefore, the subject exists as an ‘I’ differentiated from the world, which in relation forms a transcendent outside that “is there as a set of possible facts to be represented” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 73). There exists a taken for granted ontological gap between the ‘subject’ and the world, between observer and observed. As Barad (2007) states, “there are representations, on the one hand, and ontologically separate entities awaiting representation, on the other” (p. 49). Crucially, this conscious (Western) subject is fundamentally human and is placed in a superior hierarchical position, being considered as separate from other matter in its ability to understand and comprehend experience in relation to higher level transcendent principles. Colebrook (2002) identifies that much of Western
logic tends to define all experience as human experience that is predicated upon a consciousness that is present to ‘us’ as thinking beings. She states, “We tend to think of all experience as what is present to us, as what is actual. We fail to realize that we are events within a much broader terrain of experience that extends well beyond what we actually know” (2002, pp. 86–87). There is a tendency, therefore, to understand the world, and our place in it as human ‘forms’, as subjectively constructed and experienced by separate and observing subjects determined by transcendent categories such as culture, class and gender.

Deleuze (1992) links this development of ‘forms’ and the formation of subjects with a transcendent ontological position. By considering the world as subjectively constructed, the human subject comes to be positioned as a form of structure and organization for experience. The human subject is constructed as an ‘I’ who is “set over and against the world and is representative of any possible experiencing self” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 73). Each ‘I’ in the world is considered to possess separate and individual agency that precedes its interaction with other separate and distinct agencies. Underpinned by such assumptions, it is possible to construct a universal image of ‘readiness’ as an individualized identity which children take up through exposure to particular experiences. This universal subject therefore exists as ontologically prior to experience and interaction, constructed from an original foundation of ultimate and universal conditions that create what Deleuze (2001) describes as “a space defined by an a priori ‘scheme’ into which one inserts oneself” (p. 15).

**Representation**

The transcendence that remains prevalent within much Western thought relies heavily on notions of representation. Deleuze (2004) considers the “I think” of Cartesian philosophy to be the most general principle of representation within which the conscious, thinking subject perceives difference as “an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity” (p. 174). The logic of representation can therefore be considered to be a transcendent logic based
on the relationship between an original which is separate from and transcendent to a copy. The copy derives meaning from its relation to the original, which acts as a fixed norm against which difference can be measured. Such logic can be considered to underpin the mechanisms of assessment that come to define a ‘good level of development’ for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012; 2014). The statements that make up the assessment framework can be considered as creating an ‘original’ identity, what Bradbury (2013) critiques as the construction of the ‘ideal learner’, against which each individual child, assumed to be a stable subject, can be measured and compared.

Barad (2007) considers that “Representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent” (p. 46). This system of representation relies on the assumption, identified previously, of an independently coherent observing subject who is able to accurately comprehend the world through experience. Barad (2007) theorizes such a system as being formed of a tripartite arrangement of: knowledge (i.e. representations); the known (i.e. that which is represented); and the knower (i.e. someone who does the representing). Each part of this tripartite arrangement is bracketed off from the others by a taken for granted ontological gap that holds subjects, the world, and their experience of it at a distance from each other. Within such an arrangement, ‘representation’ is therefore a matter of standing back, comprehending and mirroring a world of experience in order to produce “a finely polished surface of the whole affair” (Barad, 2007, p. 86). The subject who represents is held at a distance from that which is represented and this distance is created in both time and space. The subject is presumed to exist beyond and before their interactions with the world, existing “before the law, or discovery of the law – awaiting or inviting representation” (Barad, 2007, p. 46). The subject therefore transcends experience, which it comprehends from some distant perspective, whilst also being enclosed and bounded by some stable and wholly transcendent outside that organizes and distributes individuals according to supposedly inherent attributes and characteristics.
A challenge to transcendence

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) consider that the relation of expressions and actions to transcendent ends is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind. The danger of this transcendent relationship is discussed by May (2005) who considers this way of thinking to be problematic in that it “freezes living, makes it coagulate and lose its flow” (p. 27). The potential danger of this ‘freezing’ lies, May believes, in the positioning of ‘human subjects’ as observers and interpreters of a transcendent realm, who submit to the judgement of a single truth, law or perspective that allows them to stand detached from the complex mixtures of difference that constitute life. As Pinedo-Burns (2015) cautions, by focusing on discourses of ‘readiness’ that appeal to simplistic and predictable models of learning and development, we run the risk of becoming detached from the wonder of the unexpected and unpredictable aspects of experience. The potential danger of a world ordered according to transcendence is also highlighted by Jackson and Mazzei (2012) who state that a transcendent mode of thought can serve “to enslave or preclude experience or thinking, as it forces us to submit to the strictures of a single truth, law, or perspective” (p. 90).

Deleuze (2001) responds to concerns over the effect of transcendent thinking with a proposition for reworking transcendent metaphysical positions through a logic of “transcendental empiricism” (p. 25). He states, “We will speak of a transcendental empiricism in contrast to everything that makes up the world of the subject and object” (ibid.). For Deleuze (2001) this transcendental field can be defined by what he terms a “pure immediate consciousness with neither object or self, as a movement that neither begins nor ends” (p. 26). As opposed to the type of transcendent relationship described in the previous section of this chapter, Deleuze (2001) describes a relationship of immanence as a way of breaking through assumptions that define the subject as always in relation to a particular norm. He states, “absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, to something…immanence is not immanence to substance; rather, substance and modes are in immanence” (ibid.).
As a result of his radical reaction against transcendent principles in philosophy, Deleuze, in his solo work and also his collaborations with Felix Guattari, has come to be defined as a philosopher of immanence (Colebrook, 2002; May, 2005). Deleuze and Guattari’s entire philosophical project could be considered to be an exploration in immanence and a challenge to transcendence, based on the principle that “Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 7). Colebrook (2002) cites how Deleuze described his own philosophy as an ethics of ‘amor fati’, by which, she identifies, he meant a love of ‘what is’ as opposed to a search for ultimate truth, foundation or justification of something beyond, outside or transcendent to ‘what is’. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) consider philosophy itself to be wholly immanent, stating, “Whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy whenever there is immanence” (p. 43). They define a ‘plane of immanence’ as a “ground from which idols have been cleared” (ibid.) that is engaged in infinite movement and is always open towards the new. They state,

“The plane is like a desert that concepts populate without dividing up. The only regions of the plane are concepts themselves, but the plane is all that holds them together. The plane has no other regions than the tribes populating and moving around on it. It is the plane that secures conceptual linkages with ever increasing connections, and it is concepts that secure the populating of the plane on an always renewable and variable curve” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 36–37).

In thinking about the plane of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) consideration of the ‘concept’ is of particular importance. They consider the very object of philosophy as the creation of concepts that are always new. They state, “Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated or rather created” (p. 5). This understanding of the formation of concepts is radically different from that which underpins educational policy making. Within frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012; 2014), concepts are articulated with certainty. An example of this would be the concept of the ‘Unique child’, a child who is “constantly learning and can
be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured” (DfE), 2014, p. 6). Whilst an attractive concept to those who believe in the competencies of children, it is the manner of its articulation that makes this concept challenging with the kind of postmodern theoretical framework drawn on within this discussion. It is stated as a truth, a fact of childhood. Olsson (2009), writing from a Swedish context, recognizes the risk of this way of thinking within early childhood education. She states,

“It seems that a new map to measure the child against has been drawn. Each child is supposed to have his own competencies to bring forward. These competencies are then being measured against a new set of predetermined goals and standards. Instead of being measured against the scheme of development established by developmental psychology, the child is now being measured against what is defined as competency in local as well as global contexts, including grades of autonomous and flexible behaviour” (p. 36).

As a specifically philosophical construction however, each concept, as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1994), is a singularity in that it is not founded on a transcendent outside, but is a self-positing creation. Within this logic therefore, there would be no possibility of a universally defined ‘unique child’, characterized by their resilience, capability and confidence. Instead, the concept would be continually redefined, emerging anew through each set of interactions and relations. For Deleuze and Guattari therefore, a concept is defined by its internal consistency, rather than by its coherence with an overarching truth. Understood in this way, a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept is not a universal description (i.e. a predefined image of a resilient, capable, competent child), but expresses an event. The ‘unique child’ as an event is constantly emerging anew. As a concept it is, as Butler (2016) identifies, defined by the relationship between the components that emerge within each event as it occurs in situ, between the different ways in which children’s uniqueness comes into being over and over again. It maintains its own endo-consistency and exo-consistency, but it has no transcendent reference, it is self-referential, it posits itself and its object at the same time as it is created (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 22). Concepts therefore do not rely on universals for their meaning and consistency but are formed in their
fragmentary relationship with other concepts on the plane of immanence. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) state,

“In any concept there are usually bits or components that come from other concepts, which correspond to other problems and presuppose other planes. This is inevitable because each concept carries a new ‘cutting-out’, takes on new contours, and must be reactivated or recut” (p. 18).

Concepts, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) consider, emerge on a plane of immanence which extends towards infinity, constantly becoming (becoming-new, becoming-different) through their relationships and linkages with other concepts on that plane. The concept does not speak the essence or form of the ‘thing’, but speaks the ‘event’, understood as a product of the interaction of different bodies and forces. Through each event therefore, it is considered that a concept can “express states of affairs in terms of the contingent circumstances and dynamics that lead to and follow from them” (Stagoll, 2010a, p.53). Crucially, thoughts are created anew “in relation to every particular event, insight, experience or problem, thereby incorporating a notion of the contingency of the circumstances of each event” (ibid.). Within such logic therefore, it would be impossible to have a definitive concept of ‘readiness’ existing independent of the circumstances and conditions of its emergence. Concepts, as defined on the plane of immanence, cannot be conceived a priori, apart from the circumstances of their production. They are becomings and, as such, become defined by their relationships with other concepts on the plane of immanence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Concepts do not, and from this immanent perspective cannot, exist in isolation. Each concept is entirely dependent upon its relationship with other concepts, and the components that make up those concepts, and it is through these relationships that they will “support one another, coordinate their contours, articulate their respective problems…and participate in a co-creation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 18). For example, from an immanent perspective, the idea of a predetermined concept of ‘readiness’ would make no sense as there are no universal, transcendent assumptions from which it can be derived, such as a universally consistent patterns of child
development, or a culturally consistent notion of the ‘good’ or ‘ideal’ learner. Whilst maintaining its own internal consistency therefore, a concept of ‘readiness’ expressed as an event is fragmentary as it can only be defined relationally and can never be defined once and for all, being co-created and articulated as part of the relations with which it is entangled, and that make up the assemblage or network through which it emerges (this relational aspect of ‘readiness’ is discussed in more detail in the following chapters). On a plane of immanence therefore, concepts, experiences and subjects are held together not by fixed, transcendent norms and values, but by the plane itself and as such are in a constant state of movement and change. The challenge in early childhood education is to create spaces that allow for this movement and change to occur and to be recognized and valued.

*Infinite movement and the ‘middle’*

The infinite movement that characterizes immanence is defined by a ceaseless coming and going of “movements caught within each other, each folded into others, so that the return of one instantly relaunches the other in such a way that the plane of immanence is ceaselessly being rewoven” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 18). As educators therefore, we can never become too comfortable with our assumptions, beliefs or expectations, as these are constantly shifting. Rather than adhering to a deterministic logic, movement and development on this plane is rhizomatic in the sense that a rhizome is a form of ‘subterranean stem’ that moves and develops according to “principles of connection and heterogeneity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6). The logic of the rhizome, as a way of understanding what happens in the world, can be considered as immanent in that it has no relation to “the One as subject or object” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8), or to the hierarchical strata of transcendent thought. The rhizome operates as dimensions in motion, rather than as fixed and stable units, always starting up in the middle, “from which it grows and which it overspills” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). Understanding the plane of immanence as characterized by rhizomatic movement shifts focus from an acceptance and privileging of transcendent and hierarchical structures to a concern with multiple and unpredictable lines.
of connection (that Deleuze and Guattari call ‘lines of flight’). Crucially however, it should not be assumed that movement on the plane of immanence is completely destratified, for as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state, “Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees” (p. 9). The important point is that an immanent perspective views things from the middle as “coming and going rather than starting and finishing” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). Viewed from this ‘middle’ perspective, it is the unpredictability of rhizomatic movement that opens up the potential for thinking differently within an immanent philosophy. Questions such as: “Where are you going? Where are you coming from? Where are you heading?” (p. 25), that stem from a transcendent logic and assume the self (and other) as a stable point of reference, are rendered useless as they “imply a false conception of a voyage of movement” (ibid.). From an immanent perspective, we should instead be asking, “What are your lines? ... What abstract line will you draw, and at what price, for yourself and for others? What is your line of flight?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 203).

An immanent understanding of life

The plane of immanence, therefore, resists grounding in stratified forms, figures, designs or functions.

“Its unity has nothing to do with a ground buried deep within things, nor with an end or a project in the mind of God. Instead it is a plane upon which everything is laid out, and which is like the intersection of all forms, the machine of all functions; its dimensions, however, increase with those of the multiplicities of individualities it cuts across. It is a fixed plane, upon which things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness. A plane of immanence or univocity opposed to analogy.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 254)

Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term ‘fixed’ to describe the plane of immanence does not mean immobile but rather refers to an absolute state of movement and of rest from which all relative speeds and slownesses emerge
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 627). It is this movement and rest, slowness and speed that define elements on the plane of immanence, through its capacity for infinite and dynamic movement.

It is this potential for ceaseless movement that, for Deleuze (2001), defines ‘a life’. He states that, “we then define the transcendental field by a pure immediate consciousness with neither object nor self, as a movement that neither begins nor ends” (2001, p. 26). Drawing on Spinoza, whom Deleuze (2004) hails as the ‘prince’ of philosophers, he proposes that a life should be defined as a kinetic proposition of slowness and speed between particles, as opposed to the perceived form or function of a subject (Deleuze, 1992). He states,

“Global form, specific form and organic functions depend on relations of speed and slowness. The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as form, or the development of form, but as a complex relation between different velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. A composition of speeds and slowness on a plane of immanence.” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 626)

Crucially therefore, immanent understandings of life, of progress, movement, identity and development, do not rely on the relation of a particular subject or form to ‘higher level’ or transcendent principles and characteristics. An immanent ontology does not measure life according to the difference between start and end points, creating tracings of a space planned a priori. Such tracings, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) consider, refer only to an act of mundane representation, capable only of reproducing an unconscious that is closed upon itself. A tracing, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is pre-coded and therefore cannot be creative or productive as it can only ever produce something already defined, always coming back to the same.

Thinking with this idea of the plane of immanence can disrupt the deterministic linearity that can be produced by focusing on beginnings and endings. In Deleuze’s philosophy, he considers that in life, “One never commences, one never has a tabula rasa; one slips in, enters in the middle,
one takes up or lays down rhythms” (1992, p626). This resonates with the idea that children always come to educational spaces with valid and valuable experiences. They enter in the middle of a story, already in the telling. This image of the middle is seen as a place of movement and passage where things operate and are defined kinetically, by relations of speed and slowness. This middle space works through “a logic of AND” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25) which does away with transcendent foundations and nullifies endings and beginnings. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the conjunction ‘and…and…and’ in order to challenge and shake up the verb ‘to be’, which they consider to be symptomatic of much (Western) transcendent thought. ‘To be’ is to define by form and function, to plot hierarchical coordinates of being and to connect the dots, following a predefined trajectory against which experience is given meaning. It starts by seeking a foundation and works towards an ultimate end. The logic of ‘and…and…and…’ however starts up in the middle, it is always ‘intermezzo’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), working according to an immanent logic. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explore this notion of the ‘middle’ in their introduction to A Thousand Plateaus. They state,

“The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.” (p. 25, emphasis original)

An ethology of being

Deleuze refers to this study of immanence and the kinetic relations of speed and slowness as an “Ethology” (1992, p. 627). In A Thousand Plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) ‘ethology’ is understood as a domain for understanding how varied components can become crystallized within assemblages “that respect neither the distinction between orders nor the hierarchy of forms” (p. 336). The components of the assemblage are held together not “in the play of framing forms or linear causalities” (ibid.), through
which determinate boundaries and territories can be drawn, but through
movement, “in terms of pure relations of speed and slowness…that evoke
powers to affect and be affected” (Lorraine, 2010, p. 255). Deleuze’s (1988a)
understanding of ethology, which he links through Spinoza with an Ethics,
presents an alternative to the definition of bodies in terms of “abstract notions
of genus and species” (p. 127) that provide a transcendent frame for identity.
He proposes that bodies are defined instead according to their capacity for
being ‘affected’ and the ‘affections’ of which they are capable. These affects
are distributed on a plane of immanence and therefore resist definition as
either a substance or subject being defined instead as ‘modes’ (Deleuze,

“Concretely, a mode is a complex relation of speed and slowness,
in the body but also in thought, and it is a capacity for affecting
and being affected, pertaining to the body or to thought.” (Deleuze,
1992, p. 626)

The capacity for affecting and being affected is at the heart of Deleuze’s
notion of ethology, resulting from a rejection of the classification of beings
according to ‘fictitious abstracts’ (Deleuze, 1988a). Instead of defining bodies
or ‘things’ according to particular classes and specific differences, an
immanent mode defines them according to their capacity for affecting and
being affected, by “the excitations to which they react, those by which they are
unaffected, and those which exceed their capacity, make them ill or die”
(Deleuze, 1988a, p. 45). Rather than being concerned with the development
of forms and the relation of these forms to a supplementary, transcendent
dimension, an immanent ethics is concerned with the becoming of bodies
through affective relations. For Deleuze (1988a), affect refers to an existing
mode of a body that is defined by its capacity for being affected and by the
encounters it makes with other modes. Within encounters, it can happen that
different modes enter into composition with each other, that is they are ‘good’
for each other, or it can happen, on the contrary, that one or both of the
modes decompose and are bad for each other. Deleuze (1988a) considers
that,
“In the first case the existing mode passes to a greater perfection; in the second case to a lesser perfection. Accordingly it will be said that its power of acting or force of existing increases or diminishes, since the power of the other mode is added to it, or on the contrary, is withdrawn from it, immobilizing and restraining it.” (p. 50)

The crucial point when thinking about affect is that it is relational. As Carnera (2012) states, “When you affect something you are being affected in return” (p. 76). Affects are experienced as a dynamic flow among and between bodies, meaning that at all times, in different ways, every-'one' and every-'thing' is both affecting and being affected. Affects occur through immanent relations and are always in motion through an intra-activity of forces that are always already engaged in dynamic and fluxive movement (Sellers, 2013). This dynamic and ceaseless movement results in constant change, both in the affecting and the affected bodies, as a result of their encounters. As an immanent mode however, this change does not amount to a progressive, quantitative build-up of knowledge and experience based on particular foundations or transcendent values. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), affects are the becomings of bodies, and it is impossible to know in advance what these bodies can do in their intra-active relations. Affect therefore concerns the potential of bodies on a plane of immanence and what is important about these affective flows is that they are open and unpredictable, continuously producing “new models of subjectivation that escape the forms of fixed identity of a traditional moral subject” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 26). For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), affect is a crucial concept in understanding the potential of bodies. Drawing on Spinoza, they state,

“To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act. These intensities come from external parts or from the individuals own parts. Affects are becomings.” (p. 256)

Through affective relations, bodies are therefore in a constant state of change and augmentation. Through affective relational encounters, each body’s
power of acting is either increased or diminished, producing a greater or lesser force of existing than before (Deleuze, 1988a). Indeed, Deleuze argues that we can only come to know a body through the affects of which it is capable and considers “that the reality of a body is wholly dependent upon its affects, its power to affect and in turn its capacity to be affected” (Carnera, 2012, p. 76).

The possibilities of thinking differently

Possibilities for reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ that are opened up by thinking with concepts such as affect will be explored in greater depth as the discussion within this thesis progresses. The key point highlighted within this chapter, however, is that there are modes of thought through which often taken for granted concepts with early childhood education can be unsettled. By thinking in terms of immanence: of movement rather than fixity; in terms of the middle rather than beginning and end points; and in terms of affect rather than classification and identification; space can be opened to think differently. It is from within this space that this study emerges. The following chapters build on these initial discussions, exploring the possibilities for reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ in early childhood education that emerge through engaging with an immanent philosophy. The potential for thinking differently is also explored in terms of the methodological approaches that can open space for this kind of radical critique and reconceptualization. The methodological work that has developed through this study, enabling a reconceptualized account of ‘readiness’ to emerge, also engages an immanent mode of being and works with the ways of knowing and producing knowledge that emerge from that plane. The following chapter explores these theoretical concepts in light of a methodological discussion, setting the context for the reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ that is to follow.
Part 2

Methodology
Chapter 5: A philosophical ethnography

This chapter is about the emergence of a methodology that created possibilities for radically reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education. It is not a neat retelling of the steps taken to produce knowledge, to answer a question, or confirm a hypothesis. Neither is it specifically a reflective account of the role of the researcher. It is an exploration of what happens when you let go of certainty and allow yourself to be vulnerable to the unknown in research. It is an engagement with ‘stuck places’ (Lather, 2007) as sites of production that lead to the emergence of new ways of ‘knowing and being’ and ‘knowing in being’. The themes that emerge fold into, and emerge out of, ideas of methodology in a ‘post-qualitative’ era (Lather & St Pierre, 2013). Inspired by Mol (2002) the intention is to engage with the ontological politics of method, “a politics that has to do with the way problems are framed, bodies are shaped, and lives are pushed and pulled into one shape or another” (p. viii).

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, elements of an autoethnographic approach have been central to the development and communication of this research project. In some sense this chapter could be considered an autoethnography of methodology (Childers, 2008), “an effort to write methodology from practice…a methodology unknown to itself that stumbles and bumbles along the way” (Childers, 2008, p. 298). It attempts to engage the reader with the processes through which this project emerged, whilst never allowing itself to get too comfortable, asking the difficult questions that seemed constantly to push their way to the forefront of the work. It does not shy away from difficult theory but holds it constantly at the forefront, working the borders (Lather, 2007) between theoretical and empirical work in a move towards what Barad (2007) describes as an onto-epistemological approach to science. It is a study in “empirical philosophy” (Mol, 2002, p. 1) in which the onto-epistemological aspects of knowledge are brought into being in “common, day to day, sociomaterial practices” (Mol, 2002, p. 6).
This chapter attempts to present the methodological process as a folding and layering of concepts and experiences “in ways that are multiple, simultaneous, and in flux, rather than presenting them as linear and discrete” (Lather, 2007, p. 4). Engaging in the ‘day to day’ experience through which this methodology developed, the chapter employs the textual device of the ‘aside’ (St Pierre, 2000). The inclusion of these ‘asides’ has a particular purpose. They are not intended as extracts of ‘data’ to be analysed or interpreted as ‘true’ accounts of past experience, but function in a manner similar to what Knight and Rayner (2015) describe as “a material consequence of an event which has passed and therefore cannot be replicated or truly accounted for” (p. 87). Rather than evidence of particular methodological experiences and processes, the value of these ‘asides’ is in “the possibilities they held for theorizing, researching and experimenting” (Knight & Rayner, 2015, p. 88) with the emergence of method and the onto-epistemological possibilities opened up by that method. Events from practice are embedded in theoretical/methodological/political discussions, emphasizing the necessarily emergent nature of methodology in the context of this research project. This is a particularly useful textual device as it allows the chapter to be constructed as a multiplicity of concepts, events and experiences, without reducing the methodological process to a simple linear trajectory or field report. Its construction could be considered as, what Richardson and St Pierre (2005) describe as, a ‘layered text’, “a strategy for putting yourself into your text and putting your text into the literatures and traditions of social science” (p. 974). Each of these ‘asides’ can be thought of as, what Richardson describes as, a ‘writing story’ (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). They communicate to the reader how the researcher came to develop the ideas and knowledge created through the study. They situate the researcher in the research, as the research instrument, as a reminder of “the continual co-creation of the self and social science” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 975).

This chapter highlights the emergence of methodological praxis in this project as complex and messy. It is written on the premise that to try and represent that messiness via a linear narrative or simple account of events ‘as they happened’ would be dishonest, denying the value of that complexity and its
importance in the research process. The approach taken in this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole is, therefore, what Lather (2007) describes as “a fold versus a depth model of presenting knowledge, a pragmatics dissemination to gradually build up by partial pictures the idiom of our history” (p. 168, n6).

The effort therefore, is to produce a methodological story that resists an easy telling and that troubles what it means to ‘do methodology’ in the context of this research project. The methodological processes explored within this chapter form part of the original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis. The doing of methodology (re)presented here brings together many ideas, theories and practices that have emerged in this relatively contemporary area of post-qualitative enquiry and shows one way in which they can be brought together to open space for thinking and acting differently. The contribution is to expand this area of methodological enquiry through providing an example of innovative post-qualitative research in practice, as a method for producing new and different knowledge in the early childhood field.

The decision has been made to include practical details, including details about the school community and participants who were involved in the research, as part of the appendix (see appendix A). The ethical approval documents submitted to and approved by the University of Exeter Ethics Committee include details of the school, class and participants, including adults and children, as well as a detailed discussion of the steps taken to ensure informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. The reason for not including these practical details within this chapter is a desire to maintain a consistency and fluidity in the narration and exploration of the methodology. As will be evident as the chapter unfolds, the methodological approach strives to move away from approaches to the production of knowledge that root it in a knowing humanist subject. For this reason, specific details of participants involved in ‘field work’ are omitted from the methodological discussion, with the intention of focussing on the ways in which new knowledge and ideas came into being at an onto-epistemological level.
Aside 5

In the summer of 2012 I attended the Summer Institute of Qualitative Research at Manchester Metropolitan University. I was just coming to the end of the first year of my PhD and was preparing to begin what I had defined as the ‘empirical phase’ of my research. In developing my research plan I had become interested in post-structurally framed approaches to research, such as the type of ‘post-structural ethnography’ explored by Deborah Britzman (1995) and the approach to ‘bricolage’ discussed by Kincheloe and Berry (2004). The values and ethics of these approaches resonated with my desire to challenge dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ in my professional field, and these views of knowledge as partial, temporary and contextually contingent aligned with my own. I felt at the time, however, more comfortable with the ‘reality’ and ‘on the ground’ nature of empirical methodology, as opposed to philosophy and theory, which would so often leave me feeling lost and confused. During my week in Manchester, I listened with great interest to speakers from a wide range of disciplines discuss their work. The theme of the institute was ‘Putting Theory to Work’, although it is only now that I really understand what this meant. I felt overwhelmed by what I saw as the depth of theoretical knowledge required to work in this way, a depth I both doubted I could ever achieve, and which I questioned the value of, in ‘real world’ research. Whilst the week was interesting, I left longing to return to the relative comfort of my upcoming empirical work, to the observations, interviews and analysis I was planning to carry out. Little did I know then the impact that week would have.

Lather (2007) tells us that in “[a]ttempting to be accountable to complexity, thinking the limit becomes our task” (p. 11). In order to open up to the new we must work at and break down the expectations and practices that structure and code our thinking and being. This is no easy task, especially given the dominance of what Lather (2010) defines as “scientism” (p. 15) and the “reduction of science to a very narrow and ahistorical idea of method” (ibid.).
It can be argued that, in many cases, narrow ‘scientific’ approaches to social science research are not capable of dealing with the complexity of the problems with which research is engaged. This can be due to the failure of methodology and critique to think outside of the epistemological and ontological assumptions it is attempting to challenge. In a sense, as Audre Lorde (1984) tells us, it is like attempting to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools.

Lather (2013) considers that within the qualitative field, there are layerings of research practice, which she defines (in an apologetically linear manner), as ‘Qual 1.0’, ‘Qual 2.0’, ‘Qual 3.0’ and ‘Qual 4.0’ (p. 635). She defines ‘Qual 1.0’ as,

“the conventional interpretive inquiry that emerged from the liberal humanism of sociology and cultural anthropology with a fairly untroubled focus on standpoint epistemologies, a humanist subject who has an authentic voice, transparent descriptions of lived experiences, and the generally untroubled belief that better methods and richer description can get closer to the truth.” (Lather, 2013, p. 635).

‘Qual 2.0’ Lather describes as beginning to engage with messy texts, with multiple realities and voices, but continuing to be grounded within “humanist concepts of language, reality, knowledge, power, truth, resistance and the subject” (ibid.). She considers that within this layer, the field of qualitative research can be disciplined and normalized by technologies such as research methods’ handbooks, journals and courses, which attempt to make research processes knowable in advance. In ‘Qual 3.0’ the field begins to trouble concepts commonly associated with qualitative enquiry, such as “validity, voice, data, empathy, authenticity, experience, interviewing, the field, reflectivity, clarity etc.” (ibid.). Lather expresses concern however, that despite opening these concepts to critique and contestation, they are still at risk of being normalized as they are brought under the unifying banner of ‘postmodern methodology’. ‘Qual 4.0’, Lather describes as “becoming in the Deleuzian sense” (ibid.), an attempt at methodological praxis that aims at producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently. This type
of inquiry resists tidy description, “there is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned” (ibid.). ‘Qual 4.0’ could therefore be seen as a methodology of thinking and doing ‘at the limit’, a methodology that is “non-totalizable, sometimes fugitive, also aggregate, innumerable, resisting stasis and capture, hierarchy and totality” (Lather, 2013, p. 635).

An important consideration when attempting to work with such an approach to enquiry is what makes this more than simply an anecdotal, anything goes, exercise? The question of what qualifies work in this area as research needs to be acknowledged. As the methodological discussion in this chapter develops it will attempt to engage with this question, exploring issues such as, what counts as ‘data’ within such an approach and how is it possible it talk about validity in relation to the knowledge produced.

One question that must be constantly explored is how can we work the dangers of ‘fugitive spaces’ in order to develop practices that are attentive to the ethical and political aspects of research that may be “uncertain, incomplete, contingent, tentative, and ambiguous” (Lather, 2007, p. 158) - a task made all the more important “given the present ‘rage for accountability’?” (ibid.). There is no easy answer to this question. As Lenz Taguchi (2013) identifies, the development of these kind of methodological practices “is not something that can be done only once, but it has to be done over and over again, in an ongoing flow of differentiation” (p. 715). This is a daunting task, perhaps especially as a PhD student. How do we say yes to the messiness that Lather, Lenz Taguchi, St Pierre and others like them so strongly advocate, when cultures of research training, development and assessment so often rely on measures of quality and accountability derived from the so called ‘hard sciences’ for their measures of success? Within this dominant culture, the type of ‘stuck places’ discussed by Lather (2007) as offering so much productive potential, are something to be avoided, seen as an indication of poor research design or lack of researcher competence. In this culture, that values certainty so highly, it is a daunting prospect to embrace a way of working that actively seeks to engage with these messy spaces, not resisting, but sitting with them, until something productive emerges. This is indeed a
very different way of producing knowledge, one that requires “students so trained in the philosophical, ethical and political values that undergrid knowledge production…to negotiate the constantly changing landscape of educational research far beyond the application of technical methods and procedures” (Lather, 2006, p. 53).

This is a difficult space to inhabit as an educational researcher, one which has many parallels with the teaching profession itself. Davies (2009) identifies how, in education, “[a]s successive neoliberal governments shed their responsibility for welfare, individuals are taught to become risk averse, since there will be no safety net if they make mistakes” (p. 4). As a PhD student it is possible to find oneself similarly positioned, as a kind of “vulnerable subject of neoliberalism” (ibid.), potentially put off from the necessary messiness of uncertainty and from methods that may take us into the unknown and the new. In producing work that does justice to and honours the complexity of the worlds we inhabit however, Lather (2007) encourages a “stance of getting lost” (p. 13) through which we might both “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (ibid.). It is with this in mind that this methodology, written from practice, embarks on a journey that ‘stumbles and bumbles’, bringing tensions and stuck places to the fore “as a way of learning how to live in deauthorized space” (Lather, 2007, p. 13).

**Aside 6**

I did not set out to trouble methodology quite so significantly. The research plan I wrote in my first year, looking back on it, was relatively conventional. I had wanted to use an emergent research design, planning my research in phases, each phase of which would inform the focus of ‘data collection’ and ‘analysis’ in the next. Informed by the post-structural theories I was engaging with at the time, I accepted and celebrated that my ‘analysis’ and ‘findings’ would only ever be provisional, historically and contextually situated and that they would only ever be my analysis, not a representation of truth. Despite my desire to work in an emergent manner however, I still planned my initial
phase in some detail. I intended to carry out observations in the school and classroom context, collect documents and artefacts, and carry out interviews, all methods of ‘data collection’ common to ethnographic approaches, which I accepted with little criticality. Despite the aim of my research to trouble dominant discourses in the context of early childhood education, I wasn’t fully conscious of the influence traditional research ideologies had on my thinking and practice. I ‘entered the field’ wanting to produce a ‘good’ post-structural ethnography and whilst I was beginning to look critically at the methods I was using and the ways in which they might produce knowledge, I did not at any point question the assumption that I would in fact ‘collect’ and ‘analyse’ ‘data’.

**Phenomenological ontology and the knowing humanist subject**

‘Data collection’ and ‘data analysis’ appear to be relatively uncontested terms in the context of empirical research. Whilst these terms cover a multitude of practices and approaches, they appear to assume an almost taken for granted position. It is a widely held assumption, further embedded through research methods’ text books and training, that research designs will detail these practices and that they will occur through well-planned and structured methods. This is perpetuated by research structures such as ethical approval committees, who very often require detailed accounts of proposed methods of collecting and analysing data (see for example Appendix A) before a researcher can enter ‘the field’. Due to the sensitive nature of ethics in research, the need and ability to articulate these practices prior to the start of a research project may often be taken for granted. Looking at these practices critically however, it becomes clear that they are based on a very particular type of logic. They assume an intentional and knowing human subject, who is able to articulate their intentions, even if only provisionally. As Lather and St Pierre (2013) state, “[t]he doer exists before the deed, so the researcher can (and must for IRBs) write a research proposal that outlines the doing before she begins” (p. 630). The demarcation of these processes also sets them apart as distinct, with a linear relation. Data is collected in the field and then

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3 Institutional Research Boards (IRBs)
extracted in order to be analysed. Depending on the research design, the researcher may then return to the field and, drawing on the knowledge produced from their analysis, begin another cycle of data collection. The process can then be repeated ad. infinitum (or until data saturation is reached!).

**Aside 7**

Planning my initial research design, I took for granted that I would ‘collect’ ‘data’. Although I consciously used the term ‘produce’ instead of collect, in a desire to acknowledge that I was active in its production, my plan, although I wasn’t conscious of it at the time, was still to ‘collect’ the ‘data’ that was produced. It would be recorded and extracted, a provisional textual account that I could analyse once out of ‘the field’. It would form my ‘cabinet of curiosities’ from which new knowledge would emerge. I took for granted that I would be able to produce a textual account that would give itself up to analysis, as was evident in my first year research plan, which stated that, drawing on a hermeneutic approach, ‘all data could be ‘read’ and interpreted as a form of text’.

**The challenge of representation**

Words are a very powerful commodity in research. They can create, distort, manipulate, communicate and very often, are assumed to represent. Observations written in narrative form, interviews transcribed into passages of text, feelings and emotions captured in description, these are all common practices, based on specific logics of presence and hierarchy. St Pierre (2013) considers that representational schemas assume both depth and hierarchy, that there exists an original reality that is ‘out there’ to be found and that can be accurately represented by language. According to this schema, language is surface and secondary and “can be used in such a way that it does not distort the truths scientific practice has discovered in the real word”
The challenge of representation is significant for both data collection and analysis. In terms of ‘data analysis’, a representational logic assumes “a critical, intentional subject standing separate and out-side of ‘the data’, digging behind or beyond or beneath it, to identify higher order meanings, themes or categories” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 660). The priority is to find out what data mean in relation to particular questions, ideas or contexts. Research processes and practices tend to focus on ‘data’ in relation to a fixed and stable reality, exploring,

“… what they mean; whether they are true, valid or consistent; whether they are collectable and codable under overarching themes, categories or ideas; how well arguments hold together; how power and subjectivity are constructed and negotiated” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 664).

It is taken for granted that data can represent and capture a reality of experience that, once recorded, will remain static in its account. As MacRae (2011) states, common procedures of data collection, such as observation, act to “marshal a framework for seeing” (p. 41) within which “the observed become recorded evidence of what happened” (ibid.). In relation to archival research, Jones and Jenkins (2008) describe this kind of assumedly accurate eyewitness account as a ‘Forensic Scene’. The same analogy may be used for ethnographic observation and the recording of events and experiences by an observer “caught up in the task of representation” (Jones et al., 2010, p. 479). In order for ‘findings’ to be considered valid, data must be ‘forensically clean’, and the researcher’s impact on that data either eliminated or fully accounted for via a reflexive backward glance.

Aside 8

My first ‘phase’ of data collection produced a significant amount of ‘data’. I began recording observations in a research journal with a split page format, one side of the page for my written observations and the other for field notes and emergent ideas about what data might mean and how it might relate to theory (see figure 1). The logic underpinning this approach was to record on
the one hand, only what I saw, uncluttered by my thoughts and emergent analysis. My thoughts and ideas would be recorded adjacent to these textual accounts of classroom life and experience. Participants' ‘voices' would be kept separate from my interpretations of the meanings they expressed. This on-going reflection on the data was intended to support a larger phase of analysis, capturing and representing my thoughts in process as I ‘collected data' from the field.

The humanist assumptions underpinning traditional ethnographic methods have long attracted critique (Britzman, 1995). MacRae (2011) considers that “there is a simplistic assumption that what is seen is able to accurately represent what took place” (p. 41). She questions,

“Can you really ‘see' what happens? A person's actions are complex and harness all the senses, haptic, touch and even sometimes smell. To what extent can the observer see this, and further, to what degree of accuracy can this seeing be translated by words?” (ibid.).

The humanist assumption that there is a world present to, and representable by, a researcher is therefore challenged. In relation to observation, Jones et al. (2010) reflect that, “One lie told is that we write what we see” (p. 483). They identify that this performance of data, as representative of reality, is an illusion, stating, “Field notes do not approximate to moments of ‘pure inscription’ where world becomes text...Observation notes are no more ‘innocent' than any other texts” (p. 481).
There exists a particular politics of knowledge however, that positions these forms of representation as unproblematic in their construction as ‘data’. This politics is concerned with the idea of ‘presence’. Presence becomes a defining feature of what counts as data and as valid processes of data collection. As St Pierre and Jackson (2014) state, “using presence as a criterion for quality, we assume that data collected face to face from participants are of high quality and worthy of collection and analysis” (p. 716). Connecting presence with representation contributes to a particular performative regime in which the researcher is able to record a world that, whilst present to them, is epistemologically and ontologically separate and prior (Barad, 2007). Crucially, the very act of collecting ‘data’ presumes an understanding of what counts as ‘data’ in the first place (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Often ‘data’ become that which can be collected with the intangible and unrepresentable excluded from the frame.
The methods of ‘data collection’ used within my first phase of fieldwork privileged that which could be recorded textually, or converted into text. What became valued as ‘data’ were the phenomenological and linguistic experiences I was able to represent. My attempts to analyse this data were frustrating. My planned method of coding, of reading texts in order identify particular discursive themes, felt at best superficial, at worst, as a violence to the experiences of those I was attempting to code, including myself. I struggled to make connections within the ‘data’, to engage beyond the shallow and artificial categories and codes I was constructing. My experience in the ‘field’ itself had been exciting, dynamic, yet this seemed somehow lost when reduced to textual accounts, represented through linguistic mechanisms that just didn’t do justice to the complexity and singularity of the events themselves. This was the first time I questioned the act of ‘collecting data’.

MacLure (2013a) questions the notion of what counts as data. She states that “in a materialist ontology, data cannot be seen as an inert and indifferent mass waiting to be in/formed and calibrated by our analytic acumen or our coding systems” (p. 660). She displaces the logic that assumes an intentional humanist researcher, producing and collecting data, acknowledging instead, “data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us” (ibid.). However, if we abandon a logic of presence and predefined assumptions about ‘what counts as data’, where does that leave us in terms of the important work of empirical research? Do we reach a situation in which everything counts as data? Brinkmann (2014) describes this as ‘The Dilemma of Data’. He states that by considering ‘everything as data’ the concept is rendered empty. “We swim in data like fish swim in water: The life world (to speak with the phenomenologists)…is a pool of data in which we swim – and sometimes drown if we engage in analysis” (p. 721). The problem that Brinkman identifies is that if everything is data, then correspondingly, nothing is data. He states, “It does not give us a meaningful sense of what we talk about…to say that data are everywhere…we simply end up with an empty
If we accept that not everything is data however, the dilemma we are faced with is how, in rejecting a phenomenological ontology and logic of presence, does data come to make itself known? How do we explain the ‘coming into being’ or the ‘becoming’ of data?

\textbf{‘Onto-epistemology’: the study of practices of knowing in being}

\textit{‘Data analysis’}

In ‘producing different knowledge’ and ‘producing knowledge differently’, the post-qualitative turn directly troubles the logics on which research practices are based. In particular, assumptions that knowing should be privileged over being, and positivist and phenomenological notions of the nature of lived experience and the world (Lather & St Pierre, 2013), are displaced. Hierarchical models of depth and assumptions that social and material sites can be mined increasingly for unexposed meanings are challenged. Alternative ways of knowing \textit{in} being are explored, ways that give up representational and binary logics and, instead of depth, see an imbrication of language, the social and material as entangled ‘on the surface’ (Lather & St Pierre, 2013), a rhizomatic and lateral logic, rather than a deterministic and hierarchical view of the production of knowledge. The concept of knowing \textit{in} being begins to break down barriers between ‘knowledge’ and ‘experience’, ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’. It reimagines the role of the researcher and places under suspicion “the philosophies of presence that assume the historical role of self-conscious human agency” (Lather, 2007, p. 6). This concept of how new knowledge emerges is based on the principle, put forward by Barad (2007) “that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing, but rather from a direct material entanglement in the world” (p. 49).

\textbf{Aside 10}

My first engagement with ‘data analysis’ in this project was a particularly underwhelming encounter with data. The coding process, even at the early
thematic stage, did not sit well with me. It felt wrong, like I was systematically being detached from the research. There was a coldness in this way of working. I had hit a stuck place. I had pages of ‘data’, now embellished with notes and labels (see figure 2) (I had already abandoned my intention of using Nvivo to manage my data – even at this early stage this was one separation too many!) I had emerging themes and could see links with theory, but was struggling to make any of this matter. I was going through the motions – coding my data, because this is what I had been taught to do. It was a purely technical exercise.

Davies (2014b) describes analysis as a “set of encounters among meaning, matter and ethics” (p. 735). This understanding of analysis, of the production of knowledge, is a significant shift from practices that consider meaning to be produced in the mind of an intentional humanist subject. Knowledge is not produced as an effect of the agentically thinking subject, but is “a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world” (Barad, 2007, p. 185). The world in Barad’s terms is entangled, “a mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (2007, p. 33). Agency is not a characteristic that individual entities possess, independent of their interactions, rather it emerges through processes of ‘intra-action’. As Barad (2007) states, “intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, the intra-action” (p. 33). Helpful in understanding the implications of this material, intra-active approach in research is the concept of diffraction. According to Barad (2007), “Diffraction is not reflection raised to some higher power. It is not a self-referential glance back at oneself” (p. 88). A diffractive approach attempts to decentre processes assumed to occur within the mind of the researcher, challenging “the presumed inherent separability of the subject and object, nature and culture, fact and value, human and non-human, organic and inorganic, epistemology and ontology, materiality and discursivity” (Barad, 2007, p. 381). Crucially, “diffraction does not concern homologies, but attends to specific material entanglements” (Barad, 2007, p. 88). The methodological implications of diffraction are vast and pose a significant challenge to conventional humanist processes of producing
knowledge. Any assumed distance between ‘researcher’ and ‘the field’ is dissolved and they become inseparably entangled, both implicated in the production of new knowledge. As Barad so beautifully states, “Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries – displaying shadows in ‘light’ regions and bright spots in ‘dark’ regions – the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of ‘exteriority within’” (2003, p. 803). She defines this relationality as a ‘doing’, an ‘enactment of boundaries’ (ibid.) in which knowledge is produced in being, as opposed to through analytic detached activities and individual agency.

Figure 2. Early analysis and coding

The logic of coding

A diffractive approach to analysis contrasts sharply with approaches that employ a logic of coding, approaches that require the researcher to pull themselves back from ‘the field’ and the ‘data’ in order to “produce broad categories and themes that are plucked from the data to disassemble and reassemble the narrative to adhere to these categories” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). Coding territorializes, striating and ordering chaos in order to produce
reasoned and rational interpretations of the social and moral order. In contrast to the logic of immanence that underpins a concept of ‘knowing in being’ it can be argued that systematic coding is underpinned by a transcendent logic from which the complexity of ‘data’ is sacrificed, being offered up to a particular ruling idea (MacLure, 2013b). Processes and practices of systematic coding are considered to be capable only of dealing with difference as a static relation between preformed entities, a transcendent form of ‘difference to’, represented and contained within particular categories, groups or codes. This systematic reduction of complexity confines experience, represented through ‘data’, within what MacLure (2013b) describes as a “cabinet of curiosities” (p. 165). Whilst coding may have practical relevance in some contexts, indeed its reduction of complexity may sometimes be necessary in order to comprehend the ‘chaos’ of a particular situation, it must be acknowledged that coding practices cut the researcher away from their data. They are “moved away and up from the data into the rarefied atmosphere of abstractions and generalities” (MacLure, 2013b, p. 175), a process that ultimately separates ‘coder’ from ‘coded’ and positions the researcher as outside of the data, making interpretations of blocs of experience as bounded and static entities. This reduction of complexity is problematic within research that is actively seeking to challenge complexity-reducing discourses and practices, such as the dominant discourses of readiness that are the concern of this research project. In order that the methodological approach to the production of knowledge is consistent with the aims and onto-epistemological frame in which this research is situated, it is therefore necessary to think beyond practices that can be simply planned and defined, working our way into spaces in which the processes of knowledge production are emergent with, and inseparable from, the knowledge that is produced.

A trans-corporeal engagement within ‘data’

If knowledge is not produced through coding and critical reflection however, what does constitute the production of knowing? Lenz Taguchi (2012) questions “what it might mean to do research where discourse and matter are
understood to be mutually constituted” (p. 268). Crucially, there is no blueprint for this kind of work, no methodological structure to follow. The practices that emerge from this attention to diffraction and from taking the material seriously must be done over and over again – these “practices can never be fixed, but must be invented again and again” (Lenz Taguchi, 2013, p. 715).

Aside 11

It is unsettling, coming to realize that you have strayed off the edge of the methodological map! I initially felt completely inadequate – why couldn’t I code my data properly? Perhaps I needed more training, guidance on proper coding and analysis by those with greater experience. So I retreated into methods textbooks - guides on coding qualitative data and critical discourse analysis - seeking out and exploring examples of research that had employed these approaches to analysis. What I learned from these texts was that I was coding properly, I was following the processes, employing all the technical steps. So what was missing? I sat with this question for quite a while, trying to work out why the analysis of ‘data’ which, at the point of its ‘collection/production’ had me feeling so invigorated, now left me feeling so flat.

Lather (2007) considers that, “In postfoundational thought, as opposed to the more typical sort of mastery project, one epistemologically situates oneself as curious and unknowing” (p. 9). This unknowing is what Lather (2007) talks about as ‘getting lost’, thinking “against our own continued attachments to the philosophy of presence and consciousness that under grids humanist theories of agency” (ibid.). Abandoning traditional notions of human agency, we come to know in a very different way. The knowing that comes from cognitive engagement with ‘data’ is not privileged over and above a knowing that comes from the body and its affective relations in space. Indeed, the mind and body are not considered as separate entities at all. They are mutually implicated in the production of knowledge. In relation to research
methodology, Lenz Taguchi (2012) calls for an attentiveness to the “body-mind faculties that register smell, touch, level, temperature, pressure, tension and force in the interconnections emerging in between different matter, matter and discourse” (p. 267). Meaning and new knowledge therefore come from processes of intra-action, in which the material is taken seriously in its capacity to affect meaning and the production of new thought. The relationship of the researcher to the field of research is a form of ‘transcorporeal engagement’ that involves “other bodily faculties than the mind” (ibid.). Changes in thinking and the creation of concepts emerge from an entanglement of body-mind-matter, which can only occur through the researcher’s situated, trans-corporeal engagement with/in the field.

**Aside 12**

Sitting with the ‘problem of my data’ was uncomfortable but ultimately, not unproductive. I started writing. I wrote for my supervisors, an ‘overview’ of my first phase of field work. As I wrote, connections started to form. Concepts such as ‘entanglement’ and ‘diffraction’ started to creep into my work. I started to see new thoughts and ideas emerge on the page as I wrote. Previously unacknowledged concepts began to force their way into my work. Many of these were ideas I had begun to engage with through my experience at the Summer Institute in Manchester. At the time, they had seemed interesting, but not specifically significant to my work, now however, they were pushing themselves forward, making themselves known forcefully. I started to read again. I had been quite reluctant in the past to read outside of what I considered to be my discipline, limiting myself to work that I considered as having a direct connection to early childhood education. Now however, I found myself reading about quantum physics and material ontology. I began to re-engage with work I had previously dismissed as not directly relevant to my research, such as the specific focus on Deleuzian philosophy explored by Lenz Taguchi (2009) and Olsson (2009). As concepts such as diffraction and affect pushed their way into my work, multiple connections began to fire up and the frisson of excitement and vitality began to return to my research. I
wasn’t sure where these concepts would take me, but gave myself over to them in my reading and writing.

Writing as a process of knowledge production

Augustine (2014) asks, “What does a researcher do if she does not code data?” (p. 748). If knowledge is not sought from the thematic categorization of representations, assumed to stand for social events, then how is new knowledge produced in the process of research? In relation to this, the use of reading, and in particular writing, as methods of inquiry is an approach explored in depth by Richardson (1994) and Richardson and St Pierre (2005). They consider, as a method of inquiry, writing is itself productive of new knowledge and understanding. Richardson (1994) states, “writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 516). As a process of inquiry, writing can take us into the unknown. We do not wait until we know what we want to say and then begin writing, we write in order to learn something we didn’t know before we wrote it (Richardson, 1994). Writing as inquiry can therefore be a useful strategy when dealing with the uncertainty that emergent and messy approaches to research can bring. St Pierre (2000) describes “writing myself into some new understanding, watching words appear on the computer screen that I did not quite understand but knew I must stick with and worry about” (p. 267). The writing process is therefore entangled within an assemblage in which new knowledge emerges unpredictably. The writing process could be said to have a force and vital agency of its own in which it can reveal epistemological and ontological assumptions and create new grounds for questioning and changing received scripts and hegemonic ideals (Richardson, 2000). The process of writing as inquiry needs, however, to be used with care. It can become all too easy for representational assumptions to creep in, with the effect that writing becomes a search for the ‘meaning’ of specific events in relation to higher order questions or themes – coding by another name.
Writing as inquiry was a revelation. It afforded a freedom that coding had closed down and returned to my work the vitality I had felt in the ‘field’. As I engaged with new concepts through my reading and writing, small sparks began to ignite, connections firing through the writing, between concepts and events. I felt movement returning to my work, I was working through my stuck place. These connections however were not uncovering ‘meanings’ within these events, revealing what the data ‘meant’ in terms of how ‘readiness’ was experienced and played out in the setting. The points of connection that emerged ignited new concepts, new ways of thinking about these events and produced alternatives to the hegemonic ways of thinking about ‘readiness’ that the research had set out to challenge.

‘Data collection’ and ‘analysis’ in a research assemblage

This way of writing, as a journey into the unexpected and unknown, entails a rejection of representational logic. As a way of making sense of experience, it offers an alternative to the hierarchical representation of coding. In a manner that resonates with the notion of a ‘plane of immanence’ discussed in the previous chapter, it forms a flat, proliferated assemblage (MacLure, 2013a) in which “the world is not held still and forever separate from the linguistic or category systems that represent it” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 660). Writing, therefore, becomes inseparable from processes of data collection and analysis, being part of an assemblage of forces from which new knowledge emerges. It is not something that comes after, but is entangled as part of the process of knowing. Kidd (2015) reflects on this function of writing in her own research – “I could play with the idea of allowing the writing to lead, and for both the data and the writing to take on a performative element…writing as a means of creating smooth nomadic spaces” (p. 19).

This way of writing also requires that the boundaries of the research ‘field’ are reconsidered. In traditional ethnographic approaches to research, the
researcher is immersed in the ‘field’ whilst collecting their data, but will typically extract themselves, and their data, in order to engage in processes of analysis, meaning-making and theory generation. Within this way of thinking, the field is a place, geographically and temporally bounded, into which and from which the researcher can come and go. As part of a research assemblage however, this view is shifted. Starting to think about the ‘field’ of research in terms of space, instead of place, has the potential to shift how this space is understood. Understood through the concept of place, the ‘field’ exists as somewhere that possesses a stable identity by which it is bound, for example a school or classroom. An understanding of space however, indicates somewhere that is not fixed and bounded, that is open to fluctuations, change and multiplicity (Davies, 2009a). In terms of space, therefore, the research ‘field’ becomes a continuously changing and emerging multiplicity. It includes the classroom and the playground and the kitchen table and the art exhibition and the library and…and…and. It is a continuous multiplicity made up of entangled forces, of the material, the social and the philosophical, and through which the potential for new ways of thinking and being emerge.

### Aside 14

As I read and wrote, new thoughts and ideas emerged. Concepts and theories became entangled, not only with the ‘data’ I had produced during my first ‘phase’ of fieldwork, but with experiences, memories, fiction, film, art, poetry. Deleuzian concepts of ‘smooth’ and ‘striated’ space pushed their way into my writing. Words from Deleuze and Guattari mingled on the page with: extracts from my ‘field’ notes; the ‘voices’ of ‘participants’; memories from my time as a teacher and a young child at school myself; words and images from children’s literature; a scene from the Disney film WALL-E (Disney/Pixar, 2008) in which the strictly ordered movement of the robots inside the spaceship, to which mankind has retreated, are juxtaposed with the creative and unrestricted shapes produced as WALL-E dances in the vast freedom of space – a wonderful illustration of the concepts of smooth and striated space I
was engaging with in my reading at the time. All of these came together on the page, becoming productive of ideas I would never have been able to think until that moment. My initial assumptions about ‘data’ and the ‘field’ were troubled. If a fictional robot and childhood memories could enter productively into the research assemblage, were these, in fact, data? And if ‘data’ could be produced from time (memories) as well as space (presence), was the ‘field’ in fact temporal as well as spatial? My assumptions about research were beginning to crumble, and I was left with the difficult question of what to do now?

St Pierre (in Richardson & St Pierre, 2005), describes her explorations into writing not only as a strategy of meaning making and analysis but also as a form of data collection. She tells how she “used writing as a method of data collection by gathering together, by collecting – in the writing – all sorts of data I had never read about in interpretive qualitative text books” (p. 970). She describes ‘dream data’, ‘sensual data’, ‘emotional data’ and ‘memory data’. St Pierre asserts the importance of giving value to the possibilities that are opened up by using writing as a strategy for data collection. She states,

“These data were neither in my interview transcripts nor in my field notes where data are supposed to be...But they were always already in my mind and body, and they cropped up unexpectedly and fittingly in my writing – fugitive, fleeting data that were excessive and out of category...these data might have escaped entirely if I had not written; they were collected only in the writing.” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 970)

The process of writing can therefore be a valuable tool, in the manner described by St Pierre, in ‘data collection’ and ‘analysis’ and in exploring the critical question of what counts as ‘data’.

**Becoming-data**

Holmes (2014) explores the notion of ‘what counts as data’ in relation to ethnographic research. She articulates, “There seems to be a tension between data fragments that are able to be ordered and tamed by codes as
they are accumulated, alongside data that rebelliously issues itself from the chaos of the school, crawling under my skin” (p. 783). She describes a relation with data that goes beyond coding, that affects the researcher on a bodily level, becoming “a modified part” (ibid.) of oneself. Rethinking the encounters with data that emerged through her research into young children’s behaviour, she plays with the notion that the encounters so often recorded and captured as ‘data’ within research actually reach far beyond the world of education and into far more abstract and varied fields. Speaking of a particular event from within her research she states,

“other events that connect to this playground event may include the histories and practices of observation, genetics, figured worlds, sereology, architecture, entropy, imagined bodies, astronomy, enculturation, technologies, calculus, myology, all articulations of a machinic assemblage, a series of intensities, flows and speeds.” (Holmes, 2014, p. 784)

What counts as data may therefore go far beyond accounts of events that occur to a present researcher, beyond that which can be articulated and represented textually or visually. Instead of being collected, or even produced, from the ‘field’ as a defined place, data emerge from an assemblage that is produced from a series of ‘foldings’ that disrupt binary assumptions of data/not data, inside/outside (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014). Following a Deleuzian understanding of the fold (Deleuze, 1986), in which the inside is nothing more than a fold of the outside, it can be understood that data emerges from the complexities of folded events and relations in an assemblage. This prompts the question however, of how we respond to the emergence of ‘data’. If representational schemas are rejected, must traditional methods of documenting events in research be abandoned also?

**Aside 15**

Preparing to begin my first ‘phase’ of ‘fieldwork’, despite my intention to allow an emergent research design, I had focused on the methods I was going to use to produce ‘data’. Preparing to go back into school for the second ‘phase’ was a completely different experience. My intention in the first phase had
been to engage with the meanings of events, searching for evidence of how discourses of ‘readiness’ affected the daily lives of the school community in which I was researching. I brought with me experiences and assumptions about early childhood education and research, ideas of who I was as a teacher and researcher, and who I might become. For this second period however, I felt simultaneously more and less prepared. I went in this time with a head full of questions – about what counted as data, how I should be recording the events that unfolded and emerged, how should I determine what counted and was valued as ‘data’? Despite feeling unprepared, these were questions I couldn’t begin to answer through wider reading or methodological planning – I needed to return to the school site, to shift my position within the assemblage in order to see what emerged.

Representing the empirical world: ‘theory as data’ and ‘data as theory’

Deleuze (2001) explores the relationship between theory and practice. Contesting any perceived divide between philosophy and empiricism, he conceives of theory as an enquiry, as a practice, “a practice of the seemingly fictive world that empiricism describes; a study of the conditions of legitimacy of practices in this empirical world that is in fact our own” (p. 36). The dissolution of boundaries between the theoretical and the practical, the philosophical and the empirical has significant implications for the ways in which ‘data’ and ‘theory’ are perceived in research contexts. Theory can be conceived as practical in that it does something in the world, it has an affect. Through its relations in the world, theory is in constant dynamic flux, a part of the world that, through processes of intra-action, makes itself known to other parts of the world (Barad, 2007). If theory is practical then, correspondingly, it becomes possible to consider theory as data. Clark/Keefe (2014) identifies that “theory lives in the bodies that do the theorizing and the bodies that are theorized about” (p. 794). Theory is not something that is applied to practice, it emerges as practice, through the intra-actions of bodies in context. Informed by this logic, data and theory become blurred in their articulation. The emphasis is shifted from data as “something I see, catch, or capture to
something I sense it is doing” (Clark/Keefe, 2014, p. 791). The focus is no longer on capturing an accurate picture or account of events in the ‘field’, but rather on “following the flow of data out, riding its rhythms and movement through the scene, through me, and decentering the desire to know in favor of becoming subject to a chaotic experience through which something new could emerge” (ibid.).

**Sensation: Creating new and transformative ways of being**

In developing this research methodology, it is important to articulate how, if not through discrete processes of data collection and analysis, new knowledge comes into being. As previously stated, this is a methodology written from practice (Childers, 2008). As such, the following section will explore the ways in which new knowledge emerged in the course of this study. The challenges and issues discussed in the early parts of this chapter have been fundamental to the way in which this methodological approach has emerged. In particular, the challenges of articulating what should be valued and counted as data, and how new knowledge and ideas emerged if not through systematic practices of analysis such as coding, became productive sites of methodological innovation. Within the praxis that emerged, the concepts of ‘sensation’ (Deleuze, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) and ‘affect’ (Deleuze, 1988a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) became particularly important. The following section engages with how these concepts worked in the particular context of this research project and the range of possibilities they opened up in terms of engaging in research that is responsive to complex social/material conditions. Inspired by Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007), Deleuzian philosophy is approached, in this methodological context, “as an open system, rather than a totalizing structure which must be taken as a unified system of belief” (p. 2). As concepts, ‘sensation’ and ‘affect’ are approached as “a collection of potentialities, the value of which is affirmed in their use.” (ibid.). The intention, therefore, is not to outline a ‘methodology of sensation’, or to standardize ‘affect’, but to explore the ways in which these concepts were put productively to work in the context of this study.
Aside 16

As the research progressed, I found myself becoming more attentive to the ways in which knowledge was produced. I felt with more intensity my physical reactions to events. Often, my body would register the force of an encounter or an event before my mind could make sense of the sensation. I began to record these physical reactions in my field notes (see figure 3), often adding to them at a later time, when my mind had been able to make connections to other theories, ideas and events. I began to use my field notes as a way of ‘following the flow of data’ within the research assemblage, using them as a kind of continuously changing map.

Sensation and the bodily production of knowledge

Attending to the ways in which our bodies register sensation is an important, but sometimes overlooked aspect of experience. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) recognize how, often, “the body responds with something powerful before we can articulate awe” (p. 8). Attending to sensation takes us beyond abstract form, which Deleuze (2002) considers “is addressed to the head and acts through the intermediary of the brain” (p. 31), to something that acts directly and immediately on the nervous system (ibid.). It helps us to recognize that knowledge and understanding do not emerge only out of a rationally thinking mind but out of the mind and body, the material and the discursive. Bringing the sensory capacity of bodies to the fore in the context of methodology highlights and acknowledges the vital influence of sensation on the production of knowledge from experience. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) describe this sensory aspect of the production of knowledge, stating, “When we encounter an image of a bomb victim, smell milk that has soured, or hear music that is out of key, our bodies tense before we can verbally articulate aversion” (p. 8). The ‘logic of sensation’ (Deleuze, 2002) is “neither cerebral nor rational” (Smith, 2003, p. xv) meaning that new knowledge cannot be arrived at via ‘rational’ cognitive exercises such as coding ‘data’,
especially when that data has been removed and divorced from the material context within which it emerged.

Following this understanding of sensation therefore, bodily experience becomes inseparably entangled with cognitive processes. Neither the mind nor the body is privileged within this process. It is not a mere invocation of the lived body, as might emerge from a phenomenological account (Deleuze, 2002), nor a cerebral exercise of constructing meaning from social events and representations, or of assigning bodily experience to specific categories or codes. In the context of this research project, sensation is not merely phenomenological experience, but can be understood as “the passing awareness of being at a threshold” (Massumi, 2002, online) that is open to “where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do in every situation” (Massumi, 2002, online). It is imbued with possibility and with the unknown, and fundamentally is an open space in which dynamic movement can occur through intra-active material encounters. Movement at this threshold is about ‘navigating movement’ (Massumi, 2002). This movement occurs in the unfolding of situations as they are experienced and therefore...
highlights the importance of the researcher “being immersed in a situation that’s already underway” (ibid.). One hypothesis offered by Deleuze (2002) is that sensation is that “which determines instinct at a particular moment” (p. 35). Sensation can therefore be understood to include those ‘gut feelings’, those moments of transformation, where something new emerges. These moments may not necessarily emerge as fully formed ideas or theories, but there is something in those moments that registers as important. As Kidd (2015) considers,

“Sometimes that which one hopes to explain is so fleeting and momentary that it is hard to justify as ‘data’. Yet it is in these moments that strong pivots take place – moments which, while fleeting, are so powerful that they shift a person or a group into a new trajectory of being” (p. 20).

Attention to the feelings and unexpected connections between the material and social/discursive elements of experience therefore becomes essential within the development of new ideas and concepts. As Hickey-Moody (2013) states, “how we feel about things impacts on how we can think about them” (p. 83).

**Aside 17**

By this stage, my field journal had become my primary method of documentation. I had stopped using the split page format I had begun with, choosing instead to record everything as an entanglement of ‘data/theory’. This had not been a conscious decision, but had emerged gradually. Extracts from my reading, literary and popular culture references, my emerging thoughts and ideas had started creeping into my field notes. I could no longer separate what was ‘data’ and what was emergent ‘analysis’. The words of Deleuze and Guattari became tangled with the documentation of events, with my feelings and ideas. It was no longer a case of searching for meaning in the words and experiences of participants, but of seeing what those words and experiences did as they became mangled and entangled with theory and literature, how they worked in terms of the potentialities they opened up (see
figures 4 and 5). The focus of my research had shifted from a search for meaning through the collection and coding of data, to an intra-active process of possibility, of finding out what it became possible to think as a result of my entanglement the 'field'.

*The possibilities of ‘affect’*

Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) consider that an important part of what they describe as Deleuze’s ‘ethico-aesthetic’ philosophy is the concept of affect. They consider that through our bodies, we experience a-subjective responses to our encounters, encounters that act to change the way we think in and experience the world. For Deleuze (1988a), affect refers to an existing mode of a body that is defined by its capacity for being affected and by the encounters it makes with other modes. The crucial point when thinking about affect is that it is relational. As Carnera (2012) states, “When you affect something you are being affected in return” (p. 76). Affects are experienced as a dynamic flow among and between bodies meaning that at all times, in different ways, every-'one’ and every-'thing’ is both affecting and being affected. Affects occur in relations on a plane of immanence, happening through the ‘and…and…and’ of life described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). They are always in motion through an intra-activity of forces that are always already engaged in dynamic and fluxive movement (Sellers, 2013). This dynamic and ceaseless movement results in constant change, both in the affecting and the affected bodies, as a result of their encounters. As an immanent mode however, this change does not amount to a progressive, quantitative build-up of knowledge and experience based on particular foundations or transcendent values. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), affects are the becomings of bodies, and it is impossible to know in advance what these bodies can do in their intra-active relations. As such, thinking through the concept of ‘affect’ “enables us to think about how certain assemblages, languages or social institutions impact upon bodies in ways that are not conscious” (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 8) and crucially, in the context of methodological development, are unpredictable. Hickey-Moody (2013)
explores the potential of ‘affect’ to inform an “aesthetically based research methodology” (p. 79). She draws on the notion of ‘affectus’ as a “material equation of an interaction, gain or loss recorded in a body…embodied subjectivity as the result of an encounter” (ibid.). This notion of an ‘aesthetically based research methodology’ underpins a particular corporeal relation between the researcher and the field in which “embodied capacities are increased or decreased by sounds, lights, smells and the atmospheres of places and people” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 80). The materiality of the ‘field’ becomes important as the connection between embodied sensations, feelings and the production of new thoughts, ideas and concepts is acknowledged. Processes of meaning-making are emphasized as practical acts, generated from corporeal affects, that produce a change in thought or a line of flight. From the perspective of aesthetics, Hickey-Moody (2013) describes a “kinaesthetic economy of affect” (p. 85), through which relays of sensation pass between art work and consumer. This notion has great potential in conceptualizing a methodology in which the researchers presence in, and intra-action with, the ‘field’ is of paramount importance. Barad (2007) identifies that “apparatuses of bodily production materialize in intra-action with other practices” (p. 240). The production of new concepts and theories therefore emerges through the researcher’s material intra-action and entanglement with the field through a process of ‘mattering’ as a “dynamic intra-active becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 151) within which the world is articulated and configured. This ‘intra-active becoming of the world’ can be linked with Hickey-Moody’s (2013) notion of ‘relays of sensation’ with both concepts emphasizing the importance of the materiality of encounters. In relation to research methodology, Lenz Taguchi (2012) characterizes this relationship as an attentiveness to body-mind faculties that register sensations and interconnections between different matter and discourse.
Figure 4. Field notes, entanglement of data/theory/analysis 1.

Figure 5. Field notes, entanglement of data/theory/analysis 2.
As I continued to engage in the research assemblage I began to recognize the importance of my being immersed in the ‘field’. As I mapped the flow of ‘data-theory’ I began to be aware of certain moments of greater intensity, my thinking would speed up, affecting a simultaneous feeling of increased clarity and greater confusion. In Deleuze and Guattari’s language, I began to recognize these moments as the ruptures from which new lines of flight would emerge. I began to mark these moments in my field notes with lines and arrows leading off the page, annotated with key words and phrases – a note to myself that this was a line of possibility worth following (see image 5). I also began to recognize that these moments emerged initially as a feeling, a gut feeling of butterflies in my stomach or a slight constriction in my chest as my breathing sped up, my heart started to beat faster. I came to recognize these as signals that something important was emerging, something new.

The registration of affect

Sensation, in the terms articulated in this discussion, can therefore be understood as the registration of affect (Sandvik, 2010), the process through which the affective elements of our encounters are brought into conscious being. Following a logic of affect, Grosz (2008) defines sensation as “that which is transmitted from the force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the actions of this being back onto the world itself” (p. 71). Drawing on Strauss and Bergson she identifies that sensation is “that which cannot be mapped or completed, always in the process of becoming something else” (p. 72). Understanding sensation as a fundamental element of the research process therefore negates any attempt to reduce the complexity of data through reductionist processes of systematic coding and representation. Following Grosz (2008), the notion of sensation can open up the research process to different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the researcher and the field. She states,

“Sensation is the zone of indeterminacy between subject and object, the bloc that erupts from the encounter of the one with the
other. Sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, not through representations, signs, images or fantasies, but directly, on the body’s own internal forces, on cells, organs, the nervous system.” (p. 73)

As a ‘zone of indeterminacy’, sensation creates space for thinking about the emergent possibilities for knowledge. Deleuze (2002) considers that “Sensation is the opposite of the facile and ready-made, the cliché” (p. 31). It emerges unpredictably and is specific to its particular context. Subject and object, the thought and the felt are not separated, sensation is of all of these things, inextricably. Deleuze describes sensation as having “one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, ‘instinct’, ‘temperament’)…and one face turned toward the object (the ‘fact’, the plane, the event)…Or rather it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly” (2002, p31). Rather than judging the value of subjects and objects through ‘data analysis’, or attempting to represent them through ‘data collection’, the point of research informed by such an understanding of sensation would be, therefore, to explore where those subjects and objects might go, what affects they might have in the world and what potential modes of knowing, relating or attending they might possess or might open up (Stewart, 2007). The relationship between sensation and affect in Deleuzian philosophy is clear when he says “at one and the same time I become in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 31). For a sensation to come into existence, a body must be acted upon, a forced applied to it. What is sensed is therefore the affective encounter of bodies in an assemblage and by attending to this sensation as it emerges, it is possible to expand spaces of knowledge production that are open to the unknown and unexpected in terms of what it becomes possible to think and to do.

Aside 19

The emergence of my field notes was an interesting process. I had abandoned the used of any ‘framing’ device, such as observation or interview
schedules and had immersed myself instead in creating maps of the thinking
that emerged in response to my immersion in the ‘field’. These maps were of
uncharted territory, emerging as the research went along. I often felt as if I
wasn’t in conscious control of the maps as they were developing – it was
almost as if they were being produced through me. I was an agent in their
production, but I wasn’t in complete conscious control. It was a similar feeling
to that produced when I was engaged in writing, a sense that something was
developing, but until it emerged, I wasn’t quite sure what.

Artwork, sensation and methodology

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) identify a close relationship between art and
sensation. They explore the sensations produced by a body’s relation to
works of art, and consider that, if these sensations are complicated and
interesting enough, they are capable of generating thought (Grosz, 2008).
Smith (2003) cites Cezanne’s insistence that the painter look beyond the
landscape to the forces, densities and intensities of its chaos. He identifies
the importance of the painter always being at close range, looking beyond the
wheat field and losing oneself in the landscape. It was this kind of approach
that emerged as I engaged in the methodological process of producing new
knowledge, losing myself in the research assemblage, a process through
which I, as the researcher, became able to know and articulate the knowledge
produced. Allowing myself to get lost in this way enabled me to see through
the striations of the ‘field’, dissolving identity markers such as ‘researcher’,
‘child’, ‘school’ and ‘data’. This engagement in the research assemblage
aligns with what Deleuze (2002) describes as “a logic of the senses” (p. 37),
a logic that is “neither rational nor cerebral” (ibid.). An aesthetic relationship,
such as that between artwork and consumer, therefore highlights the onto-
epistemological nature of knowledge production. This sensory logic
foregrounds the notion that knowledge emerges from the intra-action of the
entangled agencies of bodies within the research assemblage. Just as in the
relationship between ‘artist and artwork’/‘artwork and consumer’, each body
becomes as a result of its “Being-in-the-World” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 31), and
crucially, this becoming, this emergence of something new, happens at a sensory level. As Deleuze (2002) states, “As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed” (p. 31).

Aside 20

Dissolving definitions of ‘data collection’ and ‘data analysis’ had fundamentally shifted my relationship to the ‘field of research’, or as I had now come to think of it, to the research assemblage. Whilst this new methodological approach, based on processes of immersion, writing and sensation, had emerged organically from the practice of research, I was now faced with the challenge of articulating to others what had developed. This was not an easy task. The praxis of this methodological approach had emerged from a context of discomfort with more ‘traditional ways’ of doing and talking about research. It did not feel right to describe my ‘methodology’ in terms drawn from approaches I was actively contesting. I began to consider other experiences through which I might think about this emergent relationship and the production of knowledge it supported. In particular, I considered the sensory aspect of this relationship – the bodily feelings produced through encounters within the ‘field’. Thinking about those moments of intense engagement, when my heart sped up, my skin prickled, my stomach felt the force and excitement of new possibilities emerging, I was reminded of the feelings of encountering works of art. One piece in particular became prominent in my thinking. It was a piece encountered many years ago when I was still at school, about 15 or 16 years old. I was visiting the Tate Modern Gallery in London as part of a school trip. I remember walking around the gallery on my own, finding answers to the list of questions set by my teachers. On walking into one particular room however I was brought abruptly to a halt. The entire room had been given over to an installation piece, Cornelia Parker’s ‘Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view’ (see figure 6). I was mesmerized. In Parker’s piece, she had exploded a shed and its contents and then brought the pieces
back together, suspended in this room. Shards of wood hung juxtaposed with fragments of all manner of different objects. In the centre of this assemblage she had suspended a light bulb, casting light and shadows that also become part of the assemblage of the artwork. In encountering this installation I was more than just a spectator, I experienced it not only through my eyes, but became part of it physically. It surrounded and engulfed me, not just because of its scale, which was vast, but something connected with me at a visceral level. Thinking about this experience, and the power of this encounter to affect my mind/body, resonated with my research encounters. This aesthetic relationship was powerful as a way of making sense of what was happening within the research assemblage and began to give me a vocabulary to express this emergent research praxis without falling back on the languages of more ‘traditional’ approaches to research.

Hickey-Moody (2013) believes that art is a mode of producing subjectivity that propels a political agenda and creates a sensory landscape through the ways a work of art can make its observer feel and the connections it prompts that observer to make. She states, “art can readjust what a person is or is not able to feel, understand, produce and connect” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 88). As such, art can be understood as a site of affect, as a medium of becoming through which transformation and change can emerge. A work of art can be productive of ‘blocs of sensation’ which pass through an audience, bringing them into an assemblage that comes into being as a new milieu of sense (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007). Through its potential for the creation of ‘revolutionary affect’, “A work of art develops a miniature universe that can perform a pedagogic function through crafting and presenting previously non-existent elements of difference, which in turn produce the viewing body” (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 9). The affective and productive relationship between a work of art and its audience is emphasized by Deleuze and Guattari when they say;

“It should be said of all art that, in relation to the percepts of visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors or creators of affects. They not only create them in their work,
they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 175)

Within a research assemblage therefore, “everyday aesthetics” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 89) effect how knowledge and experience are produced through sensory becomings. Forces within the assemblage affect bodies and it is these forces that engender the production of difference and of new knowledge and experience. What is preserved from an encounter between bodies and artwork is a “bloc of sensations…a compound of percepts and affects” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 164). Deleuze and Guattari (1994) consider that, even if the material object only lasts for a few short seconds, it will give sensation the power to exist and traces of this sensation will be preserved.

Figure 6. Cornelia Parker, Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View 1991 © Cornelia Parker
The pre-subjective nature of the relationship between percepts, affects and sensation is important for Deleuze and Guattari. As a compound of aesthetic affects and percepts, sensation goes beyond the individual. Deleuze and Guattari consider that “percepts are no longer perceptions, they are independent of a state of those who experience them” (1994, p. 164). Similarly, they state, “Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them” (ibid.). Thinking about the production of new knowledge through sensation therefore decentres the subject as the site of knowledge production, conceptualizing this production as a process of sensory becoming. This sensory becoming is defined as “the action by which something or someone is ceaselessly becoming-other (while continuing to be what they are)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 177).

In communicating the knowledge produced from such a sensory informed research methodology, it is therefore important to attempt to affect others in a sensory way. It is on this understanding that the power of the aside, as a tool for communicating research-based experience, is founded – the affective power of the narrative of lived experience to alter how others think and feel (although not necessarily in planned and predictable ways). The impersonal aspect of percepts and affects is important as it helps us to see how sensations are not concerned with how we exist in the world, but are about the ways in which we become with the world (Marks, 2010, p. 204). Sensation comes into being as part of our relations in the world and, through those sensations, form can be given to new aspects of the world (Hickey-Moody, 2007). Percepts and affects have the capability of challenging the apparent coherence of ‘common sense experience’ (Lorraine, 2011) and ‘ready-made perceptions’ (Hickey-Moody, 2007). Sensation is therefore capable of deterritorializing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) the ‘facile’ and ‘ready-made’, slipping “between cracks in consciousness, assumption and the ‘known’ through making new bodies and creating accompanying original ways of knowing” (Hickey-Moody, 2007, p. 85).

Artwork, therefore, calls for and necessitates an audience that is to come, an audience that does not yet exist. Each percept and affect is produced as a
‘bloc of sensation’ and calls forth a new subject, who is both becoming through the sensation and is a site of becoming for sensation. Crucially however, as Roffe (2007) indicates, it does not follow that all attempts to produce art works, or for that matter, philosophical or scientific concepts, will be successful in transforming or creating new ways of thinking and experiencing. If, therefore, ‘data’ is considered to emerge as part of a sensory relationship, it can be argued that not all experiences may be productive of ‘data’. In order to be considered ‘data’, what emerges from an encounter must attain some form of unity, as Deleuze (2002) understands it, “the unity of the sensing and the sensed” (p. 31). The following section of this chapter will explore this critical point in relation to notions of validity within this form of post-qualitative research.

Methods, ethics and aesthetic validity

Lather (2007) describes her desire to rethink traditional notions of ‘validity’ outside of the limits imposed by normative framings within social and human sciences. She asks, “What might open-ended and context specific validity criteria look like?” (p. 118). For Lather (2007), validity is multiple, partial and endlessly deferred, rather than an epistemological guarantee of ‘truth’. Thinking validity through a Deleuzian concept of aesthetics, as developed in this chapter, may offer a possibility for the very context-specific and open-ended validity criteria that Lather describes. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994), “Sensations, percepts and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived” (p. 164). According to an aesthetic logic, as explored by Deleuze and Guattari in ‘What is Philosophy’, the only law of creation is that the compound that is created, the concept or artwork, must stand on its own. They state,

“Standing up alone does not mean having a top and a bottom or being upright (for even houses are drunk and askew); it is only the act by which the compound of created sensations is preserved in itself – a monument, but one that may be contained in a few marks, or a few lines, like a poem by Emily Dickinson.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 164)
The validity of what emerges as data within a research assemblage, and the new knowledge that emerges from that assemblage, is therefore concerned with the ability of that data/knowledge to achieve such aesthetic coherence. It must stand as a monument, beautiful in its internal coherence, without reference to an external referent. There is no validity in the assumption, discussed earlier, that everything is ‘data’, however if ‘data’ is defined by a condition of aesthetic coherence there emerges a condition for the definition of what counts as ‘data’ and as valid knowledge in this context.

Aside 21

As I continued my fieldwork, particular concepts and ideas seemed to come together, emerging from within the assemblage. The way in which these concepts emerged within my field notes, and were produced within my writing, was interesting. At first it was not completely clear to me why certain experiences wound their way into my field notes, becoming ‘data’, and others did not. Any criteria for their inclusion as ‘data’ was not yet clear. It was a kind of ‘gut feeling’, an awareness that this mattered, in ways of which I was not often fully conscious. This process of coming to matter did not always happen at the point of encounter. Often, an experience would not come to matter in the context of the research assemblage until later, once it had connected through and become entangled with other experiences. Despite not being recorded in my field notes at the point of their occurrence, these experiences would register with me, crawling under my skin. They would affect my very being within the research assemblage, and the way knowledge emerged. These could often be very small, subtle things: the uncomfortable shuffling of a child as they sat in front of their teacher on the carpet or the sharp but deep intake of breath as a young boy fought back his tears after grazing his knee in the outdoor play area. It was only after entering into a relationship with other experiences that moments such as these became ‘data’. They existed as data only as part of a relational assemblage, through which they became productive and creative agents.
Crucially this coherence, this ability to stand as a monument, does not imply that ‘data’ or the knowledge produced as a result of the intra-action of data are static, isolated or rigidly bounded. They exist as part of a multiplicity, a qualitative and continuous multiplicity, in which the introduction of something new, some new fragment of data, affects change and the production of something new and unpredictable. The validity of ‘data’ in the context of this study is therefore concerned with its ability to produce new knowledge. If all it is capable of producing is a reiteration of the same, it is argued that, in this context, it does not count as ‘data’. ‘Data’ must, therefore, have the potential to produce a rupture in conventional ways of thinking and being, producing onto-epistemological conditions that are truly different and new. As Roffe (2007) states, “insofar as these practices attempt to rupture aspects of contemporary ways of living, and the forms of subjectivity that go along with it, they do have revolutionary potential” (p. 45).

Aside 22

Whilst I had been writing all the way through my doctoral studies, when it came to focusing on how this writing would communicate the ideas and concepts developed within the thesis, as a defined document, I was challenged by the ways in which I could communicate to the reader the experiences that had created possibilities for new ideas and concepts of ‘readiness’. Initially, I wrote what could be considered representational accounts of events and episodes I had observed and recorded in my field notes. In reviewing my chapters however, these extracts of ‘data’, these vignettes of experience did not seem to communicate to the reader the complex jumble of experiences and ideas that had led to the formation of the new concepts being developed. It was not as simple as (re)presenting an episode or extract, cut and pasted from an observation or a transcript and linking this to emerging theory. There was no simple, linear progression from ‘data’ to a coherently formed concept of ‘readiness’. My field notes were a mess of observations, memories, feelings, senses etc., things that were not
so easily (re)presented within conventional methods of communication within social science research.

Richardson, (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005), talks about a paradigm shift in ethnographic research, heralded by the development of a variety of ‘Creative Analytical Practices’ (CAP). She states that,

“When using creative analytical practices, ethnographers learn about the topics and about themselves that which was unknowable and unimaginable using conventional analytical procedures, metaphors, and writing formats” (pp. 962–963).

One such creative analytical practice is the creation of stories and narratives. Sikes (2002) considers that “Narrative offers an exciting, important and, at this time, essentially exploratory way forward for educational research” (p. xii). For Sikes (2002), as human beings we are ‘storying beings’ and, as such, “It is natural for us to make sense of our lives, the lives of others and the contexts in which we live through telling and hearing/reading stories” (p. xii). Within a research project such as this, within which the focus is on what ‘data’ makes possible in terms of creating new knowledge about ‘readiness’ at a conceptual level, stories hold significant potential for communicating the complexities of the creative analytical process. The interest in experience as ‘data’ is not so much on what that ‘data’ means, but on what it makes possible, through intra-action with other ‘data’, in terms of ‘producing new knowledge and producing knowledge differently’. Clough (2002) explores a similar line of thought stating,

“If we think of writing stories in educational research as the creation of a building, the writer becomes architect. The question, therefore, is not technical; it is not ‘how do I construct this building?’ but rather ‘what is this building for?’ Questions of purpose and function follow – ‘What must it do?’ ‘Who is it for?’” (p. 8)

Consideration of who the (re)presentation of data extracts and episodes is for is important in deciding how ‘data’ is communicated. In a context where the work that data does is too complex to be represented in isolated vignettes or
episodes, even multiple different episodes positioned alongside each other, other narrative devices become necessary. Within this thesis, the decision was made to use the device of ethnographic fiction in order to communicate to the reader, in as clear and connected a manner as possible, the ways in which the ideas and concepts created here had come into being. Through creating stories from ‘data’, the intention was to draw together different experiences in a manner that allows the reader to see the connections, without reducing the complexity or affective potential of those entangled experiences. The challenge of representing complexity such as this to a reader or audience for research is explored by Inckle (2010), in relation to the use of ethnographic fiction as a methodological device. Inckle describes how, in communicating her research, “Much of this ‘lived experience’ was so integral to the development of my research it seemed both impossible and unrepresentative to attempt to exclude it altogether from the trajectory of my work” (p. 32). She describes the use of “empirically-based short stories [that] draw on multiple ‘real’ experiences and real people, but [which] are re-written into carefully crafted themed vignettes each of which deals with a specific issue” (p. 37). As a strategy for communicating the complexities of experience, stories of this type enable characteristics and events to be drawn as an amalgamation or composite, “which portray actual events without revealing any one particular identity or experience but which are, at the same time, directly applicable to real-life situations including policy and best practice interventions” (ibid.).

**Aside 23**

Creating stories had always been part of my process within research. I had written as a way to collect and order my thoughts, creating everyday scenes and characters through which I could explore the theoretical ideas that were developing in the context of early childhood education and classroom life. These stories were not particularly dramatic but told of ordinary events, born out of a multiplicity of experience and constructed as an amalgamation of ideas, theories and events. Until this point however these stories had
remained within my notebooks. Whilst they had been a key part of the process of meaning-making, I had never really thought of them as a valid part of the research. This fictional style writing was just something I did, I had not thought of them as ‘data’ in their own right. As I struggled to find a way of presenting ‘data’ within the thesis however, I came to realize that these stories actually communicated far more of the complexity of the data within the study than isolated and ‘factual’ accounts from observations and transcripts. They showed the connections between the multiplicity of experiences that had informed the development of theory, drawing in ‘data’ from classroom-based observations, memories, popular culture, sensory experiences and feelings etc. As fictionalized stories, they seemed to hold far greater potential for bringing the reader into the thought processes of the researcher than any traditional methods of reporting social science.

The use of short stories, as ethnographic fictions within the following chapters, are therefore intended to convey what Inckle (2010) describes as the “embodied tale”...of how we come to make and privilege certain kinds of knowledge” (p. 39). They are what Wyatt (2007) talks about as ‘creative non-fiction’. Stories which “through fictional form, of scenes or experiences that they have had or observed” (p. 15) the author draws the reader into their entangled and messy experience. As a methodological strategy it blurs the boundaries between art and science and its goal, drawing on Ellis (2004), is to “convey the meanings you attach to experience” (p. 116) and to help the reader engage with the ways in which the ideas developed emerged within the becoming of experience. They talk to the reader, as Stewart (2005) describes,

“not as a trusted guide carefully laying out the perfect links between theoretical categories and the real world but rather as a subject caught in the powerful tension between what can be known and told and what remains obscure or unspeakable but is nonetheless real” (p. 1016).

4 Within the thesis, these ethnographic fictions are differentiated from the main text and from other textual devices by presenting them against a light grey background, within a dark borderer and with the text in italics.
Validity within CAP ethnography

Inckle (2010) states that, “In terms of representation, ethnographic fictions circumvent the entire, well-worn social science debates about ‘truth’, validity and objectivity in which disembodied ‘snap shots’ of individuals’ lives are commonly appropriated for dissection in the academic lab” (p. 38).

In both writing and reading work that engages with creative analytic processes however, ideas of validity are not abandoned. It is still important that the work produced through such processes is held accountable to critique. Richardson (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) suggests a number of considerations that can support us to reflect critically on the validity of such work. Firstly, she asks whether the work makes a ‘substantive contribution’ – does it contribute to an understanding of social life? Secondly, she asks whether a work has aesthetic merit. “Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex and not boring?” (p. 964). Thirdly, she holds the author accountable to a standard of reflexivity, of the processes through which they come to know and tell. She asks, “Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?” (ibid.). Finally, she proposes that work produced from creative analytical processes be judged in terms of its impact – “Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try new research practices or move me to action?” (ibid.). Whilst, inevitably, readers of this work will engage with it through their own criteria of validity and ‘quality’, those proposed by Richardson, in conjunction with the ideas of ‘aesthetic validity’ explored earlier, may offer a useful place to start.
Some ethical considerations

Aside 24

It is relatively easy to talk about the ethics of this research study in conventional terms. Full ethical approval was sought from the university ethics committee (see appendix A) for the empirical phase of the study and subsequent use of the resulting ‘data’. At the time of writing and applying for this approval the empirical, or experience oriented element of the project had not begun and it was structured as a fairly conventional ethnographic study. I applied for approval to use methods such as observation, interviews and the collection of documentary evidence, going into detail about the steps that would be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent, from adults, children and parents as gatekeepers was sought, both through the signing of consent forms and through ongoing point in time consent. As the research was initially to be based within a reception class of an infant school, involving 4 and 5 year old children, strategies for working with young children were acknowledged and discussed. These ethical steps were followed carefully throughout the project. Names were anonymized in field notes and in the telling of stories and episodes within the thesis. Consent was obtained from parents for their children to be a part of the study, and only those children for whom I had consent became a focus of my observations and became a presence within my field notes. The traces of data created within my field notes and observations, within any documents I collected, and records of children’s work were stored securely, as per the original ethical agreement. All steps were followed to ensure the ethical acceptability of the project (and can been seen in more detail in the attached form). These steps however were largely technical in nature and, whilst important, were only one element of the ethical considerations that underpinned the work. In writing stories and in the creation of the ethnographic fictions that are presented in the following chapters, experiences that evaded official ethical approval became integrated into the work. Feelings sparked by events and memories
of working with children throughout my teaching career became entangled in the stories I wrote. These were not things for which I could obtain ‘ethical approval’, but were important elements in the production of knowledge and as such demanded ethical attention.

Beyond the technical aspects of gaining ethical consent, such as obtaining signed consent from gatekeepers for children’s participation and agreeing methods of ‘data collection’ with the university ethical approval committee, what emerged within this study was the importance of a relational ethics. As Davies (2014) recognizes, “we, as social science researchers, are part of, and encounter, already entangled matter and meanings that affect us and that we affect, in an ongoing, always changing set of movements” (p. 3). As such, she states, “Each action we engage in and each interpretation is, therefore, an ethical matter and mattering” (ibid.). This highlights the view that ethics is not a one-time consideration within a research project but is something that must be attended to critically and constantly throughout the process. As Alderson (2005) states, ethics is “a vital part of every stage of the project” (p. 30). Ethical decision-making does not happen through following prescribed guidelines, although these may have their place, but through a continual attention to others as a form of active listening. In terms of consent for participation in research, obtaining a signature is only the first step. All those involved in research, including children, have the right “to refuse permission for their lives and words to be documented” (MacNaughton & Smith, 2005, p. 114). As we go along in research with people, we must be constantly questioning our assumptions regarding their participation. Questions such as “Have children agreed willingly to participate in this research? How do I know this? What do they understand of what I am doing and why I am doing it?” (ibid.) need to be asked all the way through our interactions with those we engage with as part of our research. These questions cannot be answered once and for all but act more like provocations for reflection as a project progresses.
Talking to the children in the classroom I was visiting about the research was an important part of my early integration into the setting. My experience of working with children of this age as a teacher convinced me that they were more than capable of understanding the concept of research. I introduced myself to them as a researcher and explained that I was interested in the things that they and their teachers did at school. I talked to them about the kinds of things I might be doing, including writing notes about the things that I saw and experienced and the things that the children did and said. They seemed happy with this and with my general presence. The idea of adults scribing their actions was familiar, as it forms a key part of the assessment procedures within early childhood education. This in itself was an important point of reflection however, as it was important not to assume that just because children were used to having adults observe and document their experiences, they were necessarily happy or complicit in this process. I therefore made a point of explaining to the children that they could always tell me to stop writing, or could ask me to leave a space within the classroom should they not want what they were doing to become part of my notes.

Constant ethical attention to the actions and decisions researchers make is a vital part of the research process. It is imperative that we guard against making assumptions based on normative ideas and practices. As MacNaughton and Smith (2005) point out, the “practice of adult documentation of the child as a right in early childhood institutions is taken for granted and reinforced without ethical guides” (p. 117). As they state, very often, “documentation does not require informed consent by the child and does not provide an opportunity for children to deny or withdraw consent” (p. 118). Considering this, it is even more important that researchers are attentive to the sometimes subtle and tacit signs that children (or anybody within the research context) are uncomfortable with being observed and their actions being documented. It is for this reason that considering ethics as a relational phenomenon is so important – that ethical practices are rooted, not
in normative guides and codes, but in the real relationships with people and things that make up our experiences in research settings. Ethics therefore, takes “into account whom we are working with at a specific time in a specific place” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 174), highlighting that “[e]ach moment of practice is unique and demands that we approach it as such” (ibid.). It is vital therefore, that ethical relationships are maintained throughout the research project, even if the effect of this ethical engagement might mean missing out on particular ‘data’ or experiences (MacNaughton & Smith, 2005).

### Aside 26

In the classroom one day I had sat myself next to the role-play area, currently set up as a cottage complete with kitchen and bedroom areas. A group of girls were playing in there, acting out a version of the Cinderella story and negotiating whose turn it was to be the princess, who had to be the ugly stepsisters and stepmother and where they were going to get a handsome prince from! As I sat down, I caught the eye of one of the girls, and using this as an opportunity to engage with the group, asked if it was OK for me to watch and to write down what they were doing. The girls nodded in unison, apparently not too fazed by my presence, continuing with the important work of assigning roles and sorting costumes. I sat for a short while witnessing their activities through one of the windows in the house and making notes, when their talk suddenly became much quieter. Instead of talking in their normal, audible tones, they were now whispering to each other. Whilst I could still hear what they were saying clearly enough to make notes, I felt suddenly uncomfortable, as though I were intruding on something I wasn’t supposed to. After a short period of this whispering one of the girls approached the window through which I had been observing and, looking at me quite clearly, drew the curtain. I couldn’t help smiling to myself at this confident display of autonomy. I took it as a clear signal that my presence was no longer OK, that the group were withdrawing their permission to be observed, at which point I packed up my notebook and left the area.
There are, therefore, ethical questions to be engaged with throughout a research project. Whilst, in the space of this chapter, it is not possible to explore the multitude of reflections, considerations and decisions that were constantly engaged with throughout the research, what can be presented are some of the questions that prompted this ongoing reflection. In some ways, asking the questions is more important than detailing the answers anyway! As the research progressed, questions such as, but not limited to, the following drawn from MacNaughton and Smith (2005, p. 119) became important catalysts for ethical reflection:

• How do I, as a researcher, maintain an ethical engagement with those I am working with when caught up in moments of ‘emerging data’?
• Whose agenda is given precedence when researching with children, how, and why?
• How can I ensure that normative practices and assumptions, such as documentation and observation as taken for granted early childhood assessment practices, do not come to guide, dominate or coerce research participation?
• How can on-going permissions be sought for participation in research?

Crucially, these questions and others like them cannot be answered once and for all but need to be explored again and again in every relational encounter, every experience. The relationships we forge within research are key, as how we reach key decisions depends very much on the understanding and knowledge we have gained within those relationships (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Situating ethical decision making in a relational context also highlights our responsibility to others with whom we are connected through our research and the importance of holding ourselves accountable to them. Whilst the use of story, fiction and narrative as a method of (re)presenting data anonymizes and in some ways generalizes individual experience, removing it directly from the scrutiny of the analytic gaze, as authors of those stories and the ideas, concepts and knowledge they produce, we are no less accountable to the people and things that inspired their creation. Whilst
anonymous within the stories (re)presented in the following chapters, the
cchildren, teachers, parents and things I have engaged with throughout this
research project, throughout my career as a teacher and, it could be argued,
through my life-long experience of being in the world, are still very much
present. Translating the affective forces that emerged through our encounters
into fictional examples attempts to shift the positioning of those encounters
from objects that can be known and analysed, to considering them as lines of
flight, as provocateurs that take my thinking elsewhere (Richardson & St
Pierre, 2005). As St Pierre states about her own research, this use of story
and narrative as a creative analytical practice is not to deny the importance of
those we engage with in research, “or to say that they are not in my texts
since they are everywhere but I gesture towards them in oblique ways”
(Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 971). The methodology that emerged within
this project therefore calls for a particular ethical sensibility. As Barad (2007)
describes,

“… possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment, and these
changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act
responsibly in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what
matters and what is excluded from mattering” (p. 178).

This is not an ethics that can be planned and accounted for via criteria and as
such, “we will always be unprepared to be ethical” (Richardson & St Pierre,
2005, p. 972). Within research, we are therefore constantly accountable to
others, through our day-to-day actions in data collection, to our processes of
analysis, to the products and outputs that emerge from our work. As an
ongoing event, without firm foundations or criteria, Deleuze (1969/2015)
considers that ethics is a matter of being accountable to the others in our
world whom we affect and by whom we are affected. He states, “Either ethics
makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say:
not to be unworthy of what happens to us” (1969/2015, p. 153). In the stories
that are created and (re)presented in the following chapters, and in the ideas
and concepts that are developed from them, I strive, therefore, not to be
unworthy of the multiplicity of encounters and experiences that have produced
the lines of flight from which they have emerged. In a manner similar to St
Pierre (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) I struggle everyday through the writing of this work not to be unworthy.

**Some final critical reflections: Is this research?**

In her response to the papers in the ‘Post-qualitative research’ special edition of the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (2013), Jennifer Greene asks two key questions: “… is this way of thinking about post-qualitative research still research?” (Greene, 2013, p. 749), and, “… what is being accomplished by this shift to a post-qualitative framing of the social world, and what is being lost?” (ibid.). These are important questions and ones that have been in my consciousness as this methodology chapter has emerged and have worked to shape the writing that unfolded. Whilst the text of this chapter has addressed these questions throughout, articulating what is made possible by this particular approach to methodology in the context of this project, the chapter concludes with a few additional reflections.

Within a traditional social science report on methodology, this section may alert the reader to the limitations of the methodological approach. Whilst inevitably there will always be limitations to any approach, conventional discussions of sample size, lack of generalizability and researcher bias are circumvented by the onto-epistemological focus of the research. The researcher is situated as the research instrument, their feelings, values and histories a fundamental part of the knowledge that is produced. Researcher ‘bias’ is not avoided, but theorized as part of the methodology itself. What is produced is not generalizable to wider populations in a technical manner, but through its potential to affect others who engage with the research it opens possibilities for thinking differently. In line with the ideas of validity discussed in this chapter, it is for the reader to determine the limitations and success of the work, whether it affects them and their thinking, whether the concepts of ‘readiness’ developed cohere productively, whether it opens space for the deconstruction of taken for granted ideas and practices and offers possibilities for ‘producing new knowledge and producing knowledge differently’ (Lather, 2013).
The methodological approach that produced the new ideas and concepts of ‘readiness’ that unfold in the following chapters emerged unexpectedly. It would never have been possible to plan for what emerged, as it was a product of particular situations, encounters and the need to open spaces for the emergence of new knowledge that conventional methodological approaches could not produce. The desire from the beginning was to work with a methodology that was consistent with the theoretical ideas and concepts that underpinned the wider research project (detailed in the preceding chapter and the chapters to follow). What emerged was unexpected and in some ways unavoidable – the methodology shaped itself from experience in response to what was needed. In terms of the original contribution of this research therefore, this thesis makes a methodological contribution to the field of post-qualitative research, as well as to the field of early childhood education and discourses concerning ‘readiness’.
Part 3

De/reconstructing ‘readiness’
Contextualization

The critique of ‘readiness’ developed in this thesis aims to challenge the existing dominance of normalized goals and outcomes that have been identified throughout this discussion as structuring mainstream early childhood education in England and in particular, educational assessment. The discussion developed thus far has argued that the logic underpinning the dominance of such fixed goals and outcomes, and their use as structuring devices and policy technologies (Ball, 2003), produces a narrow and normative notion of ‘readiness’ in relation to young children’s learning and development. It is argued in this section of the thesis that ‘readiness’, constructed as the acquisition of predefined knowledges, skills, attributes or capabilities is a function of closed pedagogical systems (Biesta, 2010). It is an output, a predictable effect of a planned and controllable input. Whilst this concept of ‘readiness’ and the practices produced from it may be considered adequate within a closed system; in which causes (particular pedagogical practices and interventions), give rise to particular predictable effects (‘readiness’); the argument made here is that the system itself and the concepts of ‘readiness’ arising from it are limiting in terms of children’s educational experiences and the possibilities open for them within educational contexts. Something, it is argued, needs to change.

Aside 27

Throughout the course of my PhD research, the way in which I think about the concept of ‘readiness’ within the context of mainstream education has shifted quite dramatically. From the beginning of this process I recognized a need to critique dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ and the practices produced through them, and believed that the concept of ‘readiness’ itself was in some way broken. It did not fit with the life experiences of many children I worked with in the early years and acted to marginalize many of these children from positions of success in an educational context. Embarking on my research therefore, I aimed to critique what I saw as a broken concept, one that simply
did not fit with my experiences of young children’s learning. As I explored this issue further however, I began to see that the concept of ‘readiness’ that dominated within early childhood education was not necessarily as broken as I had thought. It was actually functional and effective within the system it served. If children were able to reach the goals and outcomes that marked them as ‘ready’ they were very likely to progress smoothly through particular transitions between educational contexts and between different pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. As dominantly constructed, ‘readiness’ was not a broken concept at all, but fitted perfectly well within the system. This was a challenging realization. If this was indeed the case, how was it that I had experienced the concept and praxis of ‘readiness’ as so problematic within my professional work?

I had begun my research seeking to argue that the concept of ‘readiness’ itself was damaging and that we should do away with it within the context of early childhood education policy and practice. However, I was confronted with an uncomfortable truth. Children who acquired the particular knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities defined by curricula and policy frameworks as indicating ‘readiness’, did tend to appear more ‘ready’ for the demands of school and for the pedagogical transitions they experienced. How could I argue that an alternative concept was necessary if the currently dominant one appeared effective?

There were two experiences in particular within my research process that helped to shift my thinking in this matter. The first was a conversation with a teacher during a fieldwork visit. It was early in the academic year and we were discussing her feelings about her new class, made up of 30 Year 1 and Year 2 children between 5 and 7 years old, and the kinds of teaching and learning opportunities she was providing. She described to me the expectations placed on her teaching in terms of kinds of the learning experiences she ‘should’ be providing for the children. Many of these were based on targets set externally concerning children’s curricular progress in relation to reading, writing, spelling/grammar and maths. She was concerned
that the vast majority of the learning experiences children had at this stage of school were adult led, in which the children had very little agency through which to explore their own interests and preferred styles of learning. One comment in particular from our ongoing dialogue stuck with me; that whilst she could provide experiences that would indeed help children reach these targets, thus getting them ‘ready’ for the next stages of their educational trajectory, it was frustrating because the possibilities were ‘so much greater’ than what was prescribed.

The second experience that influenced my thinking in this area was a particular TED talk, given by Indian educationalist Sugata Mitra (Mitra, 2013). In his talk he commented, “It’s quite fashionable to say that the education system is broken. It’s not broken, it’s wonderfully constructed, it’s just that we don’t need it any more. It’s outdated.” The sentiment of this comment resonated strongly with the challenges I was experiencing in terms of reconceptualizing ‘readiness’. Reflecting on this, what I realized was that whilst the discourses of ‘readiness’ dominating within early childhood education were problematic, I could only get so far critiquing them with the same logic of the system that had created them. Those discourses of ‘readiness’ made sense within a particular logic, on which they relied for their coherence. In order to pose an effective challenge, I would need to think from within a different logic, to rupture the system, opening it to the possibility of thinking differently about ‘readiness’.

This section of the thesis is therefore a form of thought experiment with what becomes possible when ‘readiness’ is constructed as part of an open pedagogical system, through a logic that values complexity, movement, difference and experimentation. It holds at its core that understandings of ‘readiness’ in relation to education are important and that these understandings should inform how we support children’s progression. What follows is therefore a de/reconstruction of ‘readiness’ made possible through an immanent logic. What is produced is a concept of ‘readiness’ that aims to
contribute to a praxis of teaching and learning that works with open, creative and dynamic educational spaces.

The following discussion brings together concepts, theories and experiences as a form of open and emergent rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Sellers, 2013), a weaving together of theory and experience in order to create space for new and unexpected concepts to emerge. There are many ways into this discussion and, it is hoped, multiple points of departure from which new ideas, concepts, theories and practices may emerge through the intra-active relationship of the reader and the text. The following discussion is framed around a particular problem and explores possibilities for thinking differently through a range of theoretical concepts, contemporary literature and lived experience. In an entanglement of theoretical ideas and ethnographic fiction, spaces are created in which this problem of ‘readiness’ as a normative concept can be critiqued, deconstructed and reconstructed. As discussed in the methodology section of this thesis, the construction of ethnographic fiction moves away from a search for the ‘meanings’ of specific events, or the production of definitive knowledge about ‘readiness’ in the particular contexts from which they are drawn. Rather, these fictions, constructed from a complex multiplicity of lived experience, are approached as productive events and are discussed in terms of the possibilities they hold for thinking differently, theorizing and experimenting with concepts of ‘readiness’ (Knight & Rayner, 2015).

Note to the reader: In order to differentiate each ethnographic fiction from the theoretical and analytical discussion that emerges within the following chapters, each of these fictions is differentiated by presenting it against a light grey background, within a dark boarder and with the text in italics (for an example see pp169-172). As a specific textual device, these fictions are also differentiated from the asides used throughout the thesis, which are presented against a darker grey background with a narrow, hairline boarder.
Chapter 6: ‘Readiness’ as an active-affective-ethical-relation

The problem: Dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ rely on the existence of predefined goals, outcomes and targets, against which an individual’s ‘readiness’ can be judged. What are the possibilities for understanding ‘readiness’ beyond this closed framework?

In exploring this question, this discussion continues to engage with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari as a provocation for thinking differently about ‘readiness’. One of the questions that preoccupies Deleuze and Guattari is that of the body; how a body is defined. Their immanent philosophy fundamentally opposes any classification of a body by externally defined, normative markers of identity. They consider that, “A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils” (1987, p. 260). Rather, as Baugh (2010) identifies, they define a body “by the relations of its parts (relations of relative motion and rest, speed and slowness), and by its actions and reactions with respect to both its environment or milieu and to its internal milieu” (Baugh, 2010, p. 35). Informed by this conception of the body, it then becomes impossible, even illogical, to define ‘readiness’ according to predefined goals, outcomes and attributes achievable by a defined and limited ‘body’ in terms of the individual child. The question this produces is then, ‘If we can no longer define ‘readiness’ according to form, function and the acquisition of particular skills, knowledge and attributes, how are we to define it, if indeed we can define it at all?’ ‘How are we to think about ‘readiness’ without a pre-given idea of what we are to be made ‘ready’ for?’

Exploring this shift in thinking involves critical consideration of the ways in which we define progress in relation to learning and development. This shift is from a planned and predictable concept of progress, as movement between fixed points, to an emergent focus on potential and possibility: progress as a form of ‘becoming’. It is a concept rooted in the idea that “you do not know beforehand what a body or mind can do in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 627). We cannot,
therefore, know a child, or a learner through predetermined ideas of who they ought to be or what they ought to know; indeed, we cannot know who they are in advance of the moment through which they become, and that becoming is itself a fluid and transitory process – the becoming child does not stand still (Sellers, 2013). In exploring this problem however, it is argued in this discussion, that we can come to know a body, or a child, and come to understand ‘readiness’ in the context of their lived experience, through the affects of which they are capable. The discussion in this chapter will therefore explore ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’, engaging with each of these concepts and their connections as a way of thinking differently about ‘readiness’.

The ‘logic’ of affect

In any discussion of affect, it is important to recognize that there is no single or generalizable theory through which affect can be defined and understood (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). Theories of affect are diverse and highly particular, being singularly delineated (ibid) as opposed to universally defined. Affect should be viewed, state Seigworth and Gregg (2010), as “operating with a certain modest methodological validity rather than impressing itself upon a wriggling world like a snap-on grid” (p. 4). Reading ‘readiness’ through a Deleuzian understanding of affect does not therefore approach affect as an interpretive framework, but engages it with other concepts and events as a site of production. With affect being such a broadly defined concept however, it is important to identify the particular understandings that are engaged with throughout this discussion.

Firstly, affect in this context is to do with bodies. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) state, it “is found in those intensities that pass body to body” (p. 1). Crucially, Deleuze’s (1988a) notion of a ‘body’ refers to any assemblage of parts that stand in relation to each other. He makes no distinction between natural and artificial bodies, drawing on Spinoza to define a body as an infinite combination of particles. The body of the child is therefore in constant interaction with other, human and non-human bodies, all of which have a key
role in their becoming. It is the interaction between these bodies that is key in relation to development and progression. Each body affects and is affected by other bodies and “it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its own individuality” (Deleuze, 1988a, p. 123).

The second point to emphasize, and it is related to the first, is that this understanding of affect is rooted in movement. It is an understanding of affect as a force of becoming that increases the capacities of bodies to act in the world. In this sense, states Springgay (2011), “affect is transitive; it is about movement and force” (p. 69) and gives rise to “a pedagogy of encounters that engender movement, duration, force and intensity, rather than a semiotic regime of signification and representation” (Springgay, 2011, p. 78). It is an alternative to defining bodies according to a fixed state or notion of identity, within which bodies are defined only by “a capacity for being affected, by the affections of which they are ‘capable’, by the excitations to which they react within the limits of their capability” (Deleuze, 1988a, p. 26).

The third point to note is that the concept of affect engaged with in this context is fundamentally concerned with a body’s potential, its virtual capacity to affect and be affected. It is oriented towards an open future, as opposed to one defined by specific goals and outcomes. It is a future that is, as outlined by Seigworth and Gregg (2010), “not quite in view from the present, a future that scrambles any map in advance of its arrival” (p. 21). This logic of affect therefore offers an alternative point from within which to explore ‘readiness’ outside of a framework of closed pedagogical systems and predefined goals and outcomes. It is a ‘hopeful’ logic, in that it considers the present to be an open door, a ‘threshold’ of potential (Massumi, 2003). It allows us to look to an open future hopefully and offers a challenge to utopian ideals that would construct a far off goal or identity as the driving force of our experiences. As Massumi (2003) states,

“You may not reach the end of the trail but at least there is a next step. The question of which next step to take is a lot less intimidating than how to reach a far off goal in a distant future
Thinking through affect therefore roots us in a present that is open to an unknown future, as opposed to focusing our actions on the achievement of relatively far off goals and outcomes.

Exploring affect in early childhood education

Deleuzian inspired readings of affect feature in the work of a number of scholars, researchers and practitioners in the field of early childhood education. Olsson (2009; 2013) in particular has employed the concept of affect, among other Deleuzo-Guattarian inspired concepts, as a way of thinking differently about young children’s learning and development in educational contexts. Drawing on her research in Swedish preschools, she considers that affect offers an alternative to traditional notions of subjectivity and learning, stating that,

“The somewhat untameable subjects, learning processes and experimentations that take place in the preschools could be accounted for through this bodily logic, where everything is a question of the encounter between different bodies and forces and where it becomes important to look at each situation’s particular potentiality” (Olsson, 2013, p. 55).

Affect, for Olsson (2009), offers an alternative to the ‘conscious logic’ that underpins so much educational discourse. Acknowledging that learning is to do with the capacity of bodies to act, she states, “It is all about each event’s particular potentiality and one can never formulate a pedagogical model in such an affective learning” (2009, p. 186). She is concerned, in particular, with the spaces that are provided for children in their learning and development, using a logic of affect to argue for the need “to create more space for desiring bodies to expand their capacities” (ibid.).

In another project, Olsson (2013) describes how she has worked with the concept of affect as an alternative way of valuing what young children do in their literacy activities, through their explorations of language, reading and
writing. She describes how the research team in this project were able to use a logic of affect to think differently about children’s processes of learning to read and write, reading these processes through an increase in the body’s capacity to act through the joining of children’s bodies with crayons, ink and paper. What emerged within the research, she describes as ‘crayon bodies’, becomings of children and materials through which they were able to engage in writing in an affective way. This enabled educators to question and transform assumptions about pedagogical practice in relation to early literacy development and learning and to create contexts in which young children could engage deeply with the materiality of language, reading and writing.

Sellers (2013) is another early childhood researcher who engages with the concept of affect. She is concerned with the ways in which young children ‘become’ with-and-through curriculum and draws on affect in her exploration of this becoming. Through affect she explores the flows of young children’s activities and encounters within early childhood education settings in New Zealand. She talks of affects as becomings, as “affective happenings [that] circulate as events, energy and mo(ve)ments and forces in which human-material bodies collide and are altered” (Sellers, 2013, p. 105).

Other researchers who have engaged with affect specifically in the context of early childhood education include MacLure et al. (2010). Their specific interest in affect is, in a manner similar to Olsson (2013), as a means of looking, thinking and acting differently, in this case in relation to the use of video as a methodological tool within early childhood educational research. The researchers describe the collaborative production of an “experimental video film that attempts to intervene in the repetitious production of the banal” (MacLure et al., 2010, p. 543), through which they attempt to “mobilise the barely formed, dimly glimpsed sensations that comprise ‘affect’ in its Deleuzian sense” (ibid). Their intention in this work is to deliberately engage in a “provocative visual practice” (p. 547) as a means of stirring up affectual inertia in those who engage with the research. Engagement with Deleuzian theories of affect within the work of MacLure et al. (2010) is also used as a means of thinking differently about emotion in the context of young children’s
experiences. They pose a challenge to what they call an “orthopaedics of emotion: that is, the routine and pervasive formation of ‘proper’ emotions and feelings in young children” (p. 549, emphasis original). They explore affect as distinct from feelings and emotions, as an unformed force that resonates in and registers on bodies. Through a logic of affect they draw into focus questions about what they perceive as the “narrow range of emotions and feelings that are named in the affectual economy of the classroom, and the significance of those affects that inevitably escape capture and recognition as ‘lawful’ emotions” (p. 549).

The logic of affect employed by researchers such as Olsson (2009; 2013), Sellers (2013) and MacLure et al., (2010) is quite different to what Olsson (2009) describes as “the conscious logic of taming through predicting, controlling, supervising or evaluating according to predetermined standards” (p. 76). It is used as a way of thinking differently, outside of orthodox and traditional logics, as a means of working positively with unexpected and unbounded contexts of research and practice. Following this drive to think differently, the discussion engaged with in this chapter attempts to mobilize concepts of ‘affect’ as a way of creating space to think differently about ideas and practices of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education.

**Logan**

A bright and enthusiastic little boy, but struggles to keep his attention focused on anything for longer than a few minutes.

These were the words that accompanied Logan into school. He had been described as a whirlwind in the nursery, flitting from one activity to another, from one set of resources to the next, never settling at anything. For Logan, every session at school was an active one. He would move between activities at pace and with intensity, never sticking at any one thing for too long. It was exhausting keeping up with him. Cars, trains, puzzles, dolls etc. the toys that fascinated many of his peers were picked up and discarded moments later,
apparently holding no special interest for him. Logan’s apparent lack of focus became a concern as he progressed in school. We discussed him in staff meetings, suggesting strategies for helping him engage for longer periods, perhaps spending more time in activities supported and guided by adults to help him maintain his attention on one thing for longer? This strategy however seemed to go against the values that we claimed to hold as early years educators. If we believed that every child was a competent learner, capable of engaging with the world with autonomy and agency, then it did not seem right that we attempt to tame Logan’s activity through our more experienced interventions. After much discussion, we determined to hold off our interference in his play and instead spend time really looking at what he was doing. We asked ourselves, ‘What is happening?’ ‘What are we missing?’ Trying to look beyond our assumptions of what Logan ‘should’ be doing to what he was actually doing.

Our observations were powerful. The close noticing and listening we took time to engage in told a different story to the distracted child, apparently unable to focus on an activity.

During one afternoon session, Logan approached a table of cardboard boxes that had been arranged in an invitingly haphazard way for the children to engage with. The table included boxes and containers of different shapes and sizes, piled on top of one another, each filled with potential for something new. As he approached the table he stared, observing the array of materials at his disposal. Taking his time to take in the visual spectacle he reached out and carefully extracted a clear plastic tub. Holding it in one hand, he moved it around carefully, as if testing its weight before bringing it up to his eyes and staring through the clear plastic screen in front of him. A moment later he discarded it, dropping it back on to the table. Next, Logan reached into the middle of the pile of boxes and containers, extracting a tube. He tapped the metal base gently with his finger, before wrapping it with much greater force on the table. I asked him, ‘What have you found?’ He looked at me puzzled,
before replying, “It’s a rocket!” Tapping it forcefully on the table once more, he then shot his arm up violently into the air, blasting the rocket into orbit. Bringing it down to the table with a crash, he tipped it onto its side, from where it rolled onto the floor.

Leaving the rocket where it landed, Logan spent the next 10 minutes moving around the classroom, visiting different activities, watching other children, picking up various objects and abandoning them again. Behaviour typical to what we observed on a daily basis and that had given rise to our concerns about his ability to settle and focus within his learning.

Later on in the session, Logan returned to the table of boxes. Picking up the tube he had played with earlier, he said to me, “Actually, I don’t think it is a rocket. It’s a secret box.” He stood it upright on the table and taking a small glass pebble from his pocket he carefully dropped it inside, listening to the noise it made as it hit the metal bottom. He shook the tube, rattling the pebble around inside. He then proceeded to take from his pockets a series of objects he had collected from around the room, from each of the spaces he had visited as he moved about. He carefully placed each object in the tube, then, apparently happy that they were all safely stored, placed the tube carefully back onto the table. “You look after it, watch it”, he instructed me. He went to his drawer and took out a few small objects, which he brought to the table and dropped into the tube, carefully, one at a time. A feather; a folded piece of paper; a small toy man; each stored safely in his secret box. He placed a palm over the open top of the tube, carefully inverting it, holding it closer to his ear, listening to the precious contents as they slid along inside. Placing it back on the table he looked concerned. He replaced his hand over the top of the tube a few times before saying, “I need a top.” “Perhaps there is a lid?” I replied, and he started to search amongst the boxes on the table, eventually finding one. He secured it to the top of the tube, covering it over with a strip of masking tape. He upturned the tube again gently shaking it. Unsatisfied with the safety of the objects inside, he added more tape to the top, securely fastening it in place. Happy with his work, he placed the tube in his bag,
hanging on his peg in the cloakroom, before turning to me and, quietly pushing his finger to his lips, saying, “Shhh!”

‘What is happening?’ ‘What are we missing?’ We asked ourselves these questions in light of our close watching and listening. Where before we had just seen unplanned and unstructured movement, we now saw Logan making connections, the objects he interacted with and collected as he moved around the room creating intentions and possibilities. We saw a plan in his movement as he collected objects to be included in the ‘secret box’. By really paying attention to what Logan was doing as he engaged with the material environment we began to see a certain emergent order, the movement we had previously considered frenetic and haphazard becoming instrumental in opening possibilities for further exploration and engagement. We started to see beyond the ‘lack of attention and focus’ to the ‘bright and enthusiastic’ learner within.

This kind of seemingly small and ordinary encounter, between a child and their material environment, is a significant site of production in this conceptualization of ‘readiness’ and its relation with affect. It serves as an example, a moment of realization within the research that affective encounters do not necessarily have to appear as particularly forceful or obvious events. Often, they emerge as what Stewart (2007) describes as ‘ordinary affects’, “the varied, surging capacities to affect and be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences” (p. 1). They are the stuff of everyday lives, interactions and encounters. They may not be particularly dramatic, might often be missed in the bustle of busy classroom activity, but they’re there constantly, productive of and producing ‘readiness’.

“… they happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attachment, attention, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like some-thing” (Stewart, 2007, p. 1).
Faced with an open-ended situation therefore, even one as seemingly simple as a collection of cardboard of boxes in its encounter with a child, affect can find space to transpire. Echoing the notion of ‘ordinary affects’ proposed by Stewart (2007), Seigworth and Gregg (2010) identify that, in many ways, affect is synonymous with the *force* of an encounter. Quite often, they state, affect “transpires within and across the subtlest of shuffling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed” (2010, p. 2). Within the act of picking up a cardboard tube, or a plastic tub, the force of affect finds room to emerge. It creates *possibility*. An open potential for what may become, what might be actualized from that moment. The material body of a tube holds a multiplicity of inherent possibilities and what is actualized is a product of the encounter between bodies (child-tube). Affect is born of a state of in-between-ness (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) and can be understood “as a gradient of bodily capacity” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). It is experienced as flows of energy amongst and between bodies (Sellers, 2013) that produce a change in all bodies through their encounter. The body of the child in its encounter with the material bodies of boxes and tubes produces an expression of affect that emerges through their encounter and produces a change in both.

*Potential and the virtual side of affect*

Affects have both actual and virtual sides (Springgay, 2011), in that they force us to view bodies from the perspective of their potential or virtuality (Massumi, 1992). Massumi (1992), drawing on complexity and chaos theories, considers that in the passage of bodies from one ‘threshold state’ to another, “it includes vibrations from all other states at different degrees of intensity” (p. 70), none of which virtual states are excluded from being actualized next (ibid). When we perceive affect, what we actually perceive is its expression, the actions and emotions of those caught up in affective encounters. This is the actual side of affect. Equally important however, is the virtual side of affect, which Dahlberg and Moss (2009) describe as a “swarm of potential that follows us through life” (Kindle edition, loc. 386). This virtual aspect to affect is important
as it allows us to begin to engage with the concept of ‘readiness’ as part of an open pedagogical system. It opens the way for a coherent concept of ‘readiness’ “that surpasses the knowledge we have of a body as well as the consciousness we have of it” (Olsson, 2009, p. 76), thus offering an alternative to the dominance of fixed goals and outcomes so often seen to structure readiness in early childhood education.

Precisely because affect carries an element of the virtual, it gives rise to experimentation and unpredictability in pedagogical practices and experiences (Olsson, 2009). It shifts us towards a space in which we see “life and the world from the perspective of emergence, potentiality, and connections – as a complex set of assemblages that continuously bifurcates, combines and transforms” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2009, Kindle edition, loc. 419). ‘Readiness’ emerges within these encounters, as a product of the interactions of bodies in space. We cannot necessarily say in advance what these interactions will enable children to do in the world, however in understanding the emergence of ‘readiness’ we can be mindful of those interactions and the preceding experiences that made them possible.

It is for this reason that ‘readiness’ within an open pedagogical system must be thought of as an ethical endeavour. It is not enough to say that ‘readiness’ must equip children to be able to progress within this kind of open system, without regard for predefined trajectories of learning and development. The following chapter will explore this in more detail, however it is important to note that we cannot just assume that actions and their resulting connections and progressions will be positive, that children will naturally progress towards something good. It is because of this virtual side to affect, this element of the unknown, that we must be particularly attentive to conceptualizing ‘readiness’ as an ethical concept. It is not simply about being ‘ready’ to progress, regardless of the form that progression takes, it is about focusing on what a body can do and the positive affects of which that body is capable in relation to the milieu of which it is a part. In this way therefore, ‘readiness’ is entirely a relational and ethical concept.
A relational concept of ‘readiness’

Seigworth and Gregg (2010) consider that, within an affective logic, bodies are not defined by a surface boundary but by the potential of those bodies to co-participate in passages of affect. This idea of co-participation is important as whilst readiness, within an open system, cannot be defined in relation to a fixed state, goal or outcome, it may be understood in relation to a body’s ability to engage in these passages of affect. The ‘readiness’ of a body; in this context a child; is defined in relation to their ability to enter into productive encounters, encounters through which their belonging to and being in a world can be marked (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). As already discussed, affect is concerned with the potential and capacity of the body to affect and to be affected. As such, “the capacity of a body is never defined by a body alone” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3), but is caught up within the contextual milieu of that body. In this sense, ‘readiness’, conceptualized as affective, is entirely relational.

This affective concept of relationality is in stark contrast to theories that relate ‘readiness’ to an innate developmental progression, in which the ‘normally’ developing body will pass through certain predictable stages. This developmental concept of ‘readiness’, previously identified in this thesis as following an idealist/nativist frame (Brown, 2010; Meisels, 1999), assumes that a child’s maturational development will determine what they are ‘ready’ to learn at a particular time, and when, for a ‘normally’ developing child, that time should be. Within this frame it is perfectly possible to identify in advance the form of the child who is ‘ready for school’, or ‘ready for learning’, and consequently, to identify the child whose development may indicate a delay in them reaching this desired goal at the ‘appropriate’ time, based on maturational and developmental assumptions.
Lucas

Lucas had always been one of the youngest in his year group. Had he been born a day, or even a few hours later, he would have been in the year below and not starting school until a whole twelve months later. But as it was, there he stood in his brand new uniform, school jumper a size too big to allow for room to grow and freshly polished shoes on his first day at school. As well as being one of the youngest in his class, Lucas was also by far the smallest, his blonde curls giving him an almost cherub like appearance. Before starting school he had attended the nursery class part-time over a number of years, along with a number of other children in his class. He was described by his nursery teacher as being a very quiet and shy child, particularly in group contexts where he would often choose not to respond when invited to speak, for example to answer the register or respond to a question. She was extremely concerned about Lucas starting school, about him not coping with the change, with the transition to a different environment and the building of new relationships with both adults and other children. Her concern in particular was that Lucas was just ‘too small’ and ‘too young’ to be ready for school.

Upon starting school however, Lucas settled in quickly. He was quiet, certainly, and often chose not to speak in group or even one to one contexts, however he found other ways to participate in classroom activity. Classroom expectations, which were based very much on verbal communication, adjusted around Lucas. Other options were given for answering the register, such as a smile, wave or other gesture, and he was invited to share his ideas and interests with the class in non-verbal ways, sharing things he had made or done in visual ways, in small groups or one-to-one.

Lucas remained a shy and quiet child throughout his time at school. That was him, a valued and respected feature of his personality, not a character flaw or age-related characteristic.
Through a logic of affect, physical size or perceived level of maturity would not be a defining characteristic of ‘readiness’. Defining ‘readiness’ according to characteristics such as these, as highlighted in the preceding narrative, would be to fail to recognize the affective-relationality of children’s engagement with their worlds and the role that this has to play within their learning and development. Thinking through affect however, this relationality is a key factor in the way in which we can come to think about ‘readiness’. It is what Springgay (2011) describes as “the power to affect and be affected” (p. 66).

As an affective ‘product’, ‘readiness’ can be considered the result of the interaction of bodies (Coleman, 2010). These bodies however are not defined by standards external to their encounters. As Olsson (2009) describes, we should not define bodies by perceived biological limits, as these limits can restrict what we think those bodies are capable of doing. She gives an example;

“It is true that not all children learn to walk. For some reason they might not. But the question of bodily potential becomes even more urgent in relation to these children. What, for example, can a body without legs do? What is potentiality for each singular and unique body?...From the point of view of bodies joining other bodies the important thing becomes to seek to open for potentiality in every situation, in relation to every body…” (Olsson, 2009, p. 4)

An idealist/nativist concept of ‘readiness’ therefore puts limits around the ways in which bodies can be considered ‘ready’ by separating the individual body and its ‘readiness’ from the context in which they exist. It is possible, however, to conceive of these bodies differently. Framed by Deleuze (1988a), the question of ‘what can a body do?’ or in this context, ‘what is a body ‘ready’ to do?’ is therefore more about the unbounded potential of that body in a given encounter rather than about the extent to which it conforms to pre-given notions of what it is or should be.

In recognizing the relationality of affect however, it is important to explore the particularity of affective relational encounters and how this differs from other relational concepts of ‘readiness’. Brown (2010) identifies a number of
conceptions of ‘readiness’ in early childhood education in which relationality is a key aspect. Drawing on Meisels (1999), Brown identifies three particular concepts of ‘readiness’ in which the relationship between the child and their context is a significant factor. He distinguishes these as; an empiricist/environmental model; a social constructionist framework; and an interactionist approach. Within an empiricist/environmental model, Brown (2010) states, “The readiness equation emphasizes that the child needs to engage in a particular set of experiences to be ready for school” (p. 136). The experiences and skills a child needs in order to become ‘ready’ can be defined in advance and thereby easily measured in terms of their successful acquisition. In terms of a relational model of ‘readiness’, the ‘ready’ child is therefore defined and judged in relation to a particular form, constructed according to a static notion of the context the child is to enter.

A social constructionist approach, Brown identifies, adopts a more fluid concept of ‘readiness’ that can differ depending on the context in which the child resides. According to this social constructionist view, “the readiness equation is dependent on the social context in which the child operates, and as such, a child can be ready in one community and not in another” (Brown, 2010, p. 136). ‘Readiness’ could be considered, therefore, to be a product of the child’s interaction with their particular context. Whether they are considered ‘ready’, or not emerges from the correspondence between their perceived level of learning and development, and the cultural norms and expectations of the context in which they are operating. Whilst Brown (2010) describes this as a more ‘fluid’ concept in comparison with more empiricist or environmental views, however that fluidity is still between the norms of different cultures, meaning that within each particular context what it means to be ‘ready’ remains static.

Perhaps the closest to an ‘affective’ model of ‘readiness’ is Brown’s understanding of an ‘interactionist’ perspective, which he determines to be a ‘bi-directional concept’, co-constructed through the relationship between the child and the school, or context for which they are considered ‘ready’. As identified in the early chapters of this thesis, this discourse is echoed in
contemporary critical discourse concerning ‘readiness’, for example the 2013 PACEY report which states that ‘readiness’ is about “More than just ‘ready children”’ (p.13). This report states that ‘readiness’, and in particular ‘school readiness’, should be thought of in far broader terms than just the innate development of the child, taking account of the readiness of schools and of parents to support children’s successful transitions.

Whilst each of these concepts of ‘readiness’ has a relational aspect, they differ significantly from the ‘affective’ understanding developed in this discussion. Whilst ‘readiness’ as an empiricist/environmental, social constructionist, or interactionist concept, is recognized as involving a child’s relation to a particular context, the child and that context are considered, in all of these definitions, to be separate and distinct, with child and context existing as defined forms in isolation from each other. Even within an ‘interactionist’ model, it can be argued that the ‘readiness’ of the child and the ‘readiness’ of the context into which they will progress, are considered to exist prior to each other. As described by Moss (2013), these relationships are spoken of in terms of one part being prepared and delivered ‘ready’ for another part. It is still possible, therefore, within all of these ideas of ‘readiness’ to define the ‘ready-child’, or indeed the ‘ready-school, according to a particular form or function. Even within the bidirectional relationship of the interactionist perspective, it could be argued that the potential complexity of ‘readiness’ is lost. This bidirectional relationship can still operate within a closed system, in which progression can be understood as an additive model through which children and educational contexts can be made ‘ready’ for each other in predictable and controllable ways.

An ‘affective’ concept of ‘readiness’, however, breaks with all of these understandings. It starts from the premise that we can never know in advance what a body (be it human, material, spatial etc.) can do in a given combination, or a given relationship. Within an affective understanding, ‘readiness’ is about unknown and unbounded potential and the ability to maximize bodily capacities in a given moment. Affects are about what a body can do (Springgay, 2011), not what a body is. They are “the productive
organization of encounters increasing our capacity to act and be in the world” (ibid., p. 68). They are about movement, not stasis, and in this sense are about the ongoing passage from one transitory state to another (ibid). Within an affective model therefore, ‘readiness’ is not measured by attainment of predefined knowledges and capabilities, but emerges through the passage between states and the body’s capacity to become productively through that passage. Crucially, the states through which affect passes are not mapped in advance, it is not a case of following a planned course of progression. As Springgay (2011) identifies, “affects do not organize bodies structurally but rather play on the surface of bodies and expose their movements” (p. 77). The map that charts progression can only be drawn as we go along, in contrast to the kind of developmental trajectory found within early childhood educational frameworks, through our close attention to “encounters that engender movement, duration, force and intensity, rather than a semiotic regime of signification and representation” (Springgay, 2011, p. 78).

**Sam**

*Sam finished his early years at school not having attained any of the learning goals by which progress, for all children, was measured. At the age of 5 he was a non-verbal communicator and rarely made eye contact, although liked physical contact, grabbing your arm or face to get and hold your attention. Sam was fascinated by things that spin, and also by soft textures. He loved to find and handle unfamiliar objects, exploring the possibilities they held for interaction and engagement. He would explore his environment using touch, smell and vision in particular, holding objects close up in front of his eyes or stroking them against his cheek.*

*Sam moved into his Year 1 class with the rest of his peer group and with one-to-one support to help him engage with the curriculum, which for Sam continued to work towards the goals contained within the early years framework for learning and development. He had his own workstation within the classroom, set up to be as free as possible from distractions and to*
encourage him to engage with clearly defined and time limited activities that promoted his learning in literacy and numeracy in particular. Sam found his work station based activities challenging, struggling to stay sat in the chair and to remain engaged with the activities that were planned for him. He would very often get up and walk away from the activities, showing little interest, and when he would stay for the duration of the activity, there was little excitement or real involvement evident.

In contrast to this were the times that Sam would choose his own activities. He was fascinated with objects in the classroom and would spend long periods searching out objects that he could get to spin in some way. His fascination in rotation and objects that spin was clear from his body language and facial expressions, which would light up as he explored. Sam would build up different collections of objects, arranging them in particular clusters and groupings – sometimes objects that had wheels, sometimes objects of a similar texture, and on occasions groupings which we could not fathom but to Sam clearly had a connection. Whilst he did not verbalize his activities Sam still drew others into what he was doing showing in other ways, using touch and his excited bodily movements, his delight at the collections he was making.

Sam’s progression was different from the majority of his peers. In the right contexts however, his engagement and the joy he felt from interacting with his environment was no less powerful. Given the right material and social context, he was ready and able to act in the classroom environment. Sam’s actions, so different from the expectations of children his age in a school context, were a break away from the norms that acted to structure the classroom. His very presence brought something new and different – a readiness to engage joyfully with his environment and his peers.

Sam also had an effect on the classroom environment itself. He showed the value of engaging with things that fascinate and inspire you and the difference this can make to the ways in which we approach learning. Sam’s learning in
This context was not planned in advance, he was not moving towards defined goals, rather, through his interactions in the world, his progression and learning emerged as he went along.

‘Readiness’: Determined state or affective-movement?

Seigworth and Gregg (2010) recognize affect as “integral to a body’s perpetual becoming” (p. 3). Each body, they state, is always becoming other than it currently is, being “pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter” (ibid.). Bodies, in their relations, are therefore in a constant state of movement, as their becoming is a dynamic process. Deleuze’s (1988a) notion of the body is rooted in this fundamental characteristic of movement. He states, “a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motions and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body” (1988a, p. 123). In conceptualizing ‘readiness’ from within an immanent and complex logic, we must therefore pay attention to this open and dynamic movement and its impact on pedagogical practice. Crucially, whilst concepts of learning and development always, necessarily, denote a change, and therefore a force of movement, dominant notions of ‘readiness’ are conceived as a ‘state’, a defined beginning or end point marking the commencement or completion of a passage of movement or change. Whether that state is defined by maturational or cultural factors, it is a moment of stasis, caused by the quantitative accumulation of experiences and events preceding it and underpinning the next phase of learning and development. As a state, ‘readiness’ in these traditional forms has been captured within early childhood policy frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013), being controlled, rationalized and contained (Springgay, 2011) within the boundaries that pre-define it. As part of an affective process of movement however, is it possible to shift ‘readiness’ from a position of stasis, to a dynamic progression. Rather than ‘readiness’ as a beginning or end point, a tabula rasa from which everything commences, it can be seen as a passage
into which one enters in the middle and lays down rhythms (Deleuze, 1998a). ‘Readiness’ is not, therefore, a specific state to be achieved, but emerges through encounters and the ongoing passage of bodies between previously unknown and undetermined becomings.

As Springgay (2011), citing Deleuze, identifies, “Affects are not specific states but the ongoing ‘passage from one state to another’ (Deleuze, 1988[a], p49) whereby new passages and combinations are developed, that are as yet unknown” (p. 69). The fundamental difference between ‘readiness’ as a determined state and the concept developed here, inspired by affective-movement, is that ‘readiness’ cannot be used as a structuring device. It cannot be used as a means of pinning down and organizing bodies, precisely because it cannot be known in advance. This is a significant shift in terms of theoretical understandings and practices of ‘readiness’ in the early years, one that reminds us that pedagogy is far more than just predefined strategies for teaching (Springgay, 2011).

**Affective moments: The emergence of ‘readiness’**

Crucially, if we abandon the notion of ‘readiness’ as a fixed and predetermined state, or as a product of interactions in which bodies pre-exist their encounters, we must consider how it is possible to recognize ‘readiness’ when it emerges. We must ask; how can we identify the emergence of ‘readiness’ within our learning environments without reducing it to a simplistic correspondence of children to specific goals, outcomes and predefined states of being?

Deleuze, (1988a) tells us that once we start to define bodies and thoughts according to their capacities for affecting and being affected, many things will change. As the product of an affective encounter, ‘readiness’ may be related to an increase in bodily potential. It may be understood as the necessary state for a body to pass from a lesser to a greater state of perfection (Deleuze, 1988a), not perfection in relation to a transcendent ideal but as a greater level of internal cohesion. For Deleuze (1988a) this passage of affect is
fundamentally linked to the composition and decomposition of bodies. He states, “When a body ‘encounters’ another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts” (p. 19). Each body in this encounter affects the other body, and it is the nature of that affective relationship that determines a body’s capacity to flourish within its milieu. It is possible, therefore, to relate ‘readiness’ to a body’s ability to enter into and sustain positive relationships and through these relationships to go to the limits of what that body can do. Bearing in mind however that ‘readiness’ in this context is considered to be fundamentally relational in nature, this passage through states, to the limit of a body’s potential, has a fundamentally ethical dimension. It is important to consider the question, framed by Deleuze (1988a), “How can a being take another being into its world, but whilst preserving or respecting the others own relations and world?” (p. 126).

**Daniel**

Daniel was always a physically active child in the reception classroom. He preferred to play outside where he had more space for movement, but would use the whole of the classroom space within his activities. Life for Daniel was fast paced and he seemed quite at home in the bustle of the classroom. His movements, at first glance, might be considered to have little concern for others as he would rush past and through the activities of other children without much apparent concern for the undertakings of those around him. Closer observation of his actions however showed that Daniel did have a sense of the effects of his actions on others. For example, during one session Daniel had built a space rocket from Lego® bricks. He held the rocket in one hand as he moved quickly around the classroom, making it fly alongside him as he ran. As he rushed past a table where children were building with blocks, his trailing arms knocked over the constructions they had been making. He ran on apparently oblivious to the upset he had caused, running around tables and through a train track that was being built on the floor. The
shouts and protestations of the children who had been building however, brought him to a stop. He turned around, appearing concerned about the upset he had caused. When he realized his actions had caused other children distress and disrupted their play, he punched his fist in the air and shouted, “Let’s be builders, fix it, fix it!” He began to load blocks, a few at a time, into his space rocket, flying them back to the table and saying to the children there, “Let’s build it again, let’s be space builders!”

Daniel was able to redirect his play in response to the affect his initial actions had on the other children, showing both an awareness of his actions in relation to others to whom he was connected, and a willingness to redirect his own actions in response to this relation.

This seemingly small event, and the ordinary effects produced within it, emphasize that, as Seigworth and Gregg (2010) tell us, affect very often will transpire in the subtlest of moments. Within this story, the capacities of the children’s bodies to both affect and be affected are evident, as are the results of these affective moments, moving initially towards a diminishing of power in the boy and his peers, as his actions led him to feelings of sadness about what he had done; but eventually moving to an increase in potential in all bodies, as they combined to pursue new possibilities in their activities, this time working together. This intra-action goes deeper than would be recognized by the Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2013) to which it might be considered to relate. The affective relationship is more complex than “… children play[ing] cooperatively” and “taking turns with others” (DfE, 2013, p. 19); or knowing that “some behaviour is unacceptable” (p. 18) and understanding and following the rules (ibid.). The ‘readiness’ emergent in this context is not simply a matter of knowing how to behave in a given situation, or even having an awareness of the feelings of others in relation to oneself. Rather, the ‘readiness’ in this intra-action emerges from the (literal) collision of these bodies, which gives rise to active and productive progression for all involved. The initial actions of the boy may not, at first encounter, be considered particularly positive, however it is what they produce that is
important. They produce what Massumi (2003) describes as “affective expressions” (p. 7) in the children, expressions of sadness and anger and it is through these expressions that we are able to recognize the emergence and power of affect. Massumi (2003) considers that,

“… affective expressions like anger and laughter are perhaps the most powerful because they interrupt a situation. They are negative in that sense. They interrupt the flow of meaning that’s taking place: the normalized interrelations and interactions that are happening and the functions that are being fulfilled.” (p. 7)

It is how these affective expressions change a situation however, what they do within a particular context, that is important and is key to us being able to recognize ‘readiness’ when it emerges. Feelings such as anger and frustration, and their expression, force a situation to reorganize itself around that particular irruption of affect. Where conditions of ‘readiness’ are present within and between the bodies involved in the encounter, something positive is brought about in terms of the change and reconfiguration of the space (Massumi, 2003). In the encounter above, all bodies involved were able to progress positively in an active becoming. We can therefore recognize the ‘readiness’ of those bodies through what was produced from their encounter, through their ability to come together productively in an intra-action that increased the powers of acting of all concerned. What emerged from their conditions of ‘readiness’ was an active expression of joy and positive progression.

There is, however, also the possibility of intra-actions in which what emerges are conditions of sadness (Deleuze, 1988a) and the reduction of bodily potential or capacity.

**Molly**

*The children were playing in their Reception class, which had been set up for independent play and child-initiated activity, different resources having been made available across both the indoor and outdoor environments. A group of*
4 girls; Sophie, Toni, Tam and Molly; were gathered around a table containing a selection of collage items – paper, glue, ribbons, feathers, buttons etc.

The girls sat at the table selecting different materials to create their collages. They chatted about what they were doing, sharing their creations and commenting on each other’s ideas.

**Toni:** “I’m going to use the pink ribbon, that’s the best.”

**Sophie:** “Yes I’ve got some of that one, and the buttons too, you could use them as well, then we’d have the same.”

Within their discussion however, the group appeared to deliberately exclude one of the girls, Molly.

**Molly:** “Look at mine, I used the paper too, and some of the blue one, the blue ribbon.”

**Toni:** “That’s horrible, we only used the pink ones, just pink for the girls.”

Molly suggested the girls could use the pink materials to start a game of princesses.

**Sophie:** “No we’re not playing that now, you can play that in nursery.”

The three girls turned their faces and bodies away from Molly, beginning to whisper so she couldn’t hear their conversations.

Towards the end of the activity, Molly tried to share with the other girls the techniques she had been using to create her collage.

**Molly:** “Please, watch it, watch it. Just quick, watch it, quick, quick, quick”.

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Sophie: "I didn't watch it."

Molly: "Did you see it though?"

Sophie: "No."

Molly: "In the corner of your eye did you see it?"

Sophie: "Mmmmmm ... no ... I didn't see that either."

The episode ended with Sophie, Toni and Tam taking their collages to hang on the walls of the play house, telling Molly that she couldn't come with them because only three could play in there.

Within this encounter, we can see the importance of an ethical dimension within an affective concept of 'readiness'. As Massumi (2003) reminds us, capacities for affecting and being affected are never separate, they always go hand in hand. The becoming of bodies involves not only the individual ‘going to the limit of what they can do’, but through the relationships they have with other bodies, the generation of positive affects within the milieu of which they are a part. The augmentation of one body, or as in the story above several bodies, cannot be at the expense of another, hindering that others own active-becoming and appropriating the power of their own relative force. There is also, therefore, an element of responsibility in relation to the becoming of bodies through affective encounters. To be responsible within a process of 'becoming' would be,

“... to refrain from connecting one’s body with other bodies in ways that decompose the relations that constitute them or diminish their powers, and instead to find compositions with others that enhance the powers of both” (Cunniff Gilson, 2011, p. 80).

Where a body encounters another body that does not agree with it, its cohesion is jeopardized and it is decomposed, moving to a lesser state of perfection in that moment. Its affective potential is diminished and its capacity for activity reduced. This can be seen in the narrative above, in which, whilst
the girls actively pursued their own interests, this is at the expense of another’s positive becoming, as their actions actively suppress her ability to become within the context of the activity. Therefore if we consider ‘readiness’ as an affective concept, in order to have an ethical dimension we must also consider that what emerges from conditions of ‘readiness’ must be active, productive and affirmative for the child and the multiplicity within which they are connected. If what emerges from a particular arrangement of conditions is destructive, passive or negative, it could be argued that they were never conditions of ‘readiness’ in the first place.

Reading Daniel’s and Molly’s stories, it could therefore be argued that ‘readiness’ is evident only in the first, as it tends towards positive progression and becoming for all involved, whereas in the second, this positive becoming is actively destroyed. Crucially however, this ‘readiness’ can only be recognized at the point of its emergence, it cannot be predicted or defined in advance of this moment. As Massumi (2003) states,

“An outburst of anger brings a number of outcomes into direct presence with one another – there could be a peacemaking or a move towards violence, there could be a breaking of relations, all the possibilities are present, packed into the present moment” (p. 8).

It is not until that moment, however, that we are able to perceive what is produced, whether conditions of ‘readiness’ are such that there can be a move towards peacemaking, positive and affirmative change, or whether there will be instead a move towards destruction and negative outcomes.

To revisit the axiom from which this chapter emerged, the problem that faced us was whether it was possible to conceptualize ‘readiness’ outside of a predefined notion of the form that ‘readiness’ will take or of what we are to be made ‘ready’ for. It is a question of whether we can separate a concept of ‘readiness’ from mechanistically linear progression and the acquisition of particular goals and outcomes which claim to identify children who are ‘ready’ for the next phase of learning and development, or for a change in pedagogical approach. Exploring this problem through a concept of affect
enables a shift in focus from a predictable idea of ‘readiness’, based on specific and normalized goals and outcomes, towards a concept that is emergent from the context in which it is produced. Rather than comparing children to a series of fixed goals and outcomes in order to determine their ‘readiness’ at a particular point in time, this discussion argues that our attention should be focused on what is produced through encounters within early childhood spaces and what these encounters tell us about the ‘readiness’ of bodies within that context. As part of an open pedagogical system therefore, ‘readiness’ is related to conditions of possibility. To draw again on Massumi (2003), ‘readiness’ can be considered as “a threshold of potential” (p. 3) that opens out to “where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation” (ibid.).
Chapter 7: The importance of ethics

This chapter further develops the discussion, considering a reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’, begun in the previous section. It continues to draw on the philosophy of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, in order to explore the centrality of ethics within this de/reconstruction of ‘readiness’. Considering ‘readiness’ as an active, affective and relational construct, we can begin to see how some of the challenges of perceiving ‘readiness’ according to fixed goals and outcomes, or a predefined spectrum of knowledge, skills and attributes, can be addressed. Within this reconceptualization however, perhaps the most important element is that of ‘readiness’ as an ethical relation. In articulating a concept of ‘readiness’ that extends towards an open and unplanned future, it is imperative that this concept does not advocate a situation in which the socio-material effects that emerge from ‘readiness’ for any possible future become viable and acceptable. Working again with an entanglement of theory and experience, represented through stories in the form of ethnographic fictions, this chapter will explore the basis on which this reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’ can produce and sustain ethical relationships in early childhood education, through which all involved can ‘go to the limits of what they can do’.

In developing this discussion, this chapter will explore a number of concepts that are important to reconceptualizing and articulating ‘readiness’ in these terms. It will begin by exploring ideas concerning the organization of ‘space’ within early childhood education, before discussing ideas concerning becoming, difference and multiplicity, including introducing the Deleuzian concept of ‘becoming-minoritarian’. It will then consider how, through thinking with these concepts, it is possible to escape dominant, normative patterns of meaning in relation to ‘readiness’, articulating what is framed as an ‘ethics of

becoming’. The chapter will conclude by presenting a summary of the ideas and concepts explored and created, articulating this reconceptualized notion of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’.

An ethical concept of ‘readiness’

‘Readiness’ and the space of early childhood education

Lorraine (2005) suggests that normative subjectivity tends to emphasize states of equilibrium, assimilating space and time to socially recognizable, fixed coordinates, with respect to which all movement can be mapped. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe this space as a ‘plane of organization’, productive only of static and self-contained subjects who develop as a form of mimesis, “a chain of beings perpetually imitating one another progressively and regressively” (p. 235). This ‘plane of organization’ is characterized by what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have called stratification, in which “… forms and subjects, organs and functions are strata, or relations between strata” (p. 269). Bodies within this organized space are identifiable as centralized and hierarchical organisms that appropriate the matter-energy of the organs and funnel a surplus portion of them to the benefit of transcendence, conceptualized as a superior body or stratum (Protevi, 2000). The ‘plane of organization’ therefore acts to create the individualized subject as a more-or-less imperfect representation of a series of pre-given norms, as evidenced in the construction of specific Early Learning Goals within the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014). The ‘ready-child’ is constructed through these norms as a majoritarian identity category, which Cunniff Gilson (2011) suggests is a category defined in virtue of its dominance and the ways in which it sets particular standards in relation to hierarchical terms of identity. She identifies how major identity categories distribute and maintain binary relations that reinforce their dominance, stabilizing standardized and normative patterns of development. Whilst it is not the intention of this discussion to construct ‘readiness’ and ‘unreadiness’ as binary concepts, it argues that policy technologies, such as the Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2013), have the potential to create a normative spectrum on which it is
assumed that each individual child can be positioned in terms of their relative ‘readiness’ for school or for a particular form of learning.

It is argued in this discussion that this construction of the ‘ready-child’, as a majoritarian identity category, acts to normalize particular developmental trajectories, positioning particular identities and ways of being on a spectrum organized according to a hierarchy of ‘readiness/unreadiness’. The concepts of ‘readiness’, identified in this thesis as dominating within political discourses surrounding early childhood education, act to organize this spectrum of ‘unreadiness’ to ‘readiness’, predefining desirable subject positions and trajectories of development, thus systematically reducing complexity in relation to the ways in which early learning and development is understood and experienced. This relation of ‘readiness’ to predetermined goals and outcomes is understood as a laying out and defining of territories, substituting open and dynamic space, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as the ‘plane of composition’, for the increasingly rigid segmentarity of the ‘plane of organization’ (Cunniff Gilson, 2011). These territories, demarcated by the predetermined outcomes of early childhood education policy, become static markers of identity, rigidly defining ‘readiness’ according to a particular spectrum of characteristics, observable in the individual child, a process through which individualized segments “seem to lose their ability to bud” (Cunniff Gilson, 2011, p. 212) and to produce creative and unexpected deviations from the norm.

Attention to becoming and difference

One way in which it is possible to transform ideas and practices concerning ‘readiness’ is to think with the concept of ‘becoming’. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), becoming offers a way of conceptualizing progress and change that does not rely on ideas of ‘series’ and ‘structure’ that tend toward higher, transcendent terms. A Deleuzo-Guattarian ‘becoming’ is not resemblance, imitation or identification, nor is it progression or regression along a defined series or chain of beings perpetually imitating one another. ‘Becoming’ is creative production, concerned primarily with the production of
difference. Semetsky (2011) develops this point, highlighting that rather than classical theoretical questions of being, the focus of Deleuzian philosophy is the very praxis of ‘becoming-other’. This ‘becoming-other’ is actualized when a degree or intensity enters into composition with other degrees or other intensities, to form an-other, as part of the multiplicity that constitutes the ‘plane of composition’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The movement of ‘becoming’ does not deal in the development of forms, but emerges, through speed and slowness between modules and particles of all kinds, human and non-human, natural and artificial. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) talk of ‘becoming’ as an ‘involutionary’ process, inherently creative and affirmative of the vitality of life and of difference (Parr, 2010). As Parr (2010) states, “… according to this schema creative transformation is immanent, taking place on a plane of consistency that precedes univocal Being” (p. 60). As an immanent proliferation, the line of ‘becoming’ that emerges through processes of involution, whilst directional, has no fixed end point, passing only in the middle as a form of emergence. This contrasts sharply with the ‘plane of organization’, which is composed only of contiguous points and lines drawn between pre-defined origins and destinations.

Understanding conventional spaces of early childhood education in terms of a ‘plane of organization’ constructs the identity of the child as a tracing of pre-plotted points. ‘Readiness’ becomes defined in relation to each child’s ‘accurate’ tracing of these points with the normative subject of early childhood education being sustained through interactions and experiences that produce evolutionary movements towards a fixed identity. In contrast, a line of ‘becoming’ is not defined by the connection of pre-plotted points of pre-mapped territories. The line of ‘becoming’ emerges, comes up through the middle, running perpendicular to points as first perceived and transversally to its localizable relation to other, predefined and distant points (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The line of ‘becoming’ is therefore unpredictable, impossible to plan in advance and infinite, in that it does not extend towards a planned telos, from which the identity of the ‘ready-child’ can be derived.
‘Readiness’, becoming and multiplicity

This notion of ‘becoming’ negates the existence of a stable series of identities, constructed as a spectrum against which the progressive development of ‘readiness’ can be related. Focus is shifted away from a “stable, rational individual, experiencing changes but remaining principally the same person” (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 27), towards a ‘self’ “conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces” (ibid.). In this sense, the ‘self’ does not exist in isolation, but as part of a multiplicity, ‘becoming’ through its connections and propagations. This conception of ‘becoming’ “conceives of a body (be it physical or conceptual) as a set of habitually patterned forces that sustains itself through its power to affect and be affected by forces surrounding it” (Lorraine, 2005, p. 160).

Understanding the space of early childhood education as a multiplicity is important in shifting to a conception of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’. Deleuze (1988b) distinguishes between two different types of multiplicity. One he identifies as “a multiplicity of exteriority” (p. 38), based on “quantitative differentiation” and “difference in degree” (ibid.). This is a “numerical multiplicity” (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 38) within which ‘objects’ divide only by differences in degree, remaining ultimately the same, each object being “characterized by the perfect equivalence of the divided and the divisions, of number and unit” (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 41). Within a numerical multiplicity, it is possible to construct the ‘ready-child’ as an object, produced from a quantitative accumulation of parts (environmental experiences, innate developmental milestones etc.), which by degree combine to form the complete object. What matters in relation to children’s learning, according to the logic of this qualitative multiplicity, is the progressive actualization of the object-state, which can also be used as a point against which children’s ‘readiness’ can be measured and interpreted, thus positioning them on a spectrum of ‘unreadiness’ to ‘readiness’.

Within such a multiplicity complexity is reduced, for difference and change can only proceed by degree. The object may change by addition or subtraction.
but ultimately does not change in kind, remaining principally the same, just at a greater or lesser state of completion (or a greater or lesser state of ‘readiness’). Within such a multiplicity, development and progression, leading toward a state of ‘readiness’, can be explained and predicted according to a cause and effect model in which ‘readiness’ can be conceived as a stable output, equitable to a particular input.

In contrast, Deleuze (1988b) describes a qualitative, or continuous multiplicity, which emerges not by difference in degree but by difference in kind. Fundamentally this non-numeric multiplicity cannot be divided without changing nature. The introduction of something new into the multiplicity affects a change, the eruption of a line of flight or the emergence of something unique and unpredictable. There is no particular essence that can underpin a qualitative multiplicity, just as there is no ultimate telos or final object that marks its successful completion.

**Henry**

In his Reception class Henry had been a confident child. He loved to explore, throwing himself into his interactions with people and things, keen to find out what he could do with them, how they could help him find out about the world and his place within it. He was never scared or reluctant to try new things or to engage with new objects and materials. His excitement about the possibilities of the world was infectious. Teaching Henry was a delight. His imagination produced ideas and ways of doing things that we as adults, somewhat stuck in our adult ways, could never dream of. The opportunities for play and independent exploration within the Reception classroom produced powerful learning moments for Henry and for those around him as he played with the possibilities inherent in each of his interactions. He readily took risks, happy not to know the outcomes that might emerge from his interactions and excited to share them with others when they did emerge. When something did not happen as expected he showed surprise and a
desire to find out why, a resilient acceptance when things did not go to plan and a confidence to try again.

Fast-forward 18 months. Henry is in his Year 2 class. Opportunities for independent play have all but been absorbed into preparation for statutory testing and adult directed teaching and learning. He is doing well. Henry is on track to achieve a good level of learning across his core subjects. His handwriting is neat, he listens attentively to adult instruction and completes his work with little distraction. He is keen for the approval of the adults who set his work tasks, delighting in the stickers and gold stars that grace his work, showing he has done well.

Henry is a confident, competent learner, ready to move through the steps of learning and development plotted by the curriculum and to achieve the goals that show he has progressed well and has responded in the appropriate way to the learning opportunities provided for him, arriving in the next Key Stage ready to engage with the next level of knowledge and curriculum content.

But it is not this simple. Henry’s perceived ‘readiness’ for learning has been coupled with a change. Where once he was comfortable, even sought out the unpredictability and uncertainty of his interactions with people and things, he now actively seeks the comfort, predictability and certainty of adult guidance. This becomes obvious within the rare times when adult guidance does not structure Henry’s experience. Confident and capable within activities led by a class teacher, activities with a fixed and pre-planned outcome, exposure to open-ended resources, such as a pile of Lego® or building blocks, is now a struggle. ‘What should I do?’ ‘How should I do it?’ ‘What if I do it wrong?’ Whilst he can create something through his interactions with these materials, the depth of learning and delight in the unexpected outcomes is no longer present. Henry is unwilling and perhaps unready, to take the risks that stepping forward into the unknown brings.
This shift raises questions. Has the formality of his school experience influenced Henry’s once genuine excitement to take risks? Has engaging with goals of ‘readiness’, as definable outcomes of adult led experiences, an accumulation of specific skills, knowledges and characteristics, impoverished Henry’s ability to engage in open-ended and creative learning experiences and events? Is it possible that the organization and structure of his school experience, to which he had responded as expected by the system, may have acted to close down and limit his potential to follow and develop his own original thoughts and ideas without the relative safety of a predictable structure or outcome?

As continuous and qualitative multiplicities, the spaces that young children pass through in their early childhood experience must allow for the possibility of constructing open-ended lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), creating space for children to take risks within their learning and for their readiness to engage with any unknown which may emerge. These are lines that extend beyond the multiplicity, constructing space through the development of ongoing connections and relationships. As qualitative multiplicities, early childhood spaces are defined only by abstract lines, through which they continually change their nature and connect with other multiplicities (ibid). The abstract line enacts a particular type of unpredictable movement, making it impossible to know in advance the affects it will have or the connections it will make. As “no one can say where the line of flight will pass” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 250), it is impossible to predict the trajectory that ‘becoming’ will take, or impose upon it a fixed end point. Within a multiplicity, ‘readiness’ should not be understood in relation to the achievement of a fixed identity, but rather as the conditions necessary for open-ended becoming to happen, emerging as part of an educational moment that opens space for becoming. ‘Readiness’ can therefore be conceptualized as a productive relation between different elements of a multiplicity, an active concept that produces, rather than measures, learning and development, prompting the creation of new and different knowledge and experiences, rather than a continual representation of habitual patterns of the same.
'Readiness’ and becoming-minoritarian

Conceptualizing learning, development and progression through the concepts of ‘becoming’ and ‘multiplicity’ has the potential to radically shift understandings of ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education, replacing fixed goals and outcomes with immanent and dynamic movement, the production of change and creative transformation. In developing this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ as an ethical concept however, it is important to recognize that ‘becoming’ is not aimless in its movement. ‘Becoming’, as a form of creative transformation within children’s educational experience, does, necessarily, progress. It does not however, progress towards a fixed end point. In his discussion of education as preparation, Dewey (1916) explores a similar notion, stating, “…it is not a question of whether education should prepare for the future. If education is growth it must progressively realize present possibilities, and thus make individuals better fitted to cope with later requirements” (p. 65). In considering this distinction in relation to ‘readiness’, it is important that we ask how ‘becoming’ is then any different from a haphazard or aimless collection of movements, each following a self-interested path to a self-actualized subject?

One way in which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) address this issue is through the concept of ‘becoming-minoritarian’. This concept challenges conventional understandings of ‘becoming’, as movement towards something defined, valuing instead movements that deviate from dominant minority or majority subject positions. Zukauskaite (2011) identifies how ‘becoming-minoritarian’ should be understood as a deliberate line of escape from an aggregate minority position, stating, “becoming-minoritarian is not a ‘natural’ state or condition but a political affair” (p. 193). As Dewey (1899/2000) considers, in the context of the school, the moment children act they make a break with defined norms, individualizing themselves and ceasing to be a “mechanical massing of children” (p. 16) defined according to prescribed norms and expectations.
‘Carpet time’ formed a regular part of the children’s Reception class experience. It was a time in which the whole class would come together and engage in activities led by an adult, most often the class teacher. Each child had an assigned ‘carpet space’ in which they were expected to sit, organized in order to promote the most productive class dynamic in terms of the children’s ability to maintain attention and focus on their learning. The mass of children gathered in this space formed a kind of organism, structured in a specific way, in order to produce a particular form of space, conducive to a particular form of learning. If all bodies in the organism maintained this structure, the desired form of space continued without disruption. Children received praise for displaying appropriate behaviours, such as sitting in their carpet space, sitting still and participating by making comments and answering questions, raising their hands to show they wished to do so. Children would even reprimand each other if they strayed from their assigned spaces.

The majority of the class followed the expectations of this structured space, which made those whose behaviour deviated from this norm even more obvious. For this reason, Kim stood out. Instead of sitting, Kim would choose to lie down. Instead of waiting to be chosen, Kim would shout out her responses. Instead of sitting in one place, Kim would shift, shuffle, twist and slide her body across the floor.

Early on in the school year, the ability of individuals to maintain the positive dynamic of this massed organism was considered to be a sign of children’s ‘readiness’ for the classroom environment. Kim, therefore, was considered ‘unready’. Behaviours that might disrupt the positive maintenance of this whole class context, such as lying instead of sitting or fidgeting rather than sitting still, were an indication that children had yet to learn the classroom culture. Kim was given support to conform to these behaviours, an adult
presence to give constant reminders of how to sit, how to participate, how to perform ‘readiness’ for learning in that context.

Crucially, Cunniff Gilson (2011) considers that ‘becoming-minoritarian is not a revaluation of the degraded side of a majority/minority binary, but instead a break from the rigidity of these dualist terms all together. Breaking with the rigidity of these binary segments opens up space for dynamic ‘becoming-other’, established via an affirmation of difference, diversity and multiplicity, and leading toward the creation of the new (Semetsky, 2011). The movement of ‘becoming’, and in particular becoming-minoritarian, can never be understood as progress toward a series of fixed outcomes denoting ‘readiness’ for a defined ‘next phase’, a belief that resonates with Dewian philosophy and his theorising of ‘aims’ in education. Dewey (1916) claims that if education is to have aims at all, they must be emergent from present conditions, being “based upon a consideration of what is already going on; upon the resources and difficulties of the situation” (p. 121). He considers that educational and moral theories which assume ends issuing from an external source act to “limit intelligence because, given ready-made, they must be imposed by some authority external to intelligence, leaving to the latter nothing but a mechanical choice of means” (Dewey, 1916, p. 122). In contrast, ‘becoming’ extends the possibility of education occurring in the open and dynamic space of the ‘plane of composition’, which itself is constantly unfolding, producing ‘readiness’ for a future that is as yet undefined.

Escaping dominant patterns of meaning

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) discuss the process of ‘becoming’ in relation to the concept of the ‘Body without Organs’ (BwO). Protevi (2000) describes the BwO as a ‘destratified body’, stating that, as an object or practice of construction, the BwO is not reached by regression, for it is not the infantile body of our past, but the virtual realm of potentials for any number of bodily organisations that may be precluded by organismic organisation. The BwO can be understood as the unknown potential of ‘becoming’, as that which

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remains once we have broken with the dominant patterns of the subjectified self. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state,

“... the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is not opposed to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism” (p. 158).

The organism, in this context, is understood as a stratum on the BwO that enacts a top down pressure, organizing the organs in a specific and static manner. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state, it is,

“... a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendencies” (p. 159).

In the context of early childhood education, the organism can be understood as a function of the state apparatus that codes and regulates movements and flows, establishing rigid categories of form and function by which individual bodies can be understood. Coded and regulated by particular habits, beliefs, practices and policies, the top down organization of early childhood spaces aims at developing particular forms and functions, including the child who is ‘ready’ at a particular point in space and time, themselves organized in relation to particular social and developmental norms as points of reference. In Dewian terms, this fixed and normative standard is codified in relation to adulthood as a terminal identity against which children and childhood can be comparatively judged (Dewey, 1916). The child-body is organized in relation to the adult-body and as such a tendency is established “to take immaturity as mere lack and growth as something which fills up the gaps between the immature and the mature” (Dewey, 1916, p. 49). The child’s growth and development is organized with a fixed end point in view, a majoritarian identity position that “fixes attention on what the child has not, and will not have until he becomes a man” (Dewey, 1916, p. 50). This form of organization enables learning and development to be broken up into discrete stages and sequences, structured according to fixed standards, potentially limiting understandings of ‘readiness’ to the achievement of a particular identity.
position, the successful attainment of which provides the foundation for the next, pre-defined phase of learning and development.

Conceptualising the BwO as a productive ‘becoming’ can be seen as a positive affirmation of complexity and as a commitment to maximizing the virtual, and therefore unknown, potentials that may emerge within and between bodies as part of a multiplicity. In an educational context, this shifts attention from the achievement of subjectified identity positions (i.e. the ‘ready-child’) as fixed markers of progress and success, towards notions of the self as a threshold or door, a temporary ‘phase space’, a ‘becoming’ between two multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This becoming must, therefore, be considered directional, in that it is in a constant state of movement and transformation, without a predefined telos and therefore open to the actualization of any one of an infinite number of ‘becomings-other’. The ‘readiness’ of the BwO is therefore concerned with the conditions necessary for that body to destratify, to actualize a particular state of its potential or virtuality. ‘Readiness’ is actualized as the BwO selects and pursues lines of flight, in the process fundamentally changing its own nature and the nature of multiplicities to which it is connected.

Positively, this destratified movement and the opening up of space in which lines of ‘becoming’ extend, is an affirmation of complexity and potential. There is, however, need for caution. There is a danger within this open and dynamic space that bodies destratify to the point at which they lose any form of relative consistency, that by challenging dominant striating and organizing structures, classroom spaces potentially dissolve into chaos. As Protevi (2000) identifies, the strata of the organism must be partially maintained in order that the BwO remains a body. ‘Becoming’, however, does not inevitably result in the complete dissolution of order. Even within open and dynamic spaces of learning, there can be a certain form of emergent order. As Dewey (1899/2000) states,

“… there is a certain disorder in any busy workshop…there is the confusion, the bustle that results from activity. But out of
occupation, out of doing things, that are to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type” (p. 10).

Within open educational systems and spaces there is an inherent element of responsibility for the growth and development of others and as such it is ‘fatal’ to “permit capricious or discontinuous action in the name of spontaneous self-expression” (Dewey, 1916, p. 119). There must be order within any system for it to function productively, however, that order must emerge from and be consistent in the “progressive completing of a process” (ibid.). In Deleuzian terms, that order must be immanent in the context from which it emerges.

In relation to ‘becoming’ a BwO therefore, it cannot be assumed that dynamic and supple movement, in open-space, should be privileged de facto. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make this point very clear, emphasizing the need for caution when breaking away from the striations of state structures. The exercise of caution therefore, needs to be a fundamental principle within this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’. It is vital that the ‘open-ended-becoming’, in relation to which ‘readiness’ emerges, is not confused with a romantic notion of development or a laissez-faire attitude that assumes all children will develop and progress naturally towards the ‘good’. Such an attitude would either reintroduce the transcendent, elevating particular notions of a ‘good’ of ‘ideal’ student, or create a situation in which all lines of development are considered viable, regardless of their effects.

The ethics of becoming

Protevi (2000) identifies that whilst the ‘plane of consistency’, conceptualized here as a space productive of a reconceptualization of ‘readiness’, is constituted as an immanent arrangement of BwOs, not all BwOs qualify for inclusion. There has to be a process of selection, making the construction of this plane an ethical endeavour. Protevi (2000; 2001) outlines three distinct types of BwO: full, empty and cancerous – identifying that only the full BwO is productive, being reached through a process of careful experimental
destratification. The full BwO is not completely destratified, but retains a co-
ordination of organs, arranged and negotiated in relation to immanent flows.

Caution and care is therefore vital when constructing the BwO, as too sudden
destratification leads only to an empty BwO, devoid of energy flows (Protevi,
2000). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) evoke “a dreary parade of sucked-dry,
catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies…Emptied bodies instead of full ones”
(p. 150). They ask, “What happened? Were you cautious enough?” (ibid.),
identifying caution as a rule immanent to experimentation and destratification.
Whilst the full BwO is always a communal project, created through the
continual production of connections, for the empty BwO there are no energy
flows through which to connect. There is no production possible from the
empty BwO and the plane of consistency runs the risk of descending into
nihilism or death. Situating this philosophical discussion in the context of early
childhood education, there is a particularly useful connection to be made with
Dewey’s notion of ‘dependence’, discussed in Democracy and Education
(1916). Dewey considers dependence to be something positive and
constructive in the growth of the young child. Dependence denotes a social
(or material) connection, which Dewey defines as interdependence, and in this
sense it could be considered a factor in the growth of the full BwO. Through
dependence, the BwO may connect with other BwOs and through that
relational activity growth and open-ended development may be promoted. In
contrast, the empty BwO may be likened to what Dewey (1916) defines as
helplessness. The impotent or helpless body would be devoid of affective
connections, existing either in static isolation or as part of a system in which it
lacks agency and affective capacity. Dewey elaborates on the passive and
static nature of this helplessness, stating,

“A merely impotent being has to be carried, forever, by others. The fact that dependence is accompanied by growth in ability, not by an ever-increasing lapse into parasitism, suggests that it is something constructive. Being merely sheltered by others would not promote growth.” (1916, pp. 50–51).

The empty BwO can be understood as impotent, helpless, unable to make
connections and to proliferate within its milieu. Whilst it may be effectively
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carried along a line of learning and development, organized according to an ideal standard or static end, this empty BwO will not be considered ‘ready’ to take new and unpredictable lines of flight until it breaks with the dominant organizational structure holding it in place, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) may describe as its ‘becoming-minoritarian’.

The third type of BwO identified by Protevi (2000) is the cancerous form. In contrast to the empty BwO, this cancerous form comes about under conditions of runaway stratification and sedimentation resulting in the endless repetition of homogenized subjectivity through a process of conformity and social cloning (Protevi, 2000). The construction of a ‘plane of composition’ therefore calls for extreme caution. If too much stratification can lead to a cancer of the stratum, and too sudden destratification can empty the BwO of its intensities, leaving it impotent and helpless, it is essential that we engage in cautious experimentation, approaching the production of the BwO and the ‘plane of consistency’ as a form of ethical selection for the organisation of bodies. Conditions of ‘readiness’ must therefore enable the production of the full BwO, allowing for experimentation with unplanned and unpredictable situations, whilst at the same time, retaining the element of organisation that allows the body to be productive in its creativity. The processes, or lines of flight, through which bodies destratify must therefore be selected carefully and conditions of ‘readiness’ must support the selection of lines that produce positive and affirmative affects.

This notion of ethical selection could be considered problematic in relation to the immanent philosophy underpinning the concepts developed in this thesis. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because an immanent ontology rejects transcendent norms, it has no concept of hierarchy. Jun (2011) suggests that for Deleuze, in his work as a political activist and philosopher, certain political institutions were to be recommended and celebrated, whilst others were to be rejected and condemned. To illustrate this point, Jun draws a comparison between events in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, and the actions of the freedom fighters’ battle against apartheid in South Africa. He states,
“Most people would regard the actions of the Nazis as morally reprehensible and the actions of the freedom fighters as morally praiseworthy. Although both used violence in the pursuit of political ends, only the latter were allegedly morally justified in doing so.” (Jun, 2011, p. 89)

This point is particularly important in reconceptualizing ‘readiness’ as an active and responsive ethical relationship. Given Deleuze and Guattari’s apparent rejection of transcendent norms, such as morality and justice, on what basis is it possible to condemn certain lines of flight and the affects produced from them as bad and destructive, whilst accepting others as good and productive? On what grounds can certain movements and lines of flight be considered ‘becomings’ (from which conditions of ‘readiness’ can emerge) and others condemned as “morally odious ‘alternative practices’” (Jun, 2011, p. 100)?

From a top-down position of transcendent morality, the problem posed by Jun can be considered a question of political normativity, an identification of moral criteria by which the actions, policies and existence of political entities can be judged (Jun, 2011). Certain actions, people, institutions etc., are considered bad in relation to particular laws, principles and norms that dictate how we, as human beings, ought to act. Jun (2011) identifies that, principally, morality is concerned with an expression of what is right, what ought to be done and the imperatives, obligations and duties that arise from transcendent principles. From an immanent ontological position however, how, without recourse to transcendent norms as parameters for a good and moral life, do we avoid slipping into nihilism and nothingness, a situation where any and all lines of flight are allowed to profligate, opening up to the potential of destruction and despair? Do we run the risk that without normative universals against which to judge behaviour, we will fall into a chaos of pure subjectivism or relativism (Smith, 2007)? We must ask, therefore, how to ensure that we are ‘ready’ to select lines of flight that are productive and life-affirming in order to actualise ‘ethically-responsive-becomings’ as opposed to following lines of flight that are regressive and destructive, for ourselves and for others within the multiplicities to which we are connected.
Amber

“You can’t be a princess, you haven’t got a crown!”

This was the response to Amber when she tried to join a group of girls playing in the role-play area. The girls were draped elaborately with lacy net curtains and pieces of sparkling fabric tied around their waists and shoulders, forming their princess gowns. Their performance entailed getting ready for a ball, producing in-depth discussion of costumes, hairstyles, jewellery, and makeup, with the general consensus that to qualify as a princess they had to be beautiful. Each wore a plastic crown or tiara that formed part of the contents of the dressing up box in the role-play area. These crowns formed an important part of the event of their play, denoting membership of the group and, importantly, a basis for exclusion. The crowns were limited in number, their exclusivity an active force in the formation of the group. By establishing criteria for inclusion those who were on the inside of this group shared a bond, a collective material symbol.

Amber did not give up upon being excluded. She recognized the criteria for acceptance, that of having a crown, and determined to create her own. Using materials from the creative trolley she constructed and decorated a crown of her own. Wearing her creation she returned to the group and asked again to join, pointing out that she now met their criteria for being included in their game. Looking unimpressed however, the girls informed her that it was the wrong type of crown.

“It hasn’t got jewels like these ones. It’s just if you have one of these crowns that you can play.”

The evolving criteria continued to exclude, Amber’s responsive solution dismissed, the cohesiveness of the group maintained but only through the exclusion of others, and Amber’s productive actions denied the possibility of positively affecting the event.
How did ‘readiness’ emerge and weave its way through this event? Was it present through Amber’s responsive actions? Was it present or absent in the girls exclusionary behaviour? Or are these questions too simplistic? Did ‘readiness’, in fact, ebb and flow through the course of the interaction, shifting and changing as events emerged?

This ethical question is fundamental to the reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’. If ‘readiness’ is to be conceptualized in relation to the conditions necessary for ‘becoming’ to emerge, it is essential that this conceptualization has an ethical dimension. The ‘becomings’ that emerge from these conditions of ‘readiness’ must be active and productive, as ‘readiness’, conceptualized in this way, can only open out to positive progression. The activity of the child within their milieu must “tend toward valuable results” (Dewey, 1899/2000, p. 17) through direction and organization that emerge as immanent to the process of learning and development. Conditions of ‘readiness’, emergent within the milieu or multiplicity, must allow for dynamic and productive activity, enabling what Dewey (1899/2000) describes as “go, movement, the sense of use and operation” (p. 52).

Active and reactive forces

As an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’, conditions of ‘readiness’ and ‘lines-of-becoming’ can be understood in terms of forces composing different bodies and their relations. Deleuze (1983) states, “In a body the superior or dominant forces are known as active and the inferior or dominated forces are known as reactive” (p. 40). He considers active and reactive to be the qualities that express relation of force with force. He identifies;

“… forces which enter into relation do not have quantity without each of them having, at the same time, the quality corresponding to their difference in quantity as such. This difference between forces qualified according to their quantity as active or reactive will be called hierarchy.” (1983, p. 40)
The existence of this hierarchical relationship between forces creates an immanent rationale for the selection of some lines of flight as positive ‘becomings’ and the exclusion of others as dangerous. For Deleuze, following Nietzsche, reactive forces are inferior in terms of their quality as they seek to secure and maximise quantity through mechanical means and final ends. He states, “This is the point of departure for reaction: The mechanical and utilitarian accommodations, the regulations which express all the power of inferior and dominated forces” (1983, pp. 40–41). Reactive forces are concerned with the denial of difference as mechanistic ideas impose a final end or terminal state on ‘becoming’ that constructs a binary of ‘being’/’nothing’. Either the terminal state (of ‘readiness’ for the next stage) is achieved, or the line of flight descends into nothingness. Deleuze claims, “The instrument of nihilistic thought is the triumph of reactive forces” (1983, p. 45). He considers that a reactive force triumphs by separating an active force from what it can do, taking away all or part of its power. Deleuze (1983) considers that the victory of reactive force does not proceed by addition; rather, this victory happens via a subtraction that denies active forces their difference and separates them from what they can do.

For Deleuze (1983) active and reactive forces are characterized in a number of ways. Reactive forces are utilitarian forces of adaption and imitation, they are separated from what they can do and as a result deny their difference and turn against themselves. In contrast, active forces are those that go to the limit of what they can do, making difference an object of affirmation. This affirmation of difference is a crucial component of ‘becoming-active’. In order to ‘become-active’ forces must affirm difference, both in them and in others. Deleuze states, “in order to become active it is not sufficient for a force to go to the limit of what it can do, it must make what it can do an object of affirmation” (1983, p. 68). ‘Becomings’ must therefore be life affirming and in the context of the multiplicity, this introduces an element of responsibility for the other.
Simon

Simon was most at home in the outdoor space of the early childhood classroom. He loved to be outside, in all weathers, and unless specifically required to be, would avoid indoor activity at all costs. His morning routine consisted of hovering around the door dividing the two spaces until it was opened, at which point he would rush outside ready to explore what the area had on offer that day.

Over the past couple of weeks, Simon had been involved in a project to construct and plant flowers in beds around the edge of the play area. He had loved this project, taking great care and pride in the construction and population of the beds. On this morning however, he became distressed. A group of boys were playing dinosaurs in the flowerbeds, having decided they were the perfect environment for a dinosaur forest. Suddenly, Simon’s lovingly planted flowers were home to rampaging dinosaurs, becoming a sea of churned up earth and bent flower stems.

Simon’s distress was noticed by one of his teachers. Gently she helped him calm down and suggested that he offer to help the boys find another place for their dinosaur forest. With his teachers support he approached the boys and explained that they were damaging the flowers, and that they wouldn’t be able to grow if they carried on breaking their stems and knocking soil out of the beds. Simon offered the solution suggested by their teacher, that they find another place to construct the forest. He shared an idea to use one of the large trays, to gather leaves and sticks and rocks from the forest area in the school grounds and use these create their own dinosaur forest, an idea that met with universal approval. As the boys embarked on this activity, Simon became part of the group, making suggestions for where they could find the best materials, as he knew the outdoor area so well. The forest they created was generally agreed to be far better than the flower beds where they began, as there were rocks for their dinosaurs to climb on and hide behind, and that,
using the materials they collected they could create a small river in their landscape.

Simon was absorbed into the game, changing it in the process, his responsiveness to, and care for, the natural environment resulting in new interactions and emerging lines of activity for all involved.

Cunniff Gilson (2011) recognizes ‘becoming’ as a process through which we are called to be responsive to others. She states,

“As a question of becoming, responsibility both involves and demands a certain mode of relationship and engagement with others, and not simply with them as molar entities but with that which composes them. One is responsible because one is in the midst of, linked to, and becoming through something with the other.” (pp. 79–80)

‘Becoming’ involves not only individual bodies ‘going to the limit of what they can do’, but through their relationships with other bodies, the generation of positive affects within the multiplicity. The augmentation of one body cannot be at the expense of another, hindering the other’s ‘active-becomings’, denying their difference or appropriating the power of their relative forces. To be responsible within a process of ‘becoming’ is therefore,

“... to refrain from connecting one’s body with other bodies in ways that decompose the relations that constitute them or diminish their powers, and instead to find compositions with others that enhance the powers of both” (Cunniff Gilson, 2011, p. 80).

As an ethical relationship this responsive ‘becoming’ is not a simple matter of selecting actions that correspond to normative ideas of how we should act in relation to the pursuit of a ‘good’ life. It is an oversimplification to think that we can identify certain actions as ‘good’, contributing to positive affirmation and transformation, and others as bad, leading to negation and destruction. On a ‘plane of composition’, the affects of ethical relations must be understood as situational, as a response to actual conditions. Whether a certain action affects a ‘becoming’ of active force, or a triumph of reaction, is then
dependent on the context in which that action occurs. As identified by Spinoza (1677/2001), “no action considered in itself alone is either good or evil” (pp. 206–207). Deleuze (1988a) draws on Spinozian ethics stating, “what matters is knowing whether the act is associated with the image of the thing insofar as that thing can compound with it, or, on the contrary, insofar as it is decomposed by it.” (pp. 35–36, emphasis original).

The nature of a line of flight cannot, therefore, be judged in relation to higher order principles of good/bad or right/wrong. Its nature is emergent from the context in which it arises, from the relations and connections it forms and the affects produced through those relations. The ethics of the line of flight are therefore completely immanent, arising from the situation as concrete and specific. This ethically responsive space is experienced “in terms of pure relations of movements rather than a retrospective construct of a socially shared space” (Lorraine, 2005, p. 173). Considering ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’ therefore demands attention not only to our own ‘becoming-other’, but also to the ‘becoming-of-others’ and the affects produced from the conditions of ‘readiness’ that emerge when our lines of flight cross.

Within a multiplicity therefore, ‘readiness’ cannot be understood in terms of separate and discrete entities, of one part of the world being made ‘ready’ for the another part, but must be considered as an affective production emergent from the connection of multiple lines of flight. In this sense, ‘readiness’ becomes a highly complex concept. Reconceptualized as an active-affective-ethical-relation, ‘readiness’ becomes a co-ordination of haecceities, of events emerging from the now of lived experience. As identified in this chapter, the ethical element of this reconceptualization is fundamental to its coherence as a concept. The denial of a line of flight of an-other, in favour of one’s own progression would be to deny ‘readiness’ within the assemblage of forces that make up the multiplicity. To become-active is not to progress at the expense of an-other, but to pursue lines of flight that “lead to the proliferation of enlivening connections” (Lorraine, 2005, p. 163). ‘Readiness’ is complex and requires the kind of cautious experimentation advocated by both Deleuze and
Guattari, and Dewey, deteritorializing educational multiplicities to the extent that we open up the field for unpredictable, dynamic and creative ‘becomings’, but not so much that we lose any form of consistency immanent to the multiplicity itself. Thinking through these concepts, ‘readiness’ can be understood as a complex arrangement of elements within a qualitative multiplicity that creates conditions for the ‘becoming’ of an “open-ended humanity that we can unfold together” (Lorraine, 2005, p. 174). It is the conditions necessary to allow for a departure from predetermined norms, deterriorializing and transforming dominant patterns of learning and development through the following of positive and productive lines of flight. Understood in this way, ‘readiness’ becomes both an ethical and a political concept, the pursuit of which is essential in the development of an open and inclusive landscape of early childhood education.

**Readiness: An active-affective-ethical-relation**

The final section of this chapter will draw a summary of the ideas developed thus far, of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’.

It has been proposed that ‘readiness’ should be considered as something active, that rather than a teleological goal or fixed point in children’s learning and development, ‘readiness’ be considered as part of a process of becoming. The power of becoming in relation to children’s learning and development, it has been argued, is that it moves our focus away from a concern with the production of a specific identity, towards the dynamism of change itself. This has been contrasted with traditional, dominant notions of ‘readiness’ as a measurable phenomenon within which it is considered possible to draw a stable comparison between levels of learning and development and an overarching set of organising principles. In contrast to dominant framings of policy narratives it has been argued that ‘readiness’ is part of an active and unpredictable process that emerges differently for each child.
It has also been argued that ‘readiness’ needs to be an affective concept, emerging as a capacity for affecting and being affected. Affect is concerned with a body’s capacity to act in the world, being related to unknown and unbounded potential and the ability to maximize bodily capacities in a given moment. Focus is therefore shifted from the achievement of ‘readiness’ as a specific form, identity or function – measurable in relation to specific goals and outcomes - towards ‘readiness’ as emerging in affective relationships, as the conditions necessary to maximize bodily capacities and potentials.

The discussion in this and previous chapters has also argued that ‘readiness’ needs to be defined as fundamentally relational, as a body’s ability to enter into productive encounters through which their belonging to and being in the world can be marked. Crucially however, this thesis also contends that ‘readiness’ must have an ethical sensibility. In thinking of ‘readiness’ as the ability to maximize bodily potential, this cannot be at the expense of another. Thinking through affect highlights the relationship between capacities for affecting and being affected. By maximizing the potentials and capacities of one body, other bodies to which it is connected are inevitably affected in turn, in either productive or destructive ways. Therefore, in considering ‘readiness’ to have an ethical dimension, it is important that what emerges from conditions of ‘readiness’ is active, productive and affirmative for the child and the context within which they are connected.

This conceptualization of ‘readiness’ poses a challenge when considered within the context of conventional contemporary policy discourse and the practices this discourse produces in early childhood spaces. It offers an alternative way of thinking about ‘readiness’, underpinned by onto-epistemological assumptions that are radically different from those that tie ‘readiness’ to predefined goals and outcomes. In order for this reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’ to have an effect in the world therefore, it is not enough to consider it isolation. It must be explored in relation to other contemporary educational concepts with which it intra-acts in practice, the most important of which, as will be argued in the next chapter, is the concept and practice of assessment.
Chapter 8: Readiness-and-assessment

The aim of this chapter is to explore possibilities for reconceptualizing readiness and assessment as inseparable elements of an educational event that are continuously emerging through ongoing active, affective, relational and ethical encounters.

The starting point for this discussion is the realization, emergent through the writing of this thesis, that it is impossible to approach the reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ in isolation. What has emerged from this research is the consideration that, in order to understand the possibilities for a post-normative conception of ‘readiness’, it is necessary to approach it in the context of the educational milieu in which it emerges, which includes the praxis of assessment. This chapter will seek to argue that reconceptualizations of ‘readiness’ and assessment on their own do not go far enough to address the problems identified in this thesis. It is not so much therefore, that normative notions of assessment and ‘readiness’ alone are problematic, but that they are typically approached as separate and discrete concepts.

Through the process of writing this chapter, and indeed the thesis as a whole, it has become apparent how hard it is to think and write about concepts such as ‘readiness’ in non-object-based terms – that is, moving away from ‘readiness’ as a thing to be achieved or assessed. Even when arguing for a movement beyond, or away from, predefined goals and outcomes, it has been all too easy to be drawn back into normative notions that assume a particular future, a readiness for something that can be understood through assessment processes that exist outside of educational moments and events – as goals and outcomes predefined through assessment criteria.

In attempting to deal with this challenge, this chapter explores the concept of readiness-and-assessment, through Biesta’s notion of the three domains of education: qualification, socialization and subjectification. Biesta’s domains of education are used as a frame for this discussion as they allow for an exploration of ‘readiness’ and assessment as features of different educational
contexts, without necessarily setting these contexts up as oppositional. This framing allows for a critique of ‘readiness’ within which it is possible to develop a post-normative concept of ‘readiness-and-assessment’, but without denying or undermining the functions that more normative notions of ‘readiness’ can play within educational contexts. Whilst the aim of this chapter is to critique normative praxis of readiness and assessment therefore, this critique is approached in a very particular manner. As Barad (in Jeulskjaer & Schwennesen, 2012) considers, the aim is to “engage constructively and deconstructively (not destructively)” (p. 14) with a view to “examining the foundations of certain concepts and ideas, seeing how contingency operates to secure the ‘foundations’ of concepts we cannot live without, and using that contingency to open up other possible meanings/matterings” (ibid.).

The chapter will begin with a short exploration of Biesta’s three domains and the implications for understandings of ‘learning’ and ‘education’ that are produced within each domain. The discussion will then move to explore readiness and assessment (and ‘readiness-and-assessment’) in the context of qualification, socialization and subjectification as three functions of education. The main argument made within this chapter is that, whilst they have a place within the milieu of teaching and learning, praxis of readiness and assessment that emerge within domains of qualification and socialization are fundamentally un-educational, in that they relate only to predefined ways of doing, being and socializing. This does not mean that these processes do not have value, but that they do not contribute to the emergence of real educational moments, such as emerge within a domain of subjectification.

Three domains of education: Qualification, socialization and subjectification

Biesta (2009) considers that education generally performs three different, yet related, functions: qualification, socialization and subjectification.

Qualification, Biesta defines as providing people with the knowledge, skills, understanding, dispositions and forms of judgment that allow them (qualify them) to ‘do’ something. This ‘doing’, Biesta considers, spans a spectrum
from very specific training, in preparation for a particular job, task or profession, to more general life skills that may introduce people to modern culture or Western civilization (Biesta, 2009).

The socialization function of education Biesta identifies as the ways in which education prepares us to become members of particular social, cultural and political orders. He states, “Through its socializing function education inserts individuals into existing ways of doing and being and, through this, plays an important role in the continuation of culture and tradition” (2009, p40).

Subjectification, as a function of education, Biesta considers as being about the kinds of subjectivities that become possible as an effect of particular educational arrangements. This function, he states, is best understood as the opposite of socialization, as “it is precisely not about the insertion of newcomers into existing orders, but about ways of being in which the individual is not simply a ‘specimen’ of a more encompassing order” (Biesta, 2009, p. 40). Crucially, the processes through which subjectification comes about are undetermined and are dependent upon “a desire for a particular democratic mode of human togetherness” (Biesta, 2011, p. 142), rather than knowledge about what a person is or should become (ibid). Subjectification operates through, and impacts upon, the person within their educational milieu, and through this function therefore, “children and young people come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others” (Biesta, 2015, p. 77).

In order to identify the relational nature of these three functions of education, Biesta represents them in the form of a Venn diagram, highlighting the overlaps between the three areas (see figure 7). As he states, “the more interesting and important questions are actually about the intersections between the areas rather than the individual areas per se” (2009, p. 41).
The relational nature of these three functions makes it difficult to discuss each in isolation. As such, the following section of this chapter will explore the concept of readiness and assessment in relation to qualification and socialization, recognizing the entangled nature of these domains and their effects. It will argue that whilst these two functions are considered, to some extent, to be important and necessary features of schooling, they can only produce a normative, individualistic and limited praxis of readiness and assessment. By working with subjectification as a function of education, it is argued in section 2 of this chapter, that it becomes possible to conceptualize a praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ that emerges as post-normative in that it is fundamentally open and undetermined (Biesta, 2011, p. 152).

**Section 1**

**Assessing readiness: Qualification and socialization**

*Behaviourist assumptions*

Biesta (2015) defines qualification as having “to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions” (p. 77). These knowledges, skills and dispositions allow people to ‘do’ something in the world, qualifying them for something specific. Assessment of such knowledge therefore takes a very specific form in which it is possible to establish a linear and predictable trajectory between learning experiences and assessment criteria. There are
parallels between this notion of qualification and what Torrance (2012) describes as a behaviourist tradition of assessment, in which “we define our objectives, teach to them quite specifically and ensure that teachers and students know what counts as achieving the objective, that is they know what behavior is required of them for successful completion of the task” (p. 326). Underpinned by such assumptions, assessment can be considered to be a matter of observing whether individuals are able to produce specific knowledge when they are prompted to do so (Delandshere, 2002), a conception that Delandshere (2002) considers is “well articulated in simple, essentialist and mechanistic terms” (p. 1463).

Assessment practices informed by such assumptions are constructed to identify evidence of particular knowledge, skills and dispositions. This can be seen within much mainstream educational assessment in the primary and secondary years (Torrance, 2011), but also in early years contexts and frameworks. It can be argued, that within spaces of early childhood education, learning environments are very often set up in order to produce a particular response from the children within them. The concept of “planned, purposeful play” (DfE, 2012, p. 9), for example, can in some contexts take on such behaviourist assumptions, for example ‘play’ that is planned with a specific aim in mind, such as the provision of simple number puzzles with the sole intention of developing numerical recognition, or ‘playful’ phonics activities designed with the limited intention of developing correspondence between written letters and spoken sounds. The key characteristic of such activities, in arguing that they are underpinned by behaviourist assumptions, is the pattern of stimulus-response. A clear, desirable trajectory can be traced between a particular stimulus and a response that is validated, often through praise. This pattern can also be commonly seen within behaviour management strategies based on a system of rewarding desired behaviours.
For Stephanie, carpet time was a familiar and enjoyable part of her day within the Reception classroom. It was one of the only times that the whole class would come together, in the same space, focused on the same activity. Carpet time, in Stephanie’s experience, had a particular structure. The children had all been assigned spaces on the carpet in front of the teacher, spaces determined and arranged to be conducive to productive learning, ensuring each child was free from unwanted distractions, such as other children with whom they might chat, fiddle or fidget. Stephanie understood the expectations of the children at carpet time well – they were expected to sit still, with their legs crossed, their attention on the adult who was leading the session. Stephanie knew how to perform these behaviours, keeping her eyes focused on the adult or particular visual stimulus being used, sitting as still as possible, emphasizing the physical characteristics of this performance – back straight, finger pushed to her lips to indicate she understood the need to speak only when invited to. Stephanie also knew how to interpret when her performance had been recognized, showing great pleasure in being identified as performing ‘good sitting’ and ‘good listening’, her own perfect performance being celebrated in an effort to encourage the same performance in others. Stephanie’s pride in receiving this praise was obvious, sketched on her face in a broad smile, usually followed by the slight relaxation of her physical position. She had performed well and been recognized for it!

The pattern of stimulus, response and validation is evident in examples such as this. Crucially, this pattern of teaching and learning positions assessment as a relatively straightforward task. It is rooted in capturing observable behaviours in children and relating these to predefined expectations or outcomes and is a process through which assessment and learning are fundamentally separate acts. Assessment defines desirable outcomes of learning (aspects of qualification) and as such assumes that ‘readiness’ can be assessed through observable behaviours and outcomes which can be
identified as characteristic of ‘readiness’, or not, through comparison with abstracted and generalized standards of behaviour, skills and knowledge.

It is also possible to draw a link between these kinds of behaviourist assumptions and what Biesta defines as the socialization function of education – the ways in which education prepares individuals to become members of particular social, cultural and political orders (Biesta, 2015). In relation to ‘readiness’, behaviourist assumptions can be seen in the common use of ‘priming activities’ (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000) within early childhood settings, activities through which children are socialized into dominant cultures of schooling. As indicated in the narrative above, the priming of ‘schoolified’ (Moss, 2013) behaviours, such as sitting still on the carpet during group sessions or putting up a hand to indicate the desire to contribute to a session, can be interpreted as having behaviourist foundations. This can be seen, in particular, in terms of the responses of adults to children’s acceptable performance of these behaviours, which can often elicit either praise or reprimand, thus reinforcing the accepted behaviour. Assessing ‘readiness’ therefore becomes partially about assessing the performance of these particular behaviours, skills, knowledge and characteristics in ways that indicate children’s perceived ability (their level of qualification) to interact productively with a particular school culture and the demands of learning within that culture.

Constructivist assumptions

Crucially, the particular school culture into which children are socialized does not have to be normative on a general scale, indeed the particular culture may vary from context to context. As such, qualification and socialization, as functions of education, may also be underpinned by social constructivist assumptions which perceive knowledge to be an active process of construction, wholly dependent on context and impossible to separate from the individual. The term ‘social constructivist’ is used here very broadly to denote assumptions about learning and development that emerge from a specific context and are culturally and contextually bound: “… approaches
[that] see knowledge as constructed through interaction, rather than transmitted through instruction” (Torrance, 2012, p. 326). Learning in this sense is understood as a product of social and material interactions in particular places and spaces. Within the context of qualification and/or socialization however, this learning (and the assessment of this learning) is normalized in relation to the social context into which children are socialized or within which their knowledge, skills and dispositions qualify them to be participants. Worryingly, this normalization can create inconsistency in the ways in which learning is conceptualized and assessed.

Such inconsistency, it is argued here, can be seen in the way in which assessment is structured within the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014) and the relation of assessment procedures to understandings of knowledge and learning. Within the Early Years Foundation Stage, ‘effective’ learning and teaching are considered to be underpinned by three specific characteristics:

“…” playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’; active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things” (DfE, 2014, p. 9).

These assumptions about learning can be seen to be underpinned by constructivist perspectives, in which children ‘develop their own ideas’, ‘in different ways’ and ‘at different rates’, and do this through “positive relationships” (DfE, 2014, p. 6) and within “enabling environments” (ibid). Guidance on formative assessment is consistent with these assumptions, being based on practices of observation in order to understand a child’s “level of achievement, interests and learning styles” (DfE, 2014, p. 13), observations which can then be used to “shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations” (ibid.). The inconsistency becomes apparent however, when these assumptions are considered in conjunction with the statutory summative assessment mechanisms in place at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The EYFS Profile (STA, 2013) which, at the time of
writing, must be completed for every child in the final term of the year in which they turn five years old, assesses each child against the early learning goals, requiring teachers and practitioners to “indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are exceeding expected levels, or not yet reaching expected levels (‘emerging’)” (DfE, 2014, p. 14). Whilst constructivist understandings recognise children’s learning as being non-normative, assessment procedures, in contrast, enact a single point of comparison for all children, something that is enhanced by the statutory nature of the profile which “must be completed for all children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities” (DfE, 2014, p. 14). The role of observation in this context can be likened to what Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) understand “as a means to assess children’s psychological development in accordance with predetermined stages of a ‘normal’ child” (p. 123), thus constructing a normative framework through which to interpret and assess ‘readiness’. Moss (2005) cautions that practices of observation and listening to children can in fact be used as a technology to ‘know’ and to ‘govern’ children’s learning and behaviour according to such prescribed goals and outcomes. These recommended practices are focused both on understanding the contextual nature of the individual child’s learning, whilst also detecting deficiency, lack and deviation from expected norms.

**Miss Hadley**

*Miss Hadley had been the Reception class teacher of a small village school for a number of years. Each year, 30 new children would arrive in her class, about to embark on their first year of school. The school had a nursery on site, which many of the children had attended in the years leading up to them starting school. The proximity of the nursery to the school meant that Miss Hadley was able to get to know many of these children before they started school, making visits to the nursery in the summer term and getting to know the children in the nursery context, with which they were familiar, before they began school. Many of these children had older siblings who were currently in, or had been through, the school previously meaning that Miss Hadley had*
known a number of this new intake since they were babies, having worked with their families over previous years.

Before the children started in her class, Miss Hadley would ensure she met with their nursery teachers, their key persons and their parents and carers, discussing the children’s strengths, interests and those things they found challenging, in order to build up a picture of each child, a picture that enabled her to prepare her classroom with resources the children would find interesting, enabling them to feel comfortable and to settle in comfortably at the beginning of the school year.

Another important focus for Miss Hadley when engaging in these discussions was establishing an idea of each child’s ‘ability’ level, whether they were ‘higher ability’, ‘middle ability’ or ‘lower ability’. This information was important to Miss Hadley as it contributed to her organization of classroom structures for the Reception year, enabling her to understand where children might need support to ‘catch up’ and make a ‘good start’, particularly in relation to areas such as phonics, on which there was a strong emphasis throughout the year.

Different functions of documentation and assessment are evident within this narrative. On the one hand there is a focus on socialization, on getting to know the children and adapting the physical environment to ensure it captures their interests and absorptions, thus enabling them to become socialized effectively into the school context. On the other hand, there is a sense of identifying areas of weakness or a lack in their knowledge and understanding which can inform on-going classroom activity and plans for specific interventions through which children can become sufficiently ‘qualified’ to cope with the teaching and learning demands they will encounter in this context. There is a danger however, that by rooting assessment in these functions of education, the complexity of how children’s learning is interpreted, understood and experienced is reduced.
Assessment as a mechanism of complexity reduction

Within these domains of education; socialization and qualification; assessment can be seen to take on a function of complexity reduction in relation to children’s learning. Typically, the reduction of complexity through assessment can be understood as happening in two distinct ways, as a prospective process, and as a retrospective process (Biesta, 2010). Assessment typically happens after the event of learning has taken place, through processes that judge whether that learning is valid and valuable. In this sense, learning is judged retrospectively. In much mainstream educational practice however, the standards against which learning is judged are identified prior to the event of learning taking place, through the prospective setting of goals, targets and standardized outcomes. Assessment frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013) could therefore be considered to perform a function of prospective complexity reduction. Biesta explains this, saying that;

“… because educational systems are recursive systems, that is, systems in which the ways in which the ‘elements’ interpret the situation they are in impacts upon their actions and this on the overall direction of the system as a whole, the anticipation of assessment will not be without effect” (2010, p. 9).

The kinds of learning experiences and opportunities constructed for children are inevitably effected by the outcomes expected of both children and educators, something that, in relation to ‘readiness’, can be seen in the development of the type of ‘priming events’ (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000) discussed earlier.
Throughout his teaching career, Mr Bennett had taught across the early years age range, from nursery, working with 3 year olds, to Year 2, supporting children to take their Key Stage 1 SATs (the National Curriculum standardized tests). Currently, he was teaching in a Reception class of a large infant school. One day, on a visit to the school, I asked Mr Bennett what his personal thoughts and feelings were regarding the idea of 'readiness'. He responded,

"I think that for children to be ready for school we need to focus on their personal, social and emotional development first and foremost. They need to be ready to take on all of the kinds of things that we're going to throw at them once in school I suppose, so, we need to ensure they're able to listen, to ask questions, to be able to think critically, all of those kinds of things. They need to be able to have their own ideas, their own opinions. And then there's the physical development. Sometimes we expect children to be able to come straight in and hold a pencil, but we forget about the important skills that come before that. You know, I think those pre-writing skills, they're really important. They also need to learn how to communicate with their peers and adults, all those kinds of things really."

Mr Bennett developed this point, saying,

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6 In receiving comments on this chapter I was asked about the idea that, as a researcher, I might have asked questions within the dialogues presented in this chapter that led teachers to particular kinds of comments about 'readiness'. This is an interesting point of reflection in the context of the methodological approach that emerged within this study. Dialogue within the ethnographic fictions presented in this chapter is a fictionalized account of discussions and observed events experienced by myself, as the researcher, throughout the course of this research project. In keeping with the methodological focus of this project, I do not attempt to minimize my own role in these conversations, but include the words of educators and children as provocations to the thinking developed and represented in this chapter. A reader of this work may ask, "Where did these words come from? What is the back story? Who is the researcher? Is it journal data or interview data? From one interview or multiple?" (Youngblood Jackson, 2013, p. 113). In short, the words presented in these narratives are an entangled composition – they are journal data and interview data and memory data. My own histories, ideas and values, as the researcher experiencing these narrative events, are not denied – the comments made by others are influenced by and in response to my own, in dialogue. There is no inherent truth or singular perspective of the research participant that is trying to be represented. It is data as a "productive force" (Youngblood Jackson, 2013, p. 114), as a provocation to thinking, in which I, as the researcher, am wholly present.
“Those children that haven't been to nurseries, you can see there's a huge, huge difference. You know, those children that maybe aren't as willing to take risks and be independent. It's like this year, you can notice some children, they just came straight in on the transfer days and they were playing and they were chatting to everybody.”

Talking about his opinions and experiences, ideas of independence, confidence and effective communication, as being important characteristics of children who were ‘ready’ for school, were clearly evident. Within Mr Bennett’s classroom, the children were regularly praised for independent thought and action, often rewarded by being given special jobs to do, such as taking notes to another class or to the office, thus reinforcing the value of independence. Children taking responsibility for their own belongings and managing their own personal care and hygiene was also emphasized, being consistently praised and rewarded, for example when getting ready for swimming, children would be rewarded with stickers for getting changed unaided.

Many of the behaviours identified by the class teacher in this narrative as indicating children’s ‘readiness’ for school are related to them having had a particular pre-school or home experience, being ‘ready’ to interact with the school environment in expected ways and to perform behaviours that are recognizable in the school context. Such practices and behaviours can be seen to be influenced by the anticipation of a particular school culture, including assessment goals and outcomes that act to define the identity of a child who is ‘ready’ for school. A similar pattern can be seen as children progress from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.
Miss Wilson

Throughout the school year, Miss Wilson’s classroom routines and structures shifted and changed in terms of the balance of pedagogical experience she aimed for within her planning. Early on in the year there was a dominance of child led experience and activity, moving as the year progressed to an increasing focus on group and whole class sessions led by adults. The rationale for this shift was preparation for Key Stage 1, in which children would experience a greater proportion of their learning as structured by adults. Towards the end of the year in Miss Wilson’s Reception class, planned experiences focused on ‘readiness’ in different ways, in terms of the knowledge and skills children would need in order to engage productively with Key Stage 1 learning experiences, in particular focusing on children’s learning and progression in literacy and numeracy; and also in terms of the behaviours and dispositions that would be expected of them in these ‘more formal’ environments.

The expectation of a particular school culture, the anticipation of predefined learning experiences and the preparation for these, can therefore be seen to enact what Biesta (2010) sees as an almost inevitable process of prospective complexity reduction. He states,

“... the fact that the elements within the system – students and teachers – are generally aware that at some point achievements will be selected and assessed will most likely influence the actions within the system and this will contribute to the direction in which the system will evolve” (p. 9).

This sense of prospective complexity reduction, enacted through particular ‘priming events’ and shifts in pedagogical approach, may be heightened by the advent of baseline assessments in Reception classes in England, introduced by the Department for Education in 20157. Reporting on the plans

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7 In April 2016 the Department for Education released a press release communicating that Reception baseline assessments would not be used as a measure of progress, as planned, after the findings of a comparability study which concluded that the 3 assessments from which
for baseline assessment, Kirkup (2015) identifies that “All approved baseline schemes will have to provide assessments linked to the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage in three areas of learning: communication and language, literacy, and numeracy” (p. 20). Writing for the National Foundation for Educational Research, she identifies that “Baseline assessments will need to address the different experiences and the different levels of attainment, knowledge and skills that children bring to school” (ibid.). The standardized nature of these assessments may act to further normalise conceptions of ‘readiness’, strengthening the idea of a single point of comparison for all children in terms of their learning, their development, their ‘readiness’ for school and for increasingly formal educational contexts. This normalization is alluded to in Kirkup’s (2015) report, where she identifies that baseline assessments “must be accessible to at least 99 percent of children, although some children may be able to complete only a small part of the assessment” (pp. 20–21). The kind of inconsistencies already alluded to in this chapter are also evident in the context of baseline assessment, in which, whilst “Schemes may be adaptive or offer appropriate routing to enable all children to demonstrate what they can do” (Kirkup, 2015, p. 20), “The assessor must make a single yes/no decision for each assessment ‘item’” (ibid.). Whilst the assessments may aim to identify what children ‘can do’ therefore, this is within the constraints of what is identified as valuable by the ‘assessment items’ detailed within in the baseline frameworks.

**Readiness and assessment: A linear relationship**

As a mechanism of complexity reduction, standardized assessments, such as baseline assessments or the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013), could therefore be considered to create distance within educational contexts. This distance is a form of separation between the learner and what is validated as learning through assessment processes. Assessing children
against predefined goals and outcomes acts to decontextualize learning from the process of assessment, enacting what Fenwick (2010) considers to be an ordering of practice at a distance. Standards, states Fenwick, “aspire to ensure consistency and comparability in the everyday conduct that occurs at diverse locations in which a whole constellation of relations meet and weave together in particular ways to constitute practice” (p. 55). Assessment and readiness are therefore conceptualized as fundamentally separate with assessment standing outside of the learning through which ‘readiness’ emerges. The relationship between readiness and assessment within the domains of socialization and qualification is therefore a mechanistically linear one, in which assessment both follows and precedes learning as a predictable event on a simplistic and linear trajectory. This separation of assessment and learning, and by extension readiness, also affects a culture of individualization with regard to both children and teachers. With regard to assessing ‘readiness’ within this wider context, this individualized conception is pervasive. Children are assessed on an individual basis and these statutory assessments contribute to a comparison of ‘achievement’ at local and national levels. Teachers may be assessed through performance management structures, which very often reduce conceptions of ‘readiness’ to quantitative data – striving to ensure a particular percentage of children acquire a particular level of knowledge and skill across different curriculum areas.

**Miss Wilson cont.**

*Among the influences on the shifts in pedagogy within Miss Wilson’s reception classroom throughout the year, she identified performance related pay as having an impact on ideas and practices of ‘readiness’."

“At the moment the structure is obviously quite child initiated, cos we’re in the first term, but as the year goes on we’ll do more and more adult led activities with the children. I’ll have groups of children come to sit with me and I’ll go through all of the children every day for a literacy and a maths focus and the"
phonics as well so opportunities for observing them in their own activities almost go out of the window by February time.”

Miss Wilson spoke of the performance expectations that were exerted on her as a class teacher through the introduction of performance related pay\(^8\) and the pressure that she felt from this development. She reflected on the influence that this development of teachers pay arrangements may have on ideas and practices linked to ‘readiness’ for Key Stage 1.

“I think it’s going to change this year, definitely because, if I've got to have 80% of my children achieving at least a level 3, or phase 3, ready for phase 4 in phonics, what's that, that's maybe 18 children, something like that, maybe 17 or 18 children out of my class that have got to be at that level and you know, you look at your class now and you think how? I don't know, there’s certain children that you think, well, I don’t know what to do, so you almost think right, I need to start doing all this intervention and things like that now, because you want them to be at that level. You want it for them, but also for you, because its pay related, and I wouldn't want to lose pay, or lose money. It can be really difficult. We do try really hard to have as much child-initiated stuff as we can really, but it is difficult because we also have to think about the Key Stage 1 curriculum and trying to get them to where they need to be in July, ready for Year 1 next year, which is hard.”

Assessments such as those described by the class teacher in this story are snapshots, based on observable evidence of children’s knowledge and achievements and framed in such a way as to enable comparison both in terms of ‘performance’ against other individuals, settings or areas, and in terms of an individual’s (child’s or teacher’s) progress over time. For example the phonics assessments she alludes to as being so important during the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 are performed through discrete and individualized tests, designed to check the

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\(^8\) In 2013, the Department for Education introduced new arrangements for teachers pay in England, removing pay progression based on length of service and linking all pay progression to performance (DfE, 2013b).
children’s acquired knowledge in this area (for assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA) for the 2016 Key Stage 1 Phonics test see Standards and Testing Agency (STA), 2016).

‘Learning’ as a political choice

At the most basic level, identifying something as learning through assessment of an event or experience, is in itself already a form of retrospective complexity reduction (Biesta, 2009, p. 9). Assessment practices actively define what counts as valuable learning in a specific context. As Biesta (2010) states, “‘Learning’…is not a descriptive term – it is not a noun – but it is an evaluative term which operates as a selector vis-à-vis a possibly infinite number of options to select from” (p. 9). What emerges as ‘learning’ is, therefore, in no way inevitable or natural, but is an active political choice, an evaluation of experience and a conscious recognition of those aspects of experience that are considered valuable in a particular context. Based on this logic therefore, if ‘learning’ is understood as an evaluative term, the assessment of that ‘learning’ can be seen to make specific ‘cuts’ (Barad, 2007) within educational spaces. Based on what is considered valuable in terms of ‘learning’, including particular ways of performing ‘readiness’, certain events are cut apart from general experience, made visible and given value based on their significance for children’s ‘learning’ and progression. Where this becomes particularly problematic is where these cuts are made prior to the event of learning taking place on the basis of the need for qualification or socialization into a particular future context, for which the individual must be ‘ready’. Whilst in some cases this might be a necessary function of schooling, it is argued in this thesis that readiness, understood within such a framework, is fundamentally un-educational. It is based on an individualized conception of learning that “refers to what people as individuals can do” (Biesta, 2009, p. 38) in relation to a particular societal or cultural norm or expectation, as opposed to a conception of education that is fundamentally relational, based on engagement in undetermined processes that lead to the emergence of new ways of doing, being and thinking.
Fenwick (2010) does recognise, however, that predictable standards and unpredictable educational complexity are not exclusive – complexity is not irretrievably reduced through assessment practices – they can be performed together in educational spaces. The following part of this chapter will explore this contention through Biesta’s domain of subjectification, arguing that this domain allows space for a praxis of readiness-and-assessment within which these concepts can function together as part of a process of real learning, where the intention is not to produce consistency with established norms and standards, but to create space for the emergence of new and unexpected subjectivities.

Section 2

‘Readiness-and-assessment’: Subjectification

According to Biesta (2015), the domain of subjectification “has an orientation toward emancipation, that is, toward ways of doing and being that do not simply accept the given order but have an orientation toward the change of the existing order so that different ways of doing and being become possible” (p. 64). As Biesta (2015) states, subjectification expresses an interest in the subjectivity of those being educated, perceiving them as “subjects of action and responsibility” (p. 18).

In order for this subjectification to take place however, the systems within which education takes place need to create space for this to happen. As such, the following part of this chapter will explore understandings of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ that hold the possibility of opening out to ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical relation’, engaging with ideas of ‘expansive’, as opposed to reductive pedagogical systems (Fenwick, 2008).

Readiness-and-assessment in an expansive pedagogical system

Within this discussion, ‘learning’ is conceptualized as a process of change and transformation that occurs through engagement with particular experiences or
events. Working with standardized frameworks and curricula however, the ways in which learning is understood and recognized run the risk of becoming taken for granted. Assessment frameworks specify what this change looks like in practice and provide criteria against which to judge the outcomes of such processes of transformation. The risk inherent in such frameworks is that the subtleties of learning are lost as we search for a particular outcome, rather than engaging in practices that recognize “learning as unpredictable, as rooted not in individual heads but in provisional networks of people, activity, technology, and that is expansive rather than acquisitive” (Fenwick, 2008, p. 2).

This expansive concept of learning, as articulated by Fenwick (2008), is a useful counterpoint to the acquisitive, sequential and predetermined trajectories of learning and development defined by national policy guidance. An expansive concept of learning is active and unpredictable, with learning proceeding rhizomatically rather than through mechanistic sequence. It creates space in which narratives of learning can unfold that “reveal children in creative, unexpected and unprecedented ways” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 135). Learning in this form is ‘boundless and unpredictable’ (Berger, 2010) with no preconceived end. It is also concerned with the continual production of the new – of change and transformation. As already stated however, this idea of learning as transformation and the production of the new, must be understood in particular terms. As Berger (2010) identifies, “It is important to note that the ‘new’ that is proposed here is not the same as the new in the modernist sense of innovation, that is, as progress toward an ideal” (p. 62). The ‘new’ in this sense, as Atkinson (2013) describes, is “a project grounded in the singularities of experience and the immanence of local becomings and is concerned not with a preordained subjectivity but with a subject-yet-to-come” (p. 1). This is what Atkinson talks about as ‘real learning’ – an active and transformational process that, far more than the acquisition of particular knowledge, skills and attitudes, involves a process of moving to “a new or modified ontological state” (ibid.).
Atkinson’s conception of ‘real learning’ is radically different from the acquisitive, behaviourist and socio-cultural models related in this chapter to the educational domains of qualification and socialization. Atkinson (2013) conceives of learning as an ‘event’, a “disruption, a rupture, to established patterns of existence” (p. 1). He states, “Real learning for me involves a puncturing of assimilated ways of knowing, thinking and doing in the emergence of a new or reconfigured world for the learner” (ibid.). This is similar to what Masny (2013) describes as a Deleuzian conception of learning as a “rupture or shock” (p. 13). According to Masny (2013), “bodies learn as their capacities for affecting and being affected are transformed by the array of entities they encounter” (p. 13). Bodies learn through affective encounters within the systems they inhabit and as such, “learning is a process of becoming sensitive to signs and events, learning how to be affected by them and to affect them” (ibid.).

This idea of ‘real learning’, of learning as a moment of rupture or shock, is consistent with the reconceptualized concept of ‘readiness’ developed within this thesis, as something rooted in the affects of bodies and their possibilities for action. As an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’, this idea of ‘readiness’ is congruent with what Atkinson describes as ‘pedagogies against the state’. For Atkinson (2013), ‘pedagogies against the state’ are concerned with moving beyond “established methodologies, policies or ways of thinking about and supporting learning, as though we know what learning is” (p. 2) and instead recognizing and responding to the “haecceity and the truth of learning” (ibid.). By responding pedagogically to the ‘thisness’ or haecceities of learning, Atkinson considers that we are able to “continuously expand our understanding of what learning is or can become” (ibid.). This understanding of learning is congruent with a conception of ‘readiness’ as rooted in action and affect and prompts us towards a situation in which we are constantly questioning and expanding our perception of what that ‘readiness’ might looking like in practice. Within a domain of subjectification therefore, it could be claimed that readiness-and assessment are concerned with ‘subjects-yet-to-come’ (Atkinson, 2013). As Atkinson (2013) states,
“In more simple terms we are concerned with an educational project grounded in local practices and temporalities of learning and their local truths, as those evolve for each learner. Such a task cannot clearly anticipate particular subjects and is not grounded in prescribed futures but rather is concerned with a ‘becoming active’ in the world of each learner; with how each learner captures and realizes learning, to extend what it is possible to become, to learn, to think” (p. 10).

Readiness-and-assessment: A coming into presence

These ideas of learning, assessment and readiness, as a rupture that produces something radically new, can also be articulated in terms of what Biesta (2013) describes as ‘coming into presence’. Rather than focusing on the actualization of a subject (the ‘ready-child’) in terms of an identity or essence, Biesta considers that ‘coming into presence’ focuses on an event. This is radical in the context of educational assessment as it concerns not projections or predications of what a child is to become, or the knowledge, skills and characteristics they require to achieve readiness, but as Biesta (2013) articulates, “an interest in that which announces itself as a new beginning” (p. 143).

Crucially, coming into presence as the continual arrival of new beginnings, or what in Deleuzian language we might think about as ‘becoming’, is fundamentally relational. As Biesta (2013) identifies, “What is crucial about the event of ‘coming into presence’ is that it is not something that can be done in isolation. To come into presence is always to come into the presence of others” (p. 143). This is wholly congruent therefore with the concept of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’ and negates any understanding that may consider ‘readiness’ an individualized or individualistic achievement. Drawing on Arendt, Biesta (2013) pursues this idea of coming into presence, the perpetual creation of new beginnings, as wholly dependent upon the ways in which the beginnings of individuals are taken up by others. He states,
“The very condition that makes my ‘coming into presence’ possible – that is, the fact that others take up my beginnings – also disrupts the purity of my beginnings, so to speak, as others should have the freedom to take up my beginnings in their own ways” (ibid.).

Borrowing from Arendt, Biesta identifies that to ‘come into presence’, or as he later articulates it ‘coming into the world’, is an act of plurality. As he states, “it is only under conditions of plurality that everyone’s beginnings can ‘come into presence’, and not just the beginnings of one individual” (ibid). What this highlights in relation to assessment therefore, is that, as Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) state, “Each decision we make is particular to a relationship and a context. A particular question in one relationship with a child or family will not yield the same response in another relationship” (p. 179). Crucially these notions of relationality provide a radical leap away from normative practices and processes of assessment in early childhood education that emphasize ‘readiness’ as an individual phenomenon, and the assessment of ‘readiness’ as separate from the ‘coming into presence’ that emerges through relational encounters.

If ‘readiness’, therefore, is to be understood as an active, affective concept, the kinds of individualized and detached summative assessments that dominate within early childhood education are inadequate. The Early Learning Goals separate ‘readiness’ from ‘assessment’ as distinct moments, meaning that ‘readiness’ can only ever be understood in object-based terms, as a definable goal to be achieved and assessed. In a context of subjectification, in which ‘readiness’ is constantly emerging as new ways of doing and being come into presence, what is required is a praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as entangled phenomena. The question produced at this juncture then, is how do we engage in practices of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ that hold open spaces of possibility for children’s education (subjectification), practices that engage us in encounters that “expand our conceptions of what it is to teach, to learn, to think” (Atkinson, 2013, p. 15)?
By expanding this conception we create a situation in which normative methodologies of assessment must be abandoned. We must engage in what Disch (1994), drawing on Arendt (1979) describes as ‘thinking without banisters’. To ‘think without banisters’, according to Arendt (Arendt, 1979 cited in Disch, 1994) is to think “without categories and formulas….whose basis of (sic) experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in intellectual consistency rather than their adequacy to actual events” (p. 669). The act of ‘thinking without banisters’ is used as a metaphor for movement beyond abstract categories or codes and provides a useful basis for exploring the possibilities that a praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ may hold for understanding the past and holding open the future. This would then allow for a concept of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ in which, as Berger (2010) identifies, “the past conditions us but it does not determine the future” (p. 70).

Section 3

A praxis of readiness-and-assessment: Pedagogical narration

Based on the arguments developed in this thesis, it is claimed that ‘readiness-and-assessment’ emerge together as an active process. Indebted to past experiences, but without being conditioned by a predefined future, ‘readiness’ becomes an opening to possibility that emerges through assessment. Crucially, this assessment is non-linear, occurring through folded time as opposed to standard conceptions of linear, chronological time. Important questions emerge in response to this notion of ‘readiness-and-assessment’, such as: how is it possible to usefully support our understanding of what happens at this interface in time, through which ‘readiness’ emerges? And, how can we map the trajectory of educational events in a manner that recognizes the complexity of each event, and that, through assessment opens out to unknown and unpredictable acts of subjectification in the future?

Berger (2010) discusses a model of assessment within early childhood education that is useful in exploring these questions. Drawing on ideas of ‘documentation’ developed within the preschools of Reggio Emilia in Northern
Italy, she explores the notion of ‘pedagogical narration’, thinking with the work of Arendt in order to frame assessment as a political act. Berger (2010) describes pedagogical narration as “a process by which educational experiences in early childhood settings are narrated and made visible in the public realm, thus becoming subject to critical thought and dialogue” (p. 58).

These narrations, Berger considers, provoke us to resist normalized conceptions of learning, education and assessment, thinking in ways that “open political space for discussions of possible meanings” (ibid.) of the experiences we encounter and the effects of those experiences. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) discuss pedagogical narration as an alternative to “approaches that focus on universal developmental stages [within which] educators act as arbitrators, overseeing the children and evaluating them against predefined categories of normal development” (p. 55). As a tool through which assessment can be enacted, pedagogical narration therefore makes learning visible in a manner that invites public dialogue about the event, dialogue through which “educators make decisions about curriculum development” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 114). A pedagogical narration constructs a material trace of a learning event through documentation in multiple forms, including photographs, words and artefacts. It is a fragment cut from experience that “provides a focus for concrete, meaningful adult and child reflection on children’s learning experiences and processes” (ibid.).

By transforming ongoing action and experience into a “tangible appearance” (Berger, 2010, p. 62), pedagogical narration creates a shared history for an early childhood community in a particular context. Knowledge is co-constructed as “educators partner with children, families, and their colleagues to collaboratively research, document, critically reflect on, deepen, and share their contextualized understandings” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 66). In such a context therefore, assessment is about collective and relational understandings of ‘readiness’ that emerge through dialogue and discussion, rather than existing prior to these relational encounters in assessment criteria and standards. A crucial difference between this praxis of pedagogical narration and more traditional forms of assessment based on predefined goals
and outcomes, is the acceptance that assessment can only ever provide “partial visibility” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 187). As Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) caution, “We must be careful not to take the narration to be an objective depiction of an event” (ibid.). As such, pedagogical narration deliberately moves away from representational assumptions that might consider it possible to define a fixed image of a child as a learner. Indeed, the essence of this approach is a belief that,

“When we isolate a moment in time and capture it in photos or text, we necessarily leave details out. There is always another figure or object just beyond the picture frame; other words always precede or follow a text. When we capture these moments of a child’s day, we must treat them as fragments and not as a representation of a child” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 187).

Where Arendtian thought is useful in this conception of pedagogical narration is in the very challenge to “create stories that are fragmented, incomplete” (Berger, 2010, p. 64). The aim of assessment in this form is, therefore, not to produce a definitive picture of the child as a learner, to assign them to an identity category or to position them in relation to standardized norms, as may be the case within domains of qualification or socialization. The aim, in keeping with Biesta’s conception of subjectification, is to provoke interpretation and critical reflection, focusing on the educational moments through which readiness emerges, provoking “a kind of interpersonal visiting where diverse viewpoints (of children, teachers, consultants, parents and community members) are in dialogue about the event” (Berger, 2010, p. 65).

Assessment as a moment of interruption

Recognizing educational assessment as a rupture or moment of interruption opens space to think about ‘readiness-and-assessment’ in both retrospective and prospective terms. Whilst the documentation and construction of stories acts to create a collective history – acting as a tool through which to interpret the past – these stories also provide an opening to the future. As Berger (2010) states, “Stories continually interrupt history because they carry the capacity to begin” (p. 69). If, therefore, we understand ‘readiness’ as existing.
in a fold or interface between past, present and future, assessment processes must be able to look both backwards and forwards in their entangled accounts and interpretations of ‘readiness’. The central questions for assessment are shifted therefore, from concerns with ‘are they ‘ready’?’ and the achievement of particular goals and outcomes – questions which assume a distance and separation between readiness and assessment - to questions of what ‘readiness-and-assessment’ do together as they emerge in particular contexts, and what the conditions are that enable their emergence?

This concern with the effects of ‘readiness’ leads us to question how it is possible to frame praxis of assessment that hold open space for becoming and emergence? Typically, assessment practices based on the comparison of measurable or observable knowledge and behaviours follow a predictable linear trajectory. They retrospectively assess the knowledge, skills and behaviours children have acquired in order to predict whether they are ‘ready’ to move onto a next stage or phase of learning. If the outcome of that assessment is that they are not ‘ready’ for this next step, particular interventions may be put in place in order to support them on this journey, or adjustments made to the learning experiences planned for them in the future. This is a common model of formative assessment – employing regular and ongoing assessment in order to inform the day-to-day practice in educational settings, a practice that is often described as ‘assessment for learning’. Taking a critical perspective however, Torrance (2012) discusses formative assessment models as being typically predicated on particular outcomes, being “wholly focused on intended learning processes and outcomes, with practice always being congruent with intended outcomes” (p. 325). Formative assessment practices, Torrance (2012) considers, vary according to the beliefs and traditions underpinning them and in key respects stand in contradistinction. He states, “the behaviourist traditions of mastery learning takes a very different view of the role of assessment and feedback compared with more social constructivist perspectives” (p. 326). Whilst a behaviourist practice of formative assessment “may imply a very structured, hierarchical, ‘building block’ approach to curriculum organization and assessment
procedures" (ibid.), Torrance considers that within a social constructivist informed practice,

“The argument deriving from Vygotsky (1978, 1986) is that it is important to identify not just what the learner has (or has not) achieved, but what they might achieve with the help of an experienced teacher or, in some cases a collaborating peer” (ibid.).

The implication of this perspective however, is that even if knowledge and understanding are considered to be socially constructed and developed through interaction (Torrance, 2012), we can know in advance what children are ‘ready’ to achieve. There are defined ‘next steps’ towards which children are progressing and a hierarchy of experience set up through the notion of a more experienced or knowledgeable other. Formative assessment therefore acts to identify ‘where’ children are, ‘what’ they can do and ‘how’ they can be supported to move ‘forward’ in their learning (understanding successful learning in terms of a forward trajectory of ongoing change).

This idea however implies a deficit or a gap between what a child can do at the moment of formative assessment and normative notions of what we would like them to be able to do in the future. The role of teaching and learning is to close that gap, to bring the child up, or along, to the next level, at which point they will be ‘ready’ to engage with more complex knowledge and experience. It implies a mechanistic linearity to learning and education that frames formative assessment in a particular way.

Taking the development of children’s writing skills as an example, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014), children are expected to be able to,

“… use their phonic knowledge to write words which match spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.” (p. 11).
In the manner of prospective complexity reduction discussed earlier, for children progressing through their early years education, this goal defines a point in the future towards which present activity is directed. Formative assessment therefore becomes focused on where children are in relation to this goal and how they can bridge the gap between present and future knowledge. Torrance (2012) considers that this idea of a gap implies a “linear model of closure” (p. 334) and that the closure of the gap is what formative assessment and feedback to children should be aiming to achieve. Challenging this perspective however, Torrance (2012) argues that,

“… extrapolating from Vygotskian notions of the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’… it is in the gap between teacher and learner and between the learners present knowledge and future understanding that the challenge of learning resides – the crack where the light gets in” (ibid.).

The way in which we understand this ‘gap’ is of fundamental importance to this conceptualization of ‘readiness-and-assessment’. A gap, understood as a void or empty space between points, implies a lack, a deficit that needs to be filled in a specific way in order to join up the points. The ‘challenge of learning’ in this case is to successfully move from ‘A’ to ‘B’ and to be ‘ready’ for the challenges of ‘B’ when you get there. The problem however is that this trajectory is normative. ‘B’ is a fixed point, with a fixed time frame (children must have achieved these elements of writing before the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage or they are not considered ‘ready’ to cope with the demands of the Key Stage 1 curriculum). Whilst it is recognized that children do indeed learn in different ways and at different rates (Early Education, 2012) all of their learning trajectories must converge on this fixed point. What this produces is a closed system within which “divergent possibilities” (Torrance, 2012, p. 338) and new ways of thinking, acting and ‘coming into presence’ are curtailed or redirected to a norm. To follow Torrance’s light metaphor, the light that gets in is channelled and directed in a specific way in order to help bridge the gap and hit a particular point. Assessment therefore becomes a process of reflection operating at a distance, concerned with how well children’s observable behaviours mirror expectations of what they ‘should’ be able to do and know. Based on this notion of a gap, formative assessment
becomes preoccupied with a particular type of question: How wide is the current void between what we want children to know and do and what they are currently capable of? What practices and experiences do we need to provide in order to bridge this gap? However, what if we were able to conceptualize this space, the space between present and future possibilities, differently? And what if we were able to use this different conceptualization as a framework through which to approach ‘readiness-and-assessment’ in a manner that recognizes the importance of education as a domain of subjectification?

Readiness-and-assessment: From a gap to a fold

One way in which this notion of the gap or void can be reconceptualized is by thinking with the idea of the fold. In this case, the notion of the fold is a useful device to open up ways of thinking differently about progression and about the effects of time on learning. Within typical, mechanistically linear models of progress, time is conceived in what Osberg (2015), drawing on Bergson, describes as ‘cinematographical terms’ – “as a series of snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality’ ([Bergson] 1911, p.332), strung together in time, with a predictable cause-and-effect relationship between each discrete ‘snapshot’ and the next” (pp. 3–4). Rather than this ‘cinematographic’ concept of time as a straightforward linear progression, a movement between points that brings about a change in the learner, it is possible to think of time as a process of folding. This is closer to what Bergson conceptualizes as ‘duration’, a notion through which, as Osberg (2015) describes, Bergson interprets a “‘totality’ of the past, the present and the future, inseparably enfolded together as a ‘flux’ of movement (1911, p.186) rather than enfolded in a Parmenidian ‘totality’ of stability” (p. 3). The way in which we conceptualize time is an important, and often overlooked, consideration in educational contexts. Indeed, Kidd (2015), reflecting on her experiences as an educator, considers that “most of the problems I am encountering are connected to time – to notions of linear progress, to a belief that the present will lead, step by step, to a definable future” (p. 108). Alluding to the concept of the ‘gap’ discussed here, Kidd
(2015) considers the impact of such chronological, linear conceptions of time, stating that,

“Ofsted and other policy-makers or enforcers attempt to bridge the seemingly distant future by breaking it down into a ‘specious present’ – a series of mini ‘nows’ which form the impression of a present but which are constantly moving. This flow or motion of time allows for a belief that progress is ongoing, moment by moment; that it can be measured and adjusted incrementally to secure the distant trajectory in a series of steps” (p. 109).

It can be argued that formative assessment is concerned precisely with these ‘mini nows’, with the incremental steps identified as leading to predefined goals and outcomes. These are the stepping-stones that help children traverse the gap and arrive at the other side ‘ready’ to move onto the next stage or phase of their learning.

In order to challenge this conception, it is necessary to consider an alternative notion of time and therefore, of progress. To this end, this discussion draws on a Deleuzian articulation of time as two distinct yet interwoven movements: aion and chronos (Kidd, 2015). These two movements of time offer an alternative to the simple, chronological passage of time that so dominates conventional, Western models of progression and assessment. In these dominant models, learning can be considered to occur in a linear fashion, moving from one goal or milestone to the next as the learner moves from a lesser to a more knowledgeable state. As each milestone is reached, informed by the learner’s past experiences, they are ‘ready’ to move onto the next phase, or stage in their learning journey. Crucially, this future stage is already mapped out for the learner in educational curricula and frameworks of assessment. Progress must be seen to be made towards this pre-mapped future, as children move through the “specious present” (Kidd, 2015, p. 109) in recognizable and definable ways. Time and progress are moving ever forward and it is therefore possible for children to get left behind, even in their earliest years, if they do not progress at the expected rate towards the required goals. For this reason, many children start their school experience already in a state of catch-up, trying desperately to make up the ground
between them and their peers, to cross the gap and become ‘ready’ for the next stage of their predefined learning trajectory.

This linear, chronological and cinematographic conception of time and of progress is so deeply rooted in conventional Western thinking, that it can feel practically impossible to think otherwise. However, as Kidd (2015) states, drawing on Deleuzian concepts of aion and chronos as two movements of time,

“Time in the multiple complexities of the classroom is not rapid and it is not singular. It is bound in prior experiences AND future possibility (aionic). It is also, simultaneously and sometimes broodingly, present (chronos). The two fold in on each other” (p. 107).

This folding of time is a useful concept in conceptualizing a post-normative praxis of assessment. As Deleuze (1990) states,

“... time must be grasped twice, in two complementary though mutually exclusive fashions. First it must be grasped entirely as the living present in bodies which act and are acted upon. Second, it must be grasped entirely as an entity infinitely divisible into past and future, and into the incorporeal effects which result from bodies, their actions and their passions.” (p. 6).

Deleuze considers that, “Only the present exists in time and gathers together or absorbs the past and future. But only the past and future inhere in time and divide each present infinitely” (ibid.). In the context of this discussion this interpretation is of the present as a folding of past and future, a folding that produces endless potentials, what Kidd (2015) describes as an “ontological version of time” (p. 109). This ontological time is one of experience, a lived or private time, as opposed to measured or empirical public time (Kidd, 2015). It is the time that seems to drag during an unpleasant task, or the minutes that seem like hours when waiting for a much anticipated event, the time that shifts and turns, speeds up and slows down in the experience of our daily lives.
Two movements of time: Chronos

In terms of chronos, what matters is the now, “the always limited present” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 64). In Chronos, Kidd (2015) states, “intuition is key – there is a sense that now matters and that becoming requires being watchful, in what Deleuze describes as the newness of the ‘greatest present’” (p. 110). Chronos time is composed of “interlocking presents” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 64) within which “the present is everything; the past and future indicate only the relative difference between the two presents” (ibid.). Chronos time “measures the movements of bodies and depends on the matter which limits and fills it out” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 65). Assessment in chronos time could therefore be considered to address only that which occurs in the moment, with no impingement from future expectations or past experiences.

This concept of chronos could be considered to be concerned with ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as an entangled event ‘in itself’, not making judgements about readiness for something specific, but exploring readiness in the now, readiness to act in the moment and to keep the present open to the continual play of events.

David

Whilst David was in Year 1, he continued to spend a significant portion of his time in his old Reception classroom. In particular, he would spend varying portions of the morning sessions taking part in whole class activities and spending time playing with the children in the Foundation Stage class. David was the only child in his class to do this. The reason for his differing timetable was that, at the beginning of his Year 1 experience, David’s teachers had identified that he was finding the more formal learning and differing expectations of the Key Stage 1 environment a significant challenge. He was exhibiting what they described as ‘challenging behaviour’, which was considered to be disruptive to the rest of the class and their learning.
David’s presence in the Reception class was, however, a source of frustration to the Reception teacher. Her frustration was not however, with David, but with the manner within which this time in her class was approached. She expressed frustration that David was just ‘dumped’ in her classroom for the morning to give the Year 1 class a break, rather than there being a rationale that focused on David’s needs.

Her frustration was rooted in the belief that by simply relocating David when things got tough, a bigger issue was being missed. Whilst she felt that the Year 1 curriculum, with its increased formality, was unsuitable for the needs of children like David, she also felt that only sending him to spend time in the Reception class when he was presenting with ‘challenging’ behaviour was sending the wrong message— that the time spent back in the Reception class, engaging in self-initiated activity, was a punishment, or even in some ways a regression. Whilst she agreed that David did have a more positive experience in the more informal environment of the Reception class, she was frustrated that by simply removing him from the Year 1 classroom, the wider issue of the suitability of the Key Stage 1 curriculum and pedagogy was being missed or ignored.

Considering this notion of chronos time, the difference in the interpretations of David’s ‘readiness’ in the environments of the Key Stage 1 and Reception classrooms could be thought of in terms of the difference between ‘readiness’ in the moment, and ‘readiness’ as a predetermined state. Assessed against specific expectations of learning and behaviour, David was considered ‘not ready’, his performance as a learner in the Key Stage 1 classroom did not fit the norm. During his visits to the Reception class however, his ‘readiness’ could be seen to emerge in context through his interactions with the environment. The expectation of his ‘readiness’ was for him to be able to interact productively in the classroom space (readiness as an active-affective-ethical-relation), rather than readiness for specific tasks or knowledge. During this time, his learning was not focused specifically on curriculum goals and
outcomes, but emerged in the context of each self-chosen learning event as it unfolded.

David continued.

One of the most significant concerns over David’s ‘readiness’ to participate in the Year 1 classroom was over his perceived difficulty focusing and maintaining attention on prescribed tasks, which could lead to him distracting other children and disrupting the classroom environment. Such issues with focus and attention were, however, completely absent during his time in the Reception class. An example of this sustained attention can be seen within the following narrative.

One morning when David visited the Reception classroom, he announced to the teacher that his mum had read him the story of the 3 Billy Goats Gruff before he came to school that morning. He had a plan! His plan was to use his time in the class this morning build to bridge – a bridge that was strong enough to support the weight of a real person! The Reception class teacher asked David how he planned to construct this bridge, to which David replied that he was going to find the strongest bricks in the classroom and use those. David worked for over an hour gathering different materials from around the classroom, designing experimental ways in which he could test their strength, including an elaborate exercise which involved traversing a bundle of sticks taped together with duct tape and balanced between two short towers of bricks. As he worked, David explored elements of maths, science, design and engineering, completely immersed in what, for him, was an important and meaningful exploration. When the time came for David to return to his own classroom, he was adamant that he had not finished – he had only just selected the materials he wanted to use, much more time would be needed for construction and testing. David asked if he could come back and carry on at lunchtime, and it was agreed the materials he was using would be left so they were available for him to continue his work when he was able.
Within this activity, there was no indication of the distracted and distracting child reported by his Year 1 teachers. He was engaged, intensely focused on the task he had create for himself, and through that task was engaging in deep and important learning. Far from the short attention span displayed within adult-planned and directed contexts, which David found it hard to engage with, he was desperate to spend more time on his task – measuring, recording, designing, building and testing – until he was happy his efforts had solved the problem with which he was engaged.

By focusing on the ‘now’ therefore, it is possible that the weight of expectation typically placed on David was reduced, that the shifting of assessment to focus on his actions in the moment, in the context of chronos time, enabled space to be created for his ‘readiness’ to emerge and to be witnessed (assessed) in the classroom milieu. This small narrative carries an important message. That, as Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) caution, “A narrow view of what constitutes normal behavior may lead educators to avoid dealing with issues that have far reaching effects on those with less power and privilege” (p. 53). By focusing primarily on norms of behaviour, dictated by functions of qualification or socialization, children may be denied the opportunity for their ‘readiness’ to come into presence. For this reason it is imperative that we are constantly deconstructing our practices and the assumptions that underpin them.

Two movements of time: Aion

Crucially however, the now is not all there is in the context of the classroom milieu. Inevitably, the now of lived or experienced time is both complicated by and troubles the past and the future. This is what Deleuze describes as Aion time, a time that is “constantly decomposed into elongated pasts and futures” (1990, pp. 64–65). The past and future continuously fold in on themselves in a time that “retreats and advances in two directions at once, being perpetual object of a double question: What is going to happen? What has just happened?” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 65, emphasis added). Time as we experience
it could therefore be considered to be a simultaneous expression of Chronos and Aion, “a pressing present but one in which past events and future possibilities [are] throbbing” (Kidd, 2015, p. 194).

Kidd (2015) expresses these dual aspects of time quite beautifully in her analysis of an extract from John Boyne's children's book The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas;

“In the novel, 9-year-old Bruno, the son of a concentration camp commandant, desperate for a playmate, clambers under the fence into the camp and joins his friend Shmuel. To fit in he puts on a pair of the striped pyjamas that all the prisoners wear. Pulling them over his head he makes the ‘mistake’ of breathing in. The pyjamas smell. Bruno does not make the connection, but the reader does – he is donning the clothes of a dead man. It is an act of foreshadowing. But it is more than this – it is a Deleuzian multiplicity. The pyjamas simultaneously hold the promise of play for Bruno, humiliation for Shmuel, horror for the reader, a suggestion of a life of pain and suffering for the previous owner(s). They carry the future potentiality of Bruno’s own death and his past loneliness and naivety. They carry all the prior knowledge we have of the Holocaust, and for the reader bring together the past, present and future in the moment. Folds upon folds of meaning in a smell.” (p. 195)

In each learning event we are concerned very much with chronos, with the now and with what is possible in that moment. Into each moment however, is a continual folding of past and future. Assumptions, experiences and established forms of knowledge are brought into the present moment from the past, whilst the future is made up of multiple possibilities, some of which will become actualized as they become present. This ontological conception of time, as private time – the intra-action of chronos and aion, contrasts with the very public conception of time that dominates within education. “For education”, states Kidd (2015),

“… there seems to be a presentation of only public time, with constraints and linearity in place. An obsession with linearity and conformity leads to spurious concepts of milestones – points in time by which children should achieve the same goals (i.e. ready for school/work)” (p. 110).
This public time can be seen to function within domains of qualification and socialization, in which assessment becomes focused on comparison to public norms, whether those be the skills and knowledge required to integrate productively into a particular type of workforce, or the characteristics required to become socialized as a certain type of citizen. What this ontological conception of time makes possible however is a notion of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ operating together, without reference to specified, predetermined goals and outcomes as markers of successful progress. It becomes possible to conceptualize a praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ in which these phenomena emerge together in the moment, as an opening to multiple possibilities and the conditions necessary to choose and actualize future possibilities that are ethical and affirmative. Crucially, just as this thesis argues for an active conceptualization of ‘readiness’, it contends that in order for this to be possible, we must also conceive of assessment as an active process, what Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) describe as “a doing, a nomadic ethical act” (p. 187). As an active process of ‘doing’, ‘readiness-and-assessment’ emerge as part of an entangled educational event, a notion that is explored further in section 4 of this chapter.

Section 4

‘Readiness-and-assessment’: an entangled educational encounter

Just as Biesta (2009) identifies the interrelated nature of these three domains of education (qualification, socialization and subjectification), the argument put forward in this thesis is that it is impossible, within a context of educational complexity and subjectification, to separate readiness from processes of assessment. The following section will therefore explore the interrelated nature of these two concepts, and the implications of this for the role of the educator within early childhood education contexts. This conceptualization of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ is therefore concerned with the point where these two concepts meet, the point that has been identified as working within a domain of subjectification, and with what is produced through this interrelation.
The aim of this discussion is to move beyond linear conceptions of the relationship between readiness and assessment as separate from each other, to a conception of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as an entangled educational encounter. In doing so, it is useful to think with the concept of diffraction as articulated by Barad (2007), as diffraction offers the possibility of reconceptualizing a praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ that moves beyond a mechanistically linear idea of progress (and the assessment of progress), towards a post-normative construction of teaching, learning, ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as a relational encounter.

**Diffraction, assessment and readiness**

Barad (2007), citing Haraway, states that “Diffraction is an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world…Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference” (p. 71). As a metaphor for reconceptualizing ‘readiness-and-assessment’ therefore, diffraction is a useful tool. Attending to difference, rather than comparison with norms, a diffraactive praxis of assessment is concerned with articulating potential new beginnings, and therefore the ‘readiness’ for these new beginnings that emerges within each educational moment or event. What processes such as pedagogical narration then enable is the making public of the new beginnings that emerge from the relational encounter of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ and the entangled possibilities that emerge for each learner.

Barad (2007) describes diffraction patterns as “patterns of difference that make a difference” (p. 72). Framing assessment through diffraction as a metaphor therefore, focuses not just on what children can be seen to have achieved, what they have done, but on what difference this achievement makes in the world and the possibilities it opens up. The moment of assessment, as a relational act within which readiness emerges, is therefore a folding of past experiences and future possibilities in which we can ask those questions articulated by Deleuze (1990), “*What is going to happen? What has just happened?”* (p. 65, emphasis added). Readiness, as an active-affective-ethical-relation therefore emerges through assessment as particular
possibilities become actualized from amongst a whole host of potential becomings. The relational nature of each learner’s becomings is important here: as each virtual possibility becomes actualized, they interfere with each other, influencing a range of unpredictable effects. An ongoing process of diffractive assessment would therefore seek to document, articulate and understand the differences that these effects make in the world.

Barad (2007) illustrates this phenomenon of diffraction using the following example:

“If two stones are dropped into a calm pond simultaneously, the disturbances in the water caused by each stone propagate outwards and overlap with each other, producing a pattern that results from the relative differences... The waves are said to interfere with each other, and the pattern created is called an interference or diffraction pattern.” (p. 97)

This relates to the notion of learning as a rupture or a shock, the stones breaking the surface of the water acting as a metaphor for the role of the other (be that educator, environment or child) in provoking this rupture through intervention and intra-action. ‘Readiness’ emerges in the diffraction pattern itself, at the point of interference, determining the trajectory of the waves that are produced. Assessment makes these patterns visible, bringing them into the public realm, which in itself produces a rupture through which readiness emerges. It is therefore impossible to separate ‘readiness-and-assessment’, as they emerge together as part of an entangled process in an ongoing series of relational encounters.

Crucially, “diffraction attends to the relational nature of difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 72). A diffractive praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ would therefore be concerned not with readiness and assessment in isolation, as distant and separate practices linked through a transcendent relationship, but would recognize that each emerges in the context of the other and has an effect on the ways in which people are able to make a difference in the world and in the context of their educational milieu. Sellers (2013) recognizes the
importance of this relationality within a diffractive understanding of education. She describes such relational processes through a metaphor,

“... looking at intra-active movements of the wave that (e)merges through the moment of interaction of sea and rock, for example, that intensifies the understanding of waves materializing in relational mo(ve)ments; it is not about considering sea, rock and wind as separate bodies” (pp. 19–20).

Rather than marking points of judgment on a linear trajectory along which the individual learner progresses therefore, diffractive assessment is embedded within the learning event itself.

The role of the educator in assessment: Visualizing diffraction patterns

Situating ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as part of an educational event does however have consequences for how we think about the responsibilities and roles of the educator. Considering the relational aspects of learning in this way highlights the fact that the modes and strategies of assessment that are employed in educational contexts matter. They not only make children’s learning and achievements public, but are active in shaping their future learning and the possibilities opened up by past and present experiences. Even when contextualized as an immanent process however, assessment can still be considered an active form of complexity reduction. Drawing again on Barad (2007), we can see that “When part of a wave is cut off by some obstacle, we observe diffraction effects that result from the interference of the remaining part of the wave fronts” (p. 80). Even when assessment emerges within the context of the learning event therefore, it still effects a process of making cuts, selecting particular aspects of an event to make visible, which in turn affects the ways in which ‘readiness’ emerges in that context. In a similar manner, teacher planning could also be considered a process of making this form of agential cut, enabling particular forms of learning and assessment to take place. It is imperative therefore, that as educators, we are responsible for our role in making these cuts, as we assume an inevitable position of power in shaping the milieu in which these processes occur. By focusing assessment and planning processes on some aspects of experience over
others we make a cut, reducing the number of options for action within the system and the options for possible futures that were available before that point. The crucial point however, and one that is essential in avoiding assessment becoming a technical exercise, is that whilst these cuts inevitably close down some options for action, they are instrumental in opening others. What is important is that as educators we remain constantly reflective on the processes we enact and the effects of these in relation to the emergence of readiness.

In theory therefore, a diffractive praxis of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ could offer the potential for holding open spaces for unpredictable learning to emerge. Crucially however this does not mean an ‘anything goes’ or laissez-faire approach to learning and education. As educators we must be very much concerned with what and how children are learning and that they are developing knowledge and skills that enable ‘readiness’ for active, productive participation in the worlds in which they become subjects, despite these worlds being unplanned and unpredictable. This consideration highlights the importance of Biesta’s (2009) articulation of the related nature of the three domains of education. He tells us that,

“When we engage in qualification, we always impact on socialization and on subjectification. Similarly, when we engage in socialization, we always do so in relation to particular content – and hence link up with the qualification function – and will have an impact on subjectification.” (p. 41).

By situating this conceptualization of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ within an educational context aiming towards subjectification, the functions of education in terms of socialization and qualification are therefore not ignored. As Biesta (2009) states, “when we engage in education that puts subjectification first, we usually do so in relation to particular curricular content and this will always also have a socializing effect” (p. 41). The role of the educator in this context could therefore be considered as negotiating the relationships between these domains, ensuring that children engage in experiences that will enable them to participate in the social and political contexts they encounter, whilst also
creating and holding open space in which new and unprecedented beginnings can come into presence through processes of subjectification.

The role of the educator therefore matters in creating spaces that allow for ‘readiness-and-assessment’ to emerge together. The educator must be active in holding open space for emerging diffraction patterns, created by each learning event, and through processes of assessment. In order to hold this space open however, the educator must take up a particular type of position within the educational assemblage. As Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) consider, “Educators are not mere observers who bring their image of the child to life in the moment. They are part of the image – and of an ongoing articulation of the image of children in moments of practice” (p. 54). Within post-foundational contexts of early childhood education, for example the preschools within Reggio Emilia, pedagogical practices in which the educator works alongside children, as a partner or co-researcher in their enquiries, are celebrated as good practice. As already identified however, mainstream assessment practices, and in particular the statutory assessments enacted through the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (STA, 2013), are inconsistent with this image of the educator-in-relationship, positioning assessment and the assessor as separate from the child and their learning. What has been argued for within this chapter is a praxis that dissolves this separation, recognizing ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as part of a pedagogical ethos of complexity, acknowledging the entangled nature of learners and educators in the assessment of learning. What is advocated is a praxis that is capable of creating what Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) describe as “a productive space for complexifying early childhood education curriculum...a tool, both to complexify our curriculum and to make the complexity of curriculum visible” (p. 114).

Readiness-and-assessment: Being ‘in’ assessment

This recognition of complexity requires a shift however in how we traditionally conceptualize processes of knowing, or coming to know, within education. It requires us to rethink how we, as educators, help to create space for
children’s unpredictable learning and their emerging ‘readiness’, and the ways in which we come to understand what emerges within those spaces. As Barad (2007) considers,

“Knowledge making is not a mediated activity, despite the common refrain to the contrary. Knowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting within the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation.” (p. 379)

As educators therefore, in order to develop knowledge of children’s learning through assessment, we must recognise our own situated positioning within the educational milieu and the particular types of knowledge that positioning enables us to produce. As Barad (2007) states,

“Knowing is a specific engagement of the world where part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world in its differential accountability to and for that of which it is a part” (p. 379).

Through ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as an entangled encounter therefore, educators and learners become differentially intelligible to each other. Crucially this process of developing intelligibility is not just about assessing discrete knowledge, skills or dispositions acquired by an individual, and the comparison of these to a predetermined norm, but recognizes that processes of learning and assessment affect the world of which they are a part, including the educator as part of the world. The material intra-actions that occur through each learning and assessment event therefore produce specific materializations of the world (Barad, 2007), materializations that could not be predicted or pre-planned but emerge as a result of specific material entanglements.

Mr Racks

*Mr Racks introduced the ‘pod’ to his Year 2 class one morning. The aim of the ‘pod’ was to provide a collection of objects that would act as a starting point for the children’s curiosity and wonder. There was no specific plan for*
the session beyond the assembly of the objects and their introduction to the children with the accompanying question, ‘What would you like to do?’

The pod included a variety of resources, including a thick, heavy metal chain, a box of feathers, a small box of shells, a wet suit, a variety of items carved from wood, dried seed pods of varying sizes, and a selection of antlers. The objects were arranged on a cloth in the middle of the classroom for the children to access independently, or in collaboration with an adult.

As the children engaged with the objects, Mr Racks stood back, watching and listening. The objects prompted interesting conversations amongst the children, including some fascinating ethical questions, prompted in particular by the metal chain. One particular group of children began to question and wonder: ‘What was it for? Was it for chaining animals? Why might animals be chained? Where might they be chained? Who might chain them up?’

The wet suit also prompted some interesting questions: ‘Who might wear a wet suit? What would they use it for? What might they see when they dive in the oceans? What kinds of animals might live in the oceans?’

Another object the children found fascinating was the antler: ‘What kind of animal was it from? Why had it been cut off? Was the animal alive or dead when it was cut off?’

Mr Racks observed that the pod, and the objects within it, provided a powerful starting point for the children’s investigations, confronting them with interesting and unusual objects that sparked their curiosity. Crucially, he reflected, the power of these objects, and the children’s interactions with them, was that they created an open-ended context for wonder: ‘What were they for? Where did they come from?’ Through watching and listening to the children’s engagement with the objects, Mr Racks had to admit he was surprised. The depth and significance of the children’s questions he found astonishing. They were concerned with deeply ethical issues and discussions, in a manner he
would never had predicted for children of that age - their interaction with the objects prompting explorations of ethical issues concerning dancing bears and poaching. For Mr Racks this was a significant learning event. It pushed at the limits of his understandings and expectations of what is possible when young children are given the opportunity to lead their own learning, and of the insights into children’s learning it is possible to gain when he allowed the time to engage in close watching and listening of the children’s original ideas and questions.

Acknowledging the learning of the educator within the story above highlights the importance of two particular aspects of assessment in this context. Firstly, the importance of the learning context being open and thus enabling the children to engage in these deep-level conversations; and secondly, the importance of recognizing the entangled nature of the assessment process within which the assessor's interpretations are formed through the relational encounter of each educational event. The educator in this story is confronted with “the unknown that is brought about by being with others” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 65) and being immersed in the encounter of children and materials. Rather than seeking conformity to predetermined notions of the ideas children are ‘ready’ to engage with, this encounter necessitated an openness to the unexpected, as Olsson (2009) states, to learning that is “impossible to predict, plan, supervise or evaluate according to predetermined standards” (p. 117). In terms of what may comprise this pedagogical narration therefore, the educator’s questions and reflections in addition to a narrative of the children’s explorations are important.

Giles and Earl (2014) explore these affective and relational aspects of assessment through what they describe as “an ontological layering of assessment” (p. 24). They engage with a notion of “Being ‘in’ assessment” (ibid.), exploring “the experiential and ontological nature of assessment, that is, students and teachers experiences of being ‘in’ assessment” (ibid.). They do not consider assessment to be a ‘thing’ or a specific event existing separately, or after the event of learning, but conceptualize it as a “continuous
relational encounter” (ibid.), or what we could call an educational event. In keeping with the ideas discussed in this chapter, assessment conceptualized in this way relates to a particular quality of knowing, being and doing – a “being ‘in’ assessment with others” (ibid.).

Crucially, the notion of being ‘in’ assessment is consistent with an assessment praxis emergent from conditions of subjectification. It involves, according to Giles and Earl (2014), searching for “particular understandings about a child that were not scripted but arrived at ‘in’ the experience of being with the child” (p. 25). The relational aspect of assessment is highlighted through the importance given to being with the child, rather than standing at a distance that is created by assessment criteria that transcend experience. The assessor is therefore present ‘in’ the educational event with the child and it is through each educational event that ‘readiness-and-assessment’ emerge. The educator/assessor brings their own prior knowledge and experience to the event (both in relation to specific children and more generally), which informs their assessment of the situation, the understandings that are produced and the resulting effects of these understandings on future possibilities. Knowledge of developmental norms and ‘typical’ patterns of development may therefore inform the assessments that emerge within an educational event, however this knowledge is contextually bound and enters into intra-action with a multiplicity of other ways of knowing and understanding the child as a learner.

In terms of an assessment praxis that preserves newness, this notion of being ‘in’ assessment offers potential. Giles and Earl (2014) consider that the embodied nature of this practice, for the educator, opens possibilities for being surprised, for responding to moments when what is seen or experienced is completely unexpected. This requires openness on the part of the educator, a willingness to see beyond established frameworks of goals and outcomes, to the child themselves and “how they are ‘in’ their learning” (Giles & Earl, 2014, p. 24). Such assessment processes could be described as immanent to the event of learning itself, rather than transcendent, as goals and outcomes somehow above or outside of children’s learning experiences. They involve
educators in “creating and enacting new theories as they interact with children’s, families’ and colleagues’ words and actions in the narration” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 124). They offer potential for developing understandings of children that, as Giles and Earl (2014) indicate, are arrived at ‘in’ the experience of intra-acting with the child and the material environment.

The task of the educator in assessment could therefore be understood as preserving newness (Berger, 2010), and through assessment “to invite the new to appear” (Berger, 2010, p. 62). As Berger (2010) states, through acting on the knowledge created by such immanent assessment practices, “educators create possibilities where children are invited to explore themselves as unprecedented and extraordinary” (p. 62). The question remains however, how can these kinds of assessment practices be enacted? What do educators need to do within educational spaces in order for these immanent, open and emergent practices of assessment to work for children? And how can these practices be enacted in order to hold open space for children’s ‘readiness’ to emerge and be recognized as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’?

Attuning to the other

Giles and Earl (2014) suggest that the educators’ role has to do with a form of sensitive attunement. Drawing on Hawk et al. (2002), they state, “being in assessment has a characteristic of teachers being attuned to students, their relationships, their learning and their assessment” (Giles & Earl, 2014, p. 24). Discussing assessment in professional lifelong learning, Fenwick (2008) makes a similar argument. Drawing on complexity-oriented perspectives, she states,

“… a key element of assessment would be attuning participants in the system to its diversities, emerging patterns and dynamic structures, and helping them to assess these patterns and develop a ‘complexified awareness’ of their own and others’ impacts on the larger system” (p. 11).
As is highlighted within practices of pedagogical narration, assessment is not simply about educators’ understandings of children’s learning, but is about developing collective understandings of the system itself and of the affects that impact upon that system as a result of contextualized teaching and learning. In terms of practice, assessment is concerned with experience, with attuning to, witnessing and making visible the learning of others in order that the system as a whole can develop and transform – a kind of “dwelling in experience in order to further understand” (Giles & Earl, 2014, p. 25) and to take action in the world based on that understanding.

Dwelling in experience through story telling

One practice through which this form of assessment might be developed is the act of storytelling. Drawing on Arendt, Berger (2010) suggests that pedagogical narrative can produce “an engagement in ‘worldly’ experiences which both give and are given meaning through perspectival storytelling and ceaseless questioning of what we encounter” (p. 59).

The narration of experience through storytelling acts to make visible often unexpected and unpredictable events. As a storyteller, the educator is not detached, looking in on the action from outside, an independent and objective observer or assessor. They narrate from inside the event itself, storying themselves as well as the others with whom they interact. This is very different from what Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) describe as a modernist practice of child observation that assesses children in relation to developmental standards, based on the assumptions that an objective, external truth of the child can be accurately, and normatively represented. Educators are therefore implicated in each event as uniquely able to offer a different story to that being told by the learner, which in combination creates a uniquely rich, layered account of what happened. As such, assessment becomes a collective affair, as much about prompting the educators’ attunement to the effects of their own actions, as it is about understanding the child as a learner. Each perspective shared “enriches, challenges, and
broadens the possibilities for interpretation and, more importantly, for future pedagogical response and action in the curriculum” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 125). Assessment within a praxis such as pedagogical narration is, therefore, as Giles and Earl (2014) state, “immersion like and, in particular, relational” (p. 24). The task of assessment, becomes about narrating experience as a “continuous relational encounter” (Giles & Earl, 2014, p. 24). It becomes about creating a layered map of the past in terms of what has been witnessed and experienced, and using this map in order to project future possibilities.

As alluded to in the discussion of pedagogical narration within this chapter, storytelling as a meaning making practice and analytical process in early years education has been cultivated in particular in the preschools of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. As identified by Dahlberg and Moss (2006), “Project work in Reggio can be seen as a series of small narratives, narratives that are difficult to combine in an additive and cumulative way” (p. 7). The distinctive pedagogical approaches developed within Reggio Emilia are recognized, respected and emulated around the world. It is worth noting however, that Reggio Educators do reject the idea of their practices and pedagogies being marketable or exportable as a systematic or standardized approach. As Gandini (2011) writes,

“Reggio philosophy is a deep respect for place, culture and social diversity, such that the overall approach is not codified into a rigid orthodoxy or intended to be instituted and observed in precisely the same manner where ever it may be found” (p. 78).

Gandini (2011) highlights the importance of global and local context in developing pedagogical practices and theories, stating,

“... the local topography, climate, ecology and human history should be considered fundamental raw materials for children’s exploration. Dictating how educators should organise a curriculum built around the local environment, or how children should follow a set sequence of developing one specific skill before moving on to the prescribed ‘next step’, has no place in the Reggio approach. It is, rather, a philosophy to be adapted in a way that respects new cultural and social contexts” (p. 78).
As is emphasized in the preceding quote, one of the challenges within Reggio Emilia and in early childhood education more generally, is how to engage in assessment practices that respect diverse social and cultural contexts and preserve the complexity of children’s learning. In the context of this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’, this challenge also includes maintaining a context, through assessment, in which readiness can emerge and can open productively and ethically to an unexpected and unpredictable future.

What does characterize the approach developed within Reggio Emilia however, and something that is useful in the context of this discussion, is a stance of constant questioning and the ongoing problematization of pedagogical beliefs, values and practices. In particular,

“... they have problematized the idea of predetermined goals opening instead for the exploration of alternative and marginalized ways to think and give meanings to the world in which subjectivity, surprise, amazement, openness to doubt are all important values” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006, p. 11).

Through a process of being ‘in’ assessment therefore, it can be argued, this problematization becomes a constant feature of praxis, a feature which transforms assessment, as well as the knowledge produced from it, into a fluid rather than a fixed process. This is the very essence of being ‘in’ assessment, allowing the process itself to shift and change in response to what emerges from context, and creating space for ‘readiness-and-assessment’ to emerge as an entangled part of the educational event.

**Selena**

*The session began with the whole of the Reception class assembled on the carpet and the teacher initiating a maths focus, which was exploring number bonds to 10. The children sat in their assigned carpet spaces, listening to the teacher explain the activities, eagerly putting their hands up to answer her questions and display their existing knowledge.*
Selena’s carpet space was at the front of the carpet area next to the teacher’s chair and whiteboard. Rather than sitting however, Selena spent a large proportion of the session lying on her side under the board. Despite repeated requests by the teacher to sit up, she continually reverted to her preferred position, lying under the board.

Selena’s teacher had existing concerns about behaviours such as this, worrying that they signalled an apparent lack of engagement with whole class activities. She was concerned that Selena would often ‘flop’ to the floor or lie down instead of sitting up as was expected. Her concern was with the effect of this on Selena’s learning, that she wasn’t engaging with the learning opportunities offered during these times.

Towards the end of this particular maths session however, in an attempt to draw Selena back into the group, the class teacher directed a number of questions directly to her. The class were playing a game on the interactive whiteboard that tested their knowledge of number bonds through a series of tasks. Selena was invited to come and perform one of the tasks, popping a series of bubbles to make up the correct number bonds. She responded and willingly took her turn, showing that not only was she aware of what was required of her in terms of how to operate the game, but also that she was able to form all of the required number bonds.

Reflecting on this after the session, Selena’s class teacher confessed that she was surprised by her level of knowledge and her awareness of what was happening within the session, displayed through her responses. “I honestly didn’t think she was listening”, was the teacher’s response when discussing this incident with another adult in the class. Reflecting together, the adults wondered whether it was, in fact, the expectations of Selena’s behaviour that were problematic, rather than her behaviour itself. The class teacher commented, ‘She was obviously listening, so then maybe it’s OK for her to be lying down like that, I don’t know, but then if it’s not affecting her learning
The story above highlights the potential for creating new and perhaps surprising understandings of the child, their learning, their behaviours and the space in which that learning and behaviour unfolds. It is an example of the kinds of understandings that can emerge through ongoing assessment and reflection by educators within the educational event itself. What is powerful in this event is that it is potentially transformational for the child, the educator and the environment in which it occurs. To restrict assessment in this case to a correspondence of actions and experiences to the goals laid out by the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014) would significantly miss the complexity of the whole event and restrict the possibilities it may open up for new and significant learning in the future. In response to this example, traditional correspondence models of assessment would look to identify whether Selena’s behaviours correspond to those typically expected at her age. They focus on a particular notion of acceptable behaviours in a classroom context and assumptions about the connection between these physical behaviours and children’s capacity and ‘readiness’ to learn, as if these behaviours somehow indicate they are not already ready in this context. The focus is the individual child and their behaviour, and concerns emerge because that behaviour does not correspond to common expectations. The educator is concerned that the child’s behaviour is a barrier to learning; that their ‘performance’ as a learner is inhibiting their potential. Reflecting on the event however, the class teacher admits to being surprised by Selena’s responses to her questions and to her recall of what occurred. This is a shift evident within the educator’s reflective process, in which she begins to wonder about the appropriateness of the expectations placed on children. Through her reflection she shifts from determining this child as ‘not ready’ for Key Stage 1 and more formal learning, to problematizing the expectations that these contexts for learning create for children. She begins to focus on what is being opened up for this child through her actions, rather than worrying about what is being closed down. She wonders about her own actions and the
effects of these on the child’s learning – “It makes me think how I could do things differently?” Her reflections also focus on the environment, as she wonders how she could enable children to be more comfortable in their learning.

In order to appreciate and assess the full value of this event therefore, it is necessary to move beyond simplistic lists of goals and outcomes that focus on the individual child and reduce the complexity of the event, both in terms of what may be learned from it and in terms of what might be produced through an entangled relation of ‘readiness-and-assessment’. In moving beyond these traditional models, the practice of storytelling may hold potential.

*The educator as storyteller*

Berger (2010) identifies how, for Arendt, storytelling engages a process of situated critical thinking. According to Berger (2010), the potential of storytelling to inform assessments of complex experiences is in its capacity to make fleeting and limitless actions public through narration. Through narrative, events can be opened out to dialogue and debate from which new knowledge and understanding can emerge. The understanding of story engaged with here is quite particular. It is not a straightforward linear narrative but, as alluded to in the discussion of pedagogical narration earlier in this chapter, is something fragmented, always incomplete, that is constantly shifting and changing, being composed as a collage of different perspectives within an event. The dialogue and debate that can be prompted by such public narrative can be conceptualized as a form of critical conversation that opens possibilities. By bringing different stories together in assessment, new possibilities and forms of ‘readiness’ are enabled that wouldn’t have been possible through individualistic and normative assessment mechanisms. Crucially, these understandings go beyond whether the child has demonstrated prescribed capabilities, knowledge or skills. What is significant within a particular story emerges from within the story itself, and as such, it can be argued, readiness-and-assessment emerge from within the process of narration. Rinaldi (2001), speaking of documentation and assessment
practices in Reggio Emilia states, “At the moment of documentation…the element of assessment enters the picture immediately, that is, in the context and during the time in which the experience (activity) takes place” (p. 85).

Crucially, she considers that, “It is not significant to make an abstract prediction about what is significant – the elements of value necessary for learning to be achieved – before the documentation is actually carried out. It is necessary to interact with the action itself, with that which is revealed and defined and perceived as truly significant” (ibid.).

This is not to say, however, that within the process of storytelling the educator starts off with a blank slate. As already identified they carry into the process of narrative previous experiences and knowledges such as: their knowledge of the child or children; their own teaching experiences; ideas and concepts of pedagogy and child development; as well as expectations and anticipation of events yet to come. It is through the folding of these elements into present and lived time that assessment occurs. Through storytelling and processes of documentation, fleeting events can be brought into public space, provoking assessment as a critical conversation through which new and contested meanings and possible effects can emerge. Bringing these events into a public space could be considered an enactment of minor politics. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) work with the idea of minor politics as “small spaces where people (e.g. early childhood educators, families and children, individually or together) negotiate power/knowledge relations, consider alternative discourses, and think about creative possibilities” (p. 180). This fits with a concept of ‘readiness-and-assessment’ as a coming into presence, an act of subjectification whereby new and unprecedented beginnings come into being. Assessment in the context of pedagogical narration could therefore be considered a form of minor politics as critical thinking, “creating opportunities for seeing matters differently and making loud voices stutter” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 139).

Making an educator’s narrative public involves intra-action with the narrative accounts of others, though a process of layering in which the complexity of the event emerges and is made visible. It creates a space of minor politics that
creates “opportunities for ethical practice through critical and collaborative thinking and exploring other perspectives while questioning, contesting, and disrupting widely held ‘truths’” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 181).

**The Gallery**

Children can be surprising, amazing, deep, creative, sophisticated thinkers. Within their learning they have the potential to ask big, important questions in response to the encounters they experience on a daily basis throughout their lives. Often these questions and the explorations that follow may be missed in the business and bustle of daily life and classroom activity. When they are witnessed and celebrated however, the incredible capacity of young children for learning and for new and critical thinking can become a site of political intent – laying bare for all to see the quite incredible potential inherent in their learning.

It was beliefs such as these that gave rise to the exhibition that is the subject of this short story.

The work exhibited was drawn from over 10 years of projects working with artists and creative professionals, alongside groups of children and young people of all ages, from nursery through to secondary school. Over the years, documentation had built up from across these different projects, a powerful archive of evidence of the creative potential of children and young people’s learning. Much had been learned from this documentation, by those involved in the projects at the time, the artists and educators working with each group of children. The question however, was how to communicate this learning to wider audiences, how to engage those who might not be so convinced about children’s potential for creative and critical thought and action?

The response was to curate this documentation into a public exhibition. To place these narratives of children’s and educators learning into a public space, inviting dialogue, critical thought and reflection. Those who had been
involved in projects across the years were invited to contribute their voices, to offer a short reflection on how their experiences of being a child, educator, parent or artist within one or more of these projects had affected them. These narratives were displayed alongside images drawn from the archives of many years’ worth of projects. The display, in a public city centre gallery, invited members of the public into this dialogue, offering them the opportunity to leave their own comments and reflections.

Some contributed their own examples of children’s powerful learning. Some expressed their surprise at the capacity of very young children to engage with some of the big thoughts and ideas represented in the exhibition.

The emphasis of the exhibition was on making public aspects of children’s learning that are often not seen or heard. Their wonderings, their ideas, their discussions, debates and conclusions as they encountered different provocations within their interactions with others. Making this visible brought these capacities of children into a public space, opening the potential to affect the ways in which people, who may not have thought much about young children’s learning before, thought about the capacities of these children for critical and creative thought and action.

In making assessment an act of minor politics it may, in some cases, be useful to draw into pedagogical narrative more discrete accounts of knowledge learned or skills gained, for example evidence of children’s ability to identify phonic sounds or to write a simple sentence, however the crucial difference to more normative approaches is the way in which that documentation is used to inform future educational events. Whereas more normative forms of assessment may focus on questions that confirm whether and what children have or have not learned, or whether they have acquired specific skills, characteristics and dispositions, this narrative approach is concerned with what children can do with the knowledge and skills they have, the ways in which it enables them to be active in the world and how this learning opens possibilities for new beginnings. The focus is on the active
and ethical possibilities brought about through an encounter (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Assessment therefore becomes a form of invitation, an educational moment itself, an invitation to children to show what they can do without limits, to surprise us, but also an invitation to educators to consciously reflect on their own situation and standpoint within the educational assemblage.

Produced through educational encounters therefore, ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’ begins to make sense. Emerging unpredictably, through the small, everyday affects of classroom experience ‘readiness’ is entangled within an ongoing series of thresholds, inherent in which are multiple possibilities for action and progression. Each threshold can be understood as a moment in which ‘readiness-and-assessment’ emerge together, through each other, actualising possibilities that could not be known until that moment. Crucially, we cannot know in advance the ways in which ‘readiness’ will become manifest through assessment, and as such cannot predict the form of its emergence in advance. What we can do, as educators, is engage in practices of active listening, close watching, noticing and witnessing of children’s engagement with their worlds, documenting experience in pedagogical narrations. We can bear witness to ‘readiness’ when it emerges, and also, when it doesn’t, engaging in educational spaces with a stance of constant critical reflection. Through dialogue and reflection on the narrations we produce we can determine ways to develop educational spaces in ways that respond to the ongoing articulation and emergence of children’s ‘readiness’ for learning that is unexpected and unpredictable. We can begin to challenge normative modes of representing ‘readiness’, using this model of active, affective, ethical and relational encounters as an alternative to fixed categories and outcomes of learning and development, and in doing so, hold open spaces in which difference and diversity can flourish.
Chapter 9: A moment of pause and a view to the future

In 2002, a documentary film was released exploring the life and thought of Jacques Derrida (Dick and Ziering Kofman, 2002). The tag line for this film was “What if someone came along who changed not the way you think about everything, but everything about the way you think” (ibid.). In conceptualizing the potential for this work to influence educational communities, this idea is profound. It does not aim to provide a framework which can be applied directly to practices of teaching and learning, there are no teaching guides, curricula or handbooks as outputs of this research, through which to communicate with educators. Instead, the aim of this research is to challenge, to unsettle, to affect the ways in which we, as an early childhood community, think, feel and act in relation to a fundamental concept within the landscape of our professional work – the concept of ‘readiness’. In order for meaningful change to happen, spaces need to be opened up in which educators can think differently and, through this engagement, opportunities created for them to challenge dominant and often taken for granted concepts and ideas, thus opening up new possibilities for action. In light of this aim therefore, fundamental questions include: how and where do we create these spaces in which these ideas and concepts can be communicated to educators, and, how do we support educators to engage with these theoretical concepts in ways that provoke changes in practice?

Aside 28

“So what?”

Having spent the past 4 years thinking, reading, writing, experiencing and struggling with this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’, this is the question that confronts me as I attempt to find some moment of pause, not a conclusion as such, but a moment of cohesion within the ideas presented from which a possible future can be imagined. The process of editing this completed version of my thesis shows me how far my thinking has travelled, how many twists and turns and rhizomatic movements it has taken within the process of
developing this idea of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’. Reading each chapter I have a sense of disbelief, that I have been capable of producing these ideas. I am acutely aware of how densely theoretical many of these chapters are, something I still struggle with in terms of the accessibility of this work within contexts where its effects are needed the most – early childhood settings and communities of practice themselves. I am very conscious of the fact that before embarking on this experience I would not have been able to access the writing I have now generated – as an early childhood teacher I would have struggled to make links between the theoretical concepts presented in this form and my own teaching and pedagogical practices. I am also aware however, of the importance that these theoretical ideas have had in making this reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ possible. Thinking through theory, a process I had to live through and embody in order to properly understand, opened space in which new ideas and concepts could come into being. The language through which these ideas are expressed, in the context of this thesis, is again not immediately accessible to those not familiar with certain concepts and ways of expressing ideas. Again however, this mode of expression has been necessary in order to articulate the complexity of the ideas developed and the processes through which they emerged.

It is not enough, however, for this work to exist isolated from contexts in which it could have an influence. It must be useful for the communities of educators who, as I was, are frustrated with the inflexibility of the education systems through which teaching and learning are structured in England and on a broader, international scale. The question that challenges me at this moment of pause is therefore, how can the ideas and concepts that have developed through this research effect genuine change within educational contexts?

In exploring these questions, this final chapter of the thesis will engage with two contexts that enable possibilities for the communication of this work, opening space for this research to have an influence on and in practice. The first of these spaces is a context in which these ideas have already begun to
be communicated to early childhood educators, through opportunities for Continuous Professional Development and Learning (CPDL). The second looks to future possibilities within the field of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the ways in which the ideas developed within this work may contribute to a wider reconceptualization of the relationship between theory and practice in this context, creating space to engage with concepts of ‘readiness’ through a notion of theory as practice. The discussion will end with a concluding narrative exploring the personal space this work has opened within my own practice as a researcher and educator.

Working within the system: Continuous Professional Development and Learning

Cheek (2007), in relation to the field of qualitative research, talks about the “need to think deeply about the spaces in which we find ourselves” (p1057). She calls for new forms of activism that focus on the tensions within the fields in which we work, opening practices, ideas and theories to contestation and examination. What is necessary to effect change, Cheek (2007) argues, are moments of “hesitation with respect to how we think about the spaces in which we find ourselves, how we work within these spaces, and how we might work on them” (emphasis original, p1058). These moments of hesitation come about when our orthodox modes of thought are challenged, when something comes along that changes the way we think about our day-to-day practices and the ideas and values that underpin them. This notion of working within, of challenging norms and conventional modes of thinking and acting is important. The aim of communicating this research, and the ways of thinking developed through it, is not to replace or do away with existing models of praxis. The aim is to offer a provocation, a challenge to think outside of dominant framings, to think with and through these ideas as they intra-act with established modes of thought and practice.

One way in which these ideas have already begun to be articulated within professional contexts of early childhood education is through engagement
with educators through Continuous Professional Development and Learning (CPDL).

Aside 29

One of the most rewarding elements of my PhD experience has been the engagement it has afforded with educators and educational settings. Many of these connections have emerged indirectly, through chance encounters and meetings, through conversations and shared interests. One such meeting occurred at a conference I was attending as part of a research placement. Over a coffee break, I began chatting to a conference delegate, Sarah, who worked as an early years advisor for one of the local education authorities. She was interested in my research and in the tentative links I was forming between ‘readiness’ and assessment.

Several months after this chance meeting, I received an email, asking if I would be interested in talking to a group of educators within Sarah’s authority about the ideas I was developing and how these might relate to the development of practices within their own settings relating to assessment, documentation and what she framed ‘digging deeper’ into children’s learning. As part of a wider seminar focusing on supporting educators to develop possibilities for open-ended and creative enquiry within early childhood settings, she invited me to come and talk about my ideas and experiences in relation to the notion of ‘readiness’ within early childhood education, and in particular in relation to the role of documentation and assessment in developing and supporting creativity within the educators practice.

Within the seminar I shared my narrative. I shared my experiences and feelings as an early childhood educator, feelings that had led me to pursue my PhD research in the first place. I shared key influences on my thinking, including notions of pedagogical narration and documentation. I talked about the importance of allowing ourselves, as educators, to be surprised, to think outside of the boxes within which policy documents frame children’s learning.
and development. I used ‘readiness’ as an example of one area in which we can think differently, sharing the idea that our understandings and assessments of ‘readiness’ don’t have to be oriented towards fixed goals and outcomes but can emerge in unexpected and unanticipated ways, if only we are open and attuned to what is happening in the daily experiences of young children.

These ideas were shared within the context of a wider project in which the educators were engaged, a project focused on developing educators knowledge, skills and confidence when supporting children to engage with ‘big’ ideas and concepts in their learning. Many of the educators I spoke with acknowledged provocations such as this, which opened space to think differently, were refreshing and inspiring, however also expressed the challenging nature of thinking outside of prescribed frameworks and expectations.

There was genuine interest from the educators in the ideas and experiences I was sharing. There was also, however, a feeling that in order to have practical relevance, these ideas needed to work with the bodies of knowledge and practice that currently underpinned their work.

The contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is grounded in its reconceptualization of ‘readiness’ as a concept within early childhood education. The conceptual framework developed – ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’ – offers potential for opening space to think differently and through this to affect teaching and learning. Engagement with educators in relation to this frame, whilst currently small scale and anecdotal, indicates that there is a desire to think about a praxis of ‘readiness’ differently, to move outside of normative ideas towards a concept that helps us to understand the unexpected and unanticipated affects that emerge within early childhood spaces. What is powerful about this mode of communication, approaching this reconceptualization of ‘readiness as a provocation to early childhood educators within professional development, is that it does not aim to
replace existing conceptions of ‘readiness’ entirely. Instead, it acts as an invitation to think and act differently and to experiment with a range of different theories and practices as they intra-act within particular educational spaces.

**Aside 30**

Towards the end of my PhD I attended the International Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education conference in Dublin, where I presented my reconceptualized idea of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’. The experience of this conference was supportive and affirmative of the importance of this idea, not just in the context of the Early Years Foundation Stage, but on a broader, international scale. Within the session in which I presented, one of the discussions provoked by my paper was a reflection on the way in which my work had engaged with the concept of ‘readiness’ itself. Within this discussion one of the audience members commented that it was an interesting approach to engage so directly with ‘readiness’. She asked why I had chosen to retain the terminology of ‘readiness’ when discussing this reconceptualized idea, as it was so embedded in the traditional ways of thinking that I was trying to challenge. This was an interesting question, and one I had not fully considered before. Reflecting on this question through discussion, I explained that the aim of my work was not to argue that ‘readiness’ itself was not an important or necessary concept in the context of early childhood education. In fact, I expressed that it was an essential element of our praxis – that the educational experiences we engage in with children support them to be ‘ready’ to be active and affective in their own learning and in the world at large. What I was arguing for was a move away from notions of ‘readiness’ in which it is perceived only as an achievement of particular goals and outcomes that enable children to move along a deterministic journey of learning and development. The response to this, from the audience member who asked the question, was that by reappropriating and reconceptualizing the terminology of ‘readiness’ in this way, it helped her to engage with something that had concerned her for a long time – why the problematic idea of ‘readiness’ just won’t go away! She commented that by
engaging so directly with the concept itself, this work created space in which she could see the importance of ‘readiness’ in the context of early childhood education, but also the importance of thinking about this concept in a different way, and through that process of thinking differently to challenge the status quo. What was refreshing about this way of thinking, she expressed, was that it offered the possibility of working and thinking differently within existing structures, working with and through currently dominant ideas and frameworks, which felt like a more achievable goal than attempting to overthrow or replace these systems entirely.

One way in which this notion of ‘readiness’ and the relationship between ‘readiness-and-assessment’ could have an effect in practice therefore, is in the possibilities these ideas offer in terms of opening space to think differently. They offer an alternative conceptual frame through which to interpret ideas and theories that have dominated early childhood practice and pedagogy for a long time, including developmentally driven ideas of progress in learning and development and the role of social and material environments in relation to the contexts of subjectification.

The question of how this work might act to open such spaces for educators is an important one. Engagement with communities of early childhood educators through workshops, seminars and conferences, such as those described in the asides in this chapter are only one way. These occasions are useful, however they tend to be ‘one off’ events within which the opportunity for sustained engagement can be limited. Whilst these are useful opportunities in their own right, and can sometimes provide the spark needed to open spaces of thinking and acting differently, it can be difficult to understand their long-term effects as following these through can be difficult. How then to create opportunities for work such as this to effect sustainable, long term changes in the early childhood field?
Thinking differently in Initial Teacher Education

One way in which this kind of sustainable change may be possible is by integrating the ideas and concepts developed in this thesis into contexts of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). If the aim of this work is to open spaces in which educators can think differently about education, offering a framework in response to which they can explore, contest, refine and challenge their ideas about education, exploring this with teachers and early childhood educators early in their careers, seems important.

As discussed in relation to CPDL, one important factor in terms of bringing these ideas into Initial Teacher Education is finding a way in which they might work within broader structures, provoking new and different ways of thinking and acting. Crucially, this is not just about introducing early career educators to new ideas, concepts and practices and presenting them as isolated theories that can be applied to practice. Instead, it involves creating spaces in which these ideas and theories can become a provocation through which educators can develop their own theories and ideas about what education and ‘readiness’ mean in the context of their own experiences. The aim is not, therefore, to communicate this theory of ‘readiness’ so that it can be applied to practice, but is instead to create contexts through which, by engaging with these ideas, educators can develop their own theories as practice.

Lenz Taguchi (2009) highlights the value of this way of thinking about theory and practice. She identifies that within the field of early childhood education there is a perceived divide between what is understood as theory and what is understood as practice. Lenz Taguchi (2009) articulates a dominant view of theory and practice as constituting “a binary opposition” (Kindle Edition, location 787). She states that,

“For some this binary assumes the image of a visionary, rational, logical, clean and flawless theory, on the one hand; and on the other, a 'messy', 'dirty', disorderly practice, in need of being organized, cleaned up and saturated by the rationales and visions of theory” (ibid.).
According to such a view, Lenz Taguchi (2009) considers, the role of theory as being applied to practice in order to improve and make it better. As recognized within this thesis however, theory is not a neat and tidy space from which neatly packaged ideas can be selected and applied to practice in uniform and predictable ways. Indeed, the idea of an ‘onto-epistemological’ approach to the production of knowledge (Barad, 2007) – the form of knowing in being that underpins the methodological approach to this study - could equally be applied to the relationship between theory and practice in educational spaces. Theory itself is messy and shifts and changes as it is lived out through the practices within which it is materialized.

As such, what is advocated in this final chapter is a move towards models of Initial Teacher Education, and the education of early childhood educators, that open spaces in which theories can be played with, responded to, deconstructed and reconstructed in new and innovative ways, through work with children themselves within educational contexts and settings. Such an approach would recognize the importance of engaging with a whole range of ideas and concepts – creating opportunities to read ideas, for example: ideas of child development drawn from Piaget; through a post-foundational concept of ‘readiness-and-assessment’; through the social-constructivist notions of learning developed by Vygotsky. None of these concepts would be privileged unconditionally, but would be explored through the practices of educators as a provocation to constructing their own theories of education that emerge dynamically through their engagement in educational spaces. As Durden (2015) articulates, this approach would integrate a professional standard for Initial Teacher Education, and the education of those working within early childhood spaces, to critically reflect on the ways in which, as educational professionals, we are ourselves contributing to deconstructing and reconstructing assumptions that dominate the educational field. As a professional standard, this is not a box that can be ticked once and for all, it is an ongoing habit of mind (and body) of the educator – a constant stance of critical reflection within which theory is lived, shaped, articulated and is constantly evolving through experience.
As already highlighted, there is a parallel between this onto-epistemological model of professional development and education, and the methodological process that emerged within this research project. The ideas developed and articulated - of 'readiness' as an 'active-affective-ethical-relation' and the entangled concept of 'readiness-and-assessment' - emerged from embodied experience, within situated research practice. It was a case of theory and experience as blurred, emerging together as part of a complex whole. It does not go far enough even, to say that it is a case of theory and practice intertwined, as this still implies separate entities wound together. It is, instead, a notion of theory and practice as inseparable, elements of the same multiplicity – theory as practice.

Working within contemporary contexts of Initial Teacher Education

Crucially, this model of critical professional development is not opposed to currently advocated methods and practices of Initial Teacher Education. The Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (Carter, 2015) highlighted that the highest quality courses for the development of educators across the sector were those that equipped trainees to be critically reflective, offering an academically rigorous and effective introduction to classroom spaces. The importance of an approach to teacher education that integrates theory and practice is recognized by the Carter review, which states that,

“Programmes should be structured so there is effective integration between different types of knowledge and skills trainees need to draw on in order to develop their own teaching. Programmes that privilege either ‘theory’ or ‘practice’ fail to take account of the necessity of such integration.” (Carter, 2015, p21).

The review describes a model where by trainee educators are explicitly taught how to reflect on practice, analysing teaching and making judgments about its effectiveness in relation to pupil progress. It highlights the importance of teaching and learning being an ‘evidence-based’ endeavour, advocating the development of schools as “research-rich environments” (Carter, 2015, p27) in which new and trainee teachers can be taught how to “apply theory in the classroom and reflect upon their experience afterwards” (Carter, 2015, p28).
Whilst drawing on the recommendations of the Carter Review to develop a seamless link between theory and practice, the model proposed in the concluding chapter of this thesis proposes that this link can be taken one step further. Rather than developing programmes of Initial Teacher Education within which educators are taught theories that can then be applied to practice, it advocates creating spaces in which educators can be supported to explore their own practice through a range of theoretical ideas and concepts. Within such a model, educators can be taught to recognize the ongoing emergence of their own theories of teaching and learning as they are lived out through day-to-day experiences in classroom and other educational spaces.

As Lenz Taguchi (2009) states, practice is “continuously and already doing and practicing educational theories, whether we are aware of it or not” (Kindle edition, loc 797). According to Lenz Taguchi (2009), theories and ideas are constantly being spoken and performed into existence as practice through “dense material-discursive mixture(s) of events that are folded upon each other” (ibid). As such, practice is always already theoretical, just as theory is always already practical, it is a doing, an onto-epistemological construction and enactment of situated knowledge.

The distinction between theory as practice and more traditional models, such as those described by the Carter review (2015) in which theory is applied to practice, is central to the ideas developed in this concluding chapter, which explores potential modes of communication and the potential for this research to influence the field of early childhood education. What is proposed is the development of a module or strand within Initial Teacher Education, and the development of early childhood educators, that explicitly explores this onto-epistemological idea of ‘theory as practice’. Such a strand would expose educators to a diverse range of theories and ideas, including the concept developed within this thesis of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’, and would support them to explore how such theories are lived out through day-to-day engagement within educational contexts. Exploring these concepts through practice, educators can then analyse and reflect on their
experiences and the new ideas and theories that are becoming embodied within their work.

Drawing on some of the ideas developed within this research project, this approach could be understood as a form of diffractive methodology. It goes beyond a metaphor of reflection, seeing existing theories and ideas mirrored in the practice experienced by educators, focusing instead on the new beginnings and ideas that are produced through and as experience. Such a diffractive methodology recognizes that theory, as well as being emergent from and with practice – theory as practice – is dynamic and relational. Theories do not sit in books, static and unchanging, ready and waiting to be applied, they live through those who do the theorizing and are constantly shifting and changing through the interactions of people and things. As such, the opportunity to engage in dialogue about their experiences is essential to educators being able to recognize and articulate the ways in which their own theories emerge through experience. Again, this practice does not go against currently advocated structures for the development of educators. The Carter Review (Carter, 2015) highlights the importance of establishing what it terms “communities of practice” (p39) that provide trainee educators with “opportunities to come together and learn in peer groups” (ibid). As a space within which educators can engage in diffractive practice, with the view to being responsive to their own emerging theories of education, these ‘communities of practice’ might draw on models such as those explored by Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., (2015) in their reflections on creating a collaborative and critically reflective community of early childhood educators, within their own context of British Columbia. Drawing on the model of pedagogical narration, which has been useful in the reconceptualization of the relationship between ‘readiness-and-assessment’ that forms part of the original contribution of this thesis, they describe a practice of ‘learning circles’. They describe a practice whereby educators critically reflect on documentation emergent from contexts of early childhood education and, through dialogue, explore how this documentation, drawn from practice, might be productive of theory, supporting them to extend their practices and build their curriculum (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Among the stated aims of this activity is to
“make visible how our practices are, in fact, already theoretical” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2015, p5). How this differs from more traditionally advocated models of reflective practice is in its recognition of the dynamic and situational nature of theory – working with educators to explore the intra-actions between theory and practice within their own contexts and the ways in which this can support the development of active, affective, ethical and relational spaces for teaching and learning.

The future

This idea, of a diffractive methodological approach to the development of educators, has potential for future research. Developing communities of practice, inspired by experiences such as those explored by Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015), and ideas of theory as practice inspired by scholars such as Lenz Taguchi (2009), has potential within the field of initial teacher education, within early childhood education and across other phases of the education system in England.

Crucially, the concept of ‘readiness’ as an ‘active-affective-ethical-relation’ is not limited to early childhood contexts. It could equally be applied within the field of teacher education itself. As a framework for reconceptualizing the relationship between theory and practice in initial teacher education, it can open space within which to think differently about how we might recognize the ‘readiness’ of educators to enter into the profession. Rather than relating the ‘readiness’ of educators primarily to frameworks of official standards, it offers the potential to shift our focus to their ‘readiness’ to engage and be responsive within contexts of unpredictability and uncertainty, encouraging them to be open to the challenge, wonder and surprise of learning that emerges within spaces of subjectification. Rather than questions of standards to be met, indicating ‘readiness’ to engage in professional practice, the focus within initial teacher education might shift to developing educators as researchers of their own practice, exploring and articulating their own theories as they come into presence through practical experiences in educational spaces. As Durden (2015) states, in the development of educators, we need
to question whether we are ready to develop a praxis of teacher education that speaks “to the complexity of human diversity and captures the holistic growth and development of children” (p87).

Taking this concept of ‘readiness’ into the field of initial teacher education and the development of early childhood educators could therefore be a productive line of enquiry (or line of flight) in the future development of this research. Finding ways of working within current systems and exploring possibilities to work with a diffractive approach could support the development of a creative and dynamic process of the development of educators within which theory and practice emerge together as we work to reconceptualize what ‘readiness’ means in the context of initial teacher education.

**Aside 31**

“How can the bird that is born for joy sit in a cage and sing?” (William Blake, 1789)

This quote means a lot to me. I first came across it in a piece of young peoples fiction by the author David Almond. The book is called ‘My name is Mina’ (Almond, 2010). The protagonist of the novel, the headstrong Mina, has these words hung over her bed. They are her motto. They are a reminder, in everything she does, to “make my words break out of the cages of sadness, and make them sing for joy” (Almond, 2010, Kindle Edition, loc 85).

This quote resonates with me in many ways. I have felt, myself, the frustration of feeling caged – as a teacher feeling hemmed in by structures I did not feel a part of and as a researcher feeling restricted by the codes and practices I felt I was supposed to embrace.

The resonances of these words also strike when I think of the many children I have worked with, in schools and nurseries, in my different roles as teacher and researcher. In particular I think of those children who were somehow
other to the identities that were prized – those children who failed to fit the moulds cast by institutional structures within which they seemed fated to be marginalized.

Where were the opportunities for these children to sing, to break out of these structural cages, to experience and be experienced as unprecedented and extraordinary in their everyday lives?

I began my PhD in a place of frustration – I was dissatisfied with the education system I was working within and saw this as an opportunity to be effective in creating change. I saw research as a way in which I could explore issues, questions and challenges that I knew, from my professional experience, were important. As the narrative that weaves its way through this thesis articulates however, the research experience was far from what I had expected. Engaging so closely with this notion of ‘readiness’ in relation to young children’s learning and their school experiences, I never expected to be confronted so intensely with my own ‘readiness’. My ‘readiness’ to become a researcher, my ‘readiness’ to engage in the academic world, my ‘readiness’ to engage with the research and theoretical ideas of others, and indeed my ‘readiness’ to produce an original contribution to the field in which I was working. Before embarking on the experience of my PhD, I had a particular understanding of what this ‘readiness’ meant. As a researcher, I aligned my own ‘readiness’ with the learning and application of particular methods. With regard to engaging with the ideas and theories of others, there were times when I doubted I would ever feel ‘ready’ to access the theoretical ideas and language of many of my peers, and of the philosophical texts that seemed so useful to those in the early childhood field, whose work I so admired. As I progressed through the process of this piece of research however, I began to recognize that, just as I was articulating in relation to ‘readiness’ in early childhood, my own ‘readiness’ within this process was unexpected, unpredictable, unplanned and surprising.
An example of this was my supervisory relationship. My meetings with my supervisors throughout the 4 years were intensely thought-provoking (and occasionally headache inducing!). I left every meeting with more questions than answers! Often within these meetings, my supervisors would suggest particular reading, often philosophical, which they felt would help me to engage with the ideas we were discussing. I remember on multiple occasions accessing the papers and manuscripts they recommended and completely failing to see their relevance. My assumption was that I was just not, and was unlikely to ever be, ready to bring these into my work – that my supervisors had a level of understanding I did not and as such I was unable to see the connections that they could. Looking back now however, at this moment of pause as the thesis is brought to a close, I can see how these suggestions and interjections acted as provocations. As I read, even when not feeling that I immediately understood what I was reading, these ideas and theories left traces, making tiny cracks in my (sub)conscious understanding. As I became absorbed in other experiences, read other literature, engaged in conversations across a wide range of contexts, these cracks began to spread. Connections emerged as ideas developed and suggestions my supervisors had made months, sometimes years earlier would begin to make sense as new contexts for understanding emerged. I could never have predicted when I would be ‘ready’ to engage with their suggestions productively, my ‘readiness’ to bring these strands into my developing theories emerged only as the connections themselves were made. Not all of these suggestions led to such emergence, and again it was impossible to predict those that would until they entered into interaction as part of a particular multiplicity of ideas, events and experiences. Fundamentally, the concept of ‘readiness’ I was articulating through my research in relation to early childhood education, was lived out within my own research experience.

It is no exaggeration to say that the process of engaging in my PhD research has changed me as a person. The ideas and concepts that have been explored and developed, in deconstructing this concept of ‘readiness’, have shifted the ways in which I experience the events through which my life has
passed throughout the 4 years. I have been better able to cope with significant shifts and changes and emotional stresses in my life, making me better able to deal with unexpected and unpredictable events. Being able to embrace uncertainty, to see the beauty and value in surprising events and to attempt to act ethically when they occur, in all aspects of life, is something that has developed from my experience within this research project. It has changed the way I understand what is of value within education and the ways in which I would practice as a teacher, were I to return to this role within the classroom, fundamentally shifting the ways in which I respond to others within educational spaces.

Essentially, my experiences within this research project have opened and created spaces in which I can think, act and live differently. As the thesis draws to a close, I am hopeful that the contributions made to the field of early childhood education may open space for others to think differently, provoking ripples of change in the ways in which early childhood education is lived and experienced.
Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical approval documents
Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications and view the School’s Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Katherine Evans

Your student no: 590018494

Return address for this certificate: 16 Dillons Road, Creech St Michael, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 5DS

Degree/Programme of Study: PhD Education

Project Supervisor(s): Deborah Osberg, Ros Fisher

Your email address: khle201@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07889838998

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: ___________________________ date: 6th May 2013

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013
Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT: Contesting dominant discourses in early childhood education: A situated study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage

1. Brief description of your research project:

Research aims:

- To explore the construction of ‘readiness’ within and between different contexts in the field of early childhood education, including theory, research and policy.

- To explore the ways in which discourses of ‘readiness’ are constructed by early childhood stakeholders (within a particular school community) and the ways in which these constructions relate to dominant discourses of ‘readiness’.

- To explore the impact of dominant constructions of ‘readiness’ on classroom practices and discourses.

- To explore how dominant discourses of ‘readiness’ impact the positioning of children within the school context and the impact of this positioning on children’s identities and personal discourses.

- To explore the ways in which early childhood discourses of ‘readiness’ relate to whole school practices and discourses.

The aim of this study is to engage in a critical analysis of ‘readiness’ within the context of early childhood education in England. Discourses of ‘readiness’ have been the focus of recent debate in response to the review of the Early Years Foundations Stage (DfE, 2012). Among the outcomes of this review was an increased focus on ‘school readiness’ as a primary outcome of early years education and care. Whilst there has been much critique of the way in which this discourse of ‘readiness’ has been conceptualised within education policy, and the potential impact of this dominant discourse on practice, there is a lack of critique exploring ‘readiness’ from the situated perspectives of early childhood stakeholders, including teachers, children and wider school communities. It is the aim of this study, therefore, to develop a situated critique of dominant discourses of ‘readiness’, exploring the ways in which dominant and Other discourses are constructed within and among early childhood communities and the power relationships that function between these different discourses. In particular, this study is interested in the relationships of power that underpin the construction, circulation and reification of discourses of ‘readiness’ and the impact of these power relations on the situated experiences of those in early childhood education settings. Drawing on post structural understandings of power and discourse, the construction and influence of discourses of ‘readiness’ will be explored through critical analysis of literature, focussing on ‘readiness’ as a historically and culturally situated and politically and ethically motivated discourse.

This macro level study of ‘readiness’ will be juxtaposed with empirical work, designed to engage with situated perspectives and experiences in relation to the construction and influence of discourses of ‘readiness’ in the EYFS. This engagement with perspectives from situated practice will occur through a year-long empirical study in an early childhood school setting. Initially drawing on principles from post structural ethnography (Britzman, 1995; Vaughan, 2004; Youdell, 2010) this study will aim to explore the ways in which ‘readiness’ is constructed through the day to day experiences and negotiations of relationships between stakeholders in early childhood education settings. It is

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recognised that from the post structural perspectives that underpin this project, engaging with the day
to day complexities of participants situated experiences creates a research situation that is potentially
unpredictable and complicated, as the lived experiences that are the focus of this study and the
knowledge constructed through them are considered to be constantly in process, culturally specific
and inscribed with power relations. This understanding of the research context therefore requires a
methodological approach that is flexible, emergent and responsive to participants. The study will
therefore draw on a bricolage approach, as discussed by Kinchloe and Berry (2004), recognising
research as a power driven act within which researcher and participants have active agency. This
understanding of the research context precludes comprehensive methodological planning prior
entering the field, as data collection and analysis methods will develop in response to engagement
with participants in the field and on-going analysis of data. Initial methodological planning therefore
will be designed to engage with participants and develop understanding of the relationships,
discourses, connections and understandings within the setting. Through on-going involvement in the
field, methodological processes and procedures will be developed with participants. The initial
methodological plan therefore has been designed to facilitate the researchers engagement in the field
and exploration of the research aims, through processes of observation, interviews and the collection
and analysis of documents and artefacts. This ethical approval form is therefore considered to be a
starting point, as it is intended that the methodology will develop as the study progresses. The on-
going and close involvement of my supervisory team in the development of this emergent
methodology will ensure that ethical considerations are constantly monitored as the study progresses.
Whilst the following sections address ethical considerations of consent, methods, anonymity and confidentiality for the initial stages of the study, any additional ethical considerations
that arise as the study progresses, for example if the need arises to use additional methods of data
collection or analysis, will be referred to the university ethics committee before alteration of the
methodology and application of such methods, via an additional ethical consent form. In this
situation, additional, amended, consent will also be sought from participants.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young
people involved):

For the purposes of this form, participants in this research project are considered in three different
categories. These categories are: the research site, adult participants; and child participants.

The planned research site is an infant and nursery school, taking children from 2 years old (nursery)
to 7 years old (year 2). Data collection activities will initially be focussed within one reception class,
however, in line with the ethnographic methodology of the study and the aim to understand how
discourses of ‘readiness’ in early childhood relate to whole school practices and discourses, data
collection will also take place within the wider school and community setting as the study progresses.
Examples of school sites beyond the main reception class setting will include the school nursery
class, key stage 1 classrooms, staff meetings and team planning meetings. Examples of wider
community engagement may include communication with the local children’s centre, local preschool
settings and outside agencies linked to the school. Engagement with such community participants is
expected to emerge as the study progresses and through contacts within the primary research site
(the school). Processes of informed consent, confidentially and anonymity, as described below, will
be employed for all participants, within all research sites.

Adult participants will be purposefully sampled from among the school staff team and wider school
community, including class teachers, support staff, members of the leadership team, members of the
school governing body, and parents and carers. Participation from some school staff, including staff
members from the focus reception class, will be sought in advance of the commencement of the
ethnographic study. Participation from other school staff and community members, including parents
and carers, will be sought as the study progresses.

Child participants will mainly be drawn from the focus reception class and will be between 4 and 5
years old. Observations will initially take a broad focus, exploring events and experiences as they

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occur within the class as a whole. As the study progresses, the focus will narrow to the experiences and interactions of specific individuals and groups of children, based on on-going analysis of data in relation to constructs of ‘readiness’.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

3. informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.

Details of informed consent will be addressed in relation to three categories: school staff; parents and carers; and children.

School staff: Regarding school staff, initial information about the research project, including aims, research questions, data collection methods and ethical considerations, will be shared in advance of data collection occurring. General research information will be shared with all staff during initial meetings that will take place in the summer term of 2013. During these meetings, staff will have the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. Staff members will also be given a copy of the research information sheet to take away, with contact details for the researcher, enabling them to ask further questions or express any further concerns over the course of the summer holiday, and prior to data collection commencing at the beginning of the next school year. After initial meetings, general information regarding the project will be available for all school staff, being published on a notice board in the staff room. Where staff members have more focussed involvement, for example adults within the focus reception class, more specific information will be provided, relevant to their involvement. This will include more detailed information about data collection techniques initially planned within the classroom, information about my role as a researcher specific to the classroom context and information about their own roles and rights as participants. Formal, written consent for participation will be sought at the beginning of the school year (September 2013), just before the first phase of data collection commences. This consent will then be formally revisited at two further points throughout the year, at the beginning of each school term, to ensure participants are comfortable with their on-going participation. Written consent for the schools participation will be sought from the head teacher and specific written consent from individual focus participants, such as the reception class teacher and support staff, will be sought from the individuals concerned, and will include information about their rights as participants within specific data collection activities, such as interviews and observations. Verbal consent will be sought from all other staff members. This verbal consent will use ‘point in time’ procedures, within which consent will be sought as situations arise. In order to ensure that verbal consent is informed, the researcher will revisit the research information sheet with participants, discussing the purpose to which their specific data would be put and their rights with regard to anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawing their verbal consent at a future time, should they wish. A written record will be kept of participants from whom verbal consent has been sought and granted, along with a reference to the particular data they have given consent for. This record will be kept securely, in paper form in a locked filing cabinet in the researchers home, and in digital form on an encrypted memory stick.

Consent for interviews: Participants will be asked for their consent prior to each interview. At the beginning of each interview, participants’ initial written consent will be revisited, reminding them of the purpose of the interview, of my role as researcher and of their rights as participants. Verbal consent will then be sought for the specific interview being conducted.

Consent for observations: When observing in school and classroom situations, adults on-going consent will be sought, in addition to their initial written consent. This will involve asking adult participants before commencing any observation if they are happy to be observed in that particular situation, for example if the class teacher is happy to be observed teaching a particular lesson. This on-going consent will be respected at all times and observations terminated if participants are not
comfortable being observed at that time. In this situation, and if appropriate, participants will be engaged in discussion about why they were not comfortable being observed and if it is possible to reschedule the observation for another time.

Consent for collection of documentary data/artefacts: Verbal consent for documentary data/artefacts will be sought from relevant adults at the point of enquiry and will be in addition to initial written consent. For class planning and assessment documents consent will be sought from the class teacher and will have identifying information such as the name of the class, or of individual children and adults removed. If at any point information is requested about a specific child or group of children, consent will also be sought from the child’s parents and the head teacher. Consent for access to whole school documentary data, such as school policies, will be sought from the head teacher and the chair of governors, this will be verbal consent and will again be in addition to written consent obtained at the beginning of the project.

These consent processes will also be employed for professionals from the wider school community, for example the local children’s centre, should their involvement arise.

Please see attached consent form.

Parents and carers: The involvement of parents and carers is considered in two categories, as research participants themselves, and as gatekeepers to the participation of children. Information about the project will be communicated to all parents and carers in the form of a brief overview of my research in the school newsletter. This will include a statement about who I am, the aims of my research project and the types of research activities I will be undertaking within the school. Data concerning the experiences and perspectives of parents and carers will be sought via formal and informal interviews, discussions and conversations.

Gatekeepers consent: Parents and carers of children in the focus reception class will be informed about the research in greater detail, via a letter providing more detail about research activities occurring in their child’s class, including data collection procedures, information relating to storage of data and the use to which research findings will be put. Parents/carers will be provided with contact details so that they may ask questions or express concerns regarding the research. In addition to information about data collection activities, this letter will include details of how research data and analysis will be used, including for the purposes of the thesis and wider publication and presentation, and details of confidentiality and anonymity processes. Attached to this letter will be a consent form, giving parents and carers the option to give or refuse consent for information about their child/ren to be used within the project. (Please see attached letter/consent form)

Consent for interviews: Where parents and carers are invited to participate in interviews, written consent will be sought. Consent processes are designed to be respectful to participants and to take account of differing literacy levels. Participants will be provided with an information sheet relating to the purpose of the interview, storage of data and participants rights, including information about anonymity and confidentiality. When approaching each parent/carer, the information sheet will be supported by a conversation in which research information will be communicated. Where possible participants will be provided with this information in advance of the interview and given opportunities to ask questions and express any concerns they may have. Where possible, parents/carers will be asked to provide written consent by signing a consent form. Details of the consent form will always be discussed with the participant prior to signing to ensure, as far as is possible, that consent is informed.

Please see attached consent form.

Children: Whilst consent for children’s participation will be sought from parents and/or carers, where permission from gatekeepers is granted, the consent of children themselves will also be sought. Consent from children will employ ‘child friendly’ strategies for obtaining consent, informed by my professional judgement as an experienced early childhood teacher. Information about the aims of the

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research project will be shared verbally with children individually, in small groups and as a whole class, as appropriate and guided by the class teacher. Strategies for gaining consent from children will include point in time consent, asking each time data is collected whether children are happy to participate. The language used to communicate with children will show an awareness of their experiences and ways of understanding the world, for example referring to narrative observations as ‘stories’ about them and their play.

Consent for observations: Regarding observational methods, children will be asked before each observation if they mind me watching and writing notes about what they are doing. If they say no, this will be respected. Children will be made aware that they have a choice as to whether to let me observe and that they can ask me to stop observing at any time. Throughout observation episodes, I will be sensitive to actions or expressions which may indicate that children do not wish to be observed. Such action or expression may include signs of discomfort such as crying or non-verbal indications that their play is of a private nature such as hiding or withdrawing from my sight. Children’s choices about participation will be respected and upheld at all times.

Consent for interviews: Interviews with children will be informal and will occur as guided conversations within the context of child initiated activities within the classroom. Before each interview session, children will be asked if it is ok for me to speak to them, to ask them some questions and to write down what they say. As with observational data collection, attention will be paid throughout interviews to tacit signals that children may be uncomfortable or may want an interview to stop, at which point data collection will cease.

Consent for collection of documentary data/ artefacts: When collecting artefacts or documents from children, they verbal consent will be sought each time. If children do not want to give the original artefact, they will be asked if it is ok for a photograph to be taken, or a sketch to be drawn (for example if they have created a model or painted a picture). Children will be offered the choice to document their creations themselves if they wish by taking photographs themselves for the researcher to use. Where photographs of artefacts are taken, they will not include images of the children themselves.

Ethical issues related to informed consent will be taken seriously for all participants and will be an ongoing consideration throughout the study, with the rights of participants being listened to, respected and upheld at all times.

4. Anonymity and confidentiality

The right to anonymity will be respected for all participants and for the research setting as a whole. This right will be upheld at all stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis and communication of the research within the thesis and related publications. Pseudonyms and codes will be used to identify individual participants within recordings of research data, including field notes, narrative observations and interview transcripts. A key for pseudonyms will be kept separately from the data and will be accessible only by the researcher. Within any written account of the research project, including the final thesis, related research publications and conference presentations, descriptive information that could be used to identify the setting and individuals will be changed and where appropriate omitted, for example, rather than identifying the particular name and geographical location of the setting, it will be recorded as ‘a setting in the south west of England’.

Regarding confidentiality, this study recognises participant’s entitlement to privacy, as stated in the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011). All data will be stored securely and safely. Written transcripts of interviews and observations, and copies of documentary data will be stored both as paper copies and digitally. Paper copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers home, to which the research alone will hold a key. Digital copies will be stored on an encrypted and password protected data stick, and backed up on the university U: drive.

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Issues of disclosure will be constituted in line with the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011). Participants will be informed of their right to have their research responses kept confidential, in the majority of circumstances. The exception to this, of which participants will be made aware, is the researchers’ ethical and moral duty to disclose information related to behaviour that may be harmful to participants or others. Depending on the nature of the information, this disclosure may be to the head teacher, that ‘named person’ within the school for safeguarding, or the chair of governors.

5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Before commencing any formal data collection the researcher will spend a period of at least 2 weeks in the focus class and school environment in order to begin building relationships with participants and to become familiar with the routines of the school/class. This initial phase will take place during the first two weeks of the Autumn term in September 2013, in agreement with the head and class teacher.

Initial data collection will employ three methods: naturalistic observation; interview; and collection of documents/artefacts. Details of each method are outlined below. Due to the emergent and responsive nature of this study however, additional data collection methods may need to be employed, such as video recording or photographic data collection techniques. Should the need for additional methods arise, further consent will be sought from the University Ethics committee.

Naturalistic observation: When collecting observational data I will take on the role of overt, semi participant observer. Before beginning data collection I will discuss my role with staff members in order to ensure, as far as is possible, a shared understanding of my position as a researcher in the setting. This discussion will include issues such as if and/or when I might intervene in situations involving children (for example in reaction to particular behaviours or potentially unsafe situations), and the type/level of responsibility I would have as a ‘non-staff adult’. Through the on-going negotiation and development of researcher/participant relationships I will endeavour to enable participants to have ownership of the extent to which, as a researcher, I am allowed ‘in’ to various aspects of their daily experience. Whilst formal consent for observation will be sought from participants in line with the processes outlined above, on-going attention will be paid to the tacit signals of consent that may emerge during the course of an observation.

When conducting observations, data will initially be recorded using written, narrative observations and field notes. These will be kept with the researcher at all times when in the setting and will be stored securely when outside of the setting (see section b – anonymity and confidentiality above). Participants, both adults and children, will have the right to access data that relates to them personally at any time. With children in particular this may mean reading a narrative observation back to them.

Interviews: Interview data will be recorded using a combination of written notes and audio recording. Participants will always be given the choice of whether to have the interview recorded or not. At the beginning of each interview, participants will be shown how to switch the recorder off and informed that they have the right to switch it off at any point throughout the interview, or to ask the researcher to switch it off for them.

Before using audio equipment to record interviews with children, the researcher will spend time allowing children to explore and familiarise themselves with the audio equipment. This would be through a combination of planned activities led by the researcher and through making the equipment available to children to explore independently. As with adult participants, children would be taught how to turn the audio equipment on and off and would be given control over recording during the interview.

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Participants will have the right to access interview data that is relevant to them, in the form of field notes, audio recordings and transcripts. The researcher will also keep a private research diary, which will be accessed only by the researcher herself.

All interview data will be stored securely (see section b – anonymity and confidentiality above).

Document/artefact collection: Examples of documents and artefacts may include: planning and assessment documents; school policies; children’s pictures, writing, models etc; school newsletters, general school/class information. Consent will always be sought from appropriate participants before collection of documents/artefacts. If it is not possible to collect the original artefact, permission to make a copy or representation will be sought e.g. a photocopy, a photograph or a sketch. Where a photograph is taken, the image will be of the artefact only and will not include the child/children themselves.

Documentary data will be stored in accordance with the procedures outlined in section 4.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or

Secure storage of data: see section b – anonymity and confidentiality

Regarding the storage of audio data, data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest possible opportunity, and then deleted immediately from the device.

Regarding the safeguarding of children, the researcher holds current CRB clearance and as an experienced teacher is familiar with issues relating to child protection and safeguarding. Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher will discuss safeguarding arrangements with the head teacher, including identifying who the ‘named person’ is for safeguarding within the school.

7. special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

None

8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

None

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School’s Research Support Office for the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: Sept 2012 until: 24 Sept 2016

By (above mentioned supervisor’s signature): ..................Ros Fisher............................date:........10/5/2013........

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013
GSE unique approval reference: 12/12/28

Signed: N. [Signature]

Date: 14/6/13

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013
Research information sheet

Research title

Contesting dominant discourses in early childhood education: A situated study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Who is conducting this research project?

My name is Katherine Evans and I am a PhD researcher at the University of Exeter. Before beginning my PhD I was a teacher for 7 years, working in school, nursery and children’s centre settings with children from birth to 7 years old. I am particularly interested in early childhood education and the experiences of children and teachers within educational environments. My current research project is concerned with concepts of ‘readiness’ in the context of Early Years Foundation Stage.

What is the aim of this research project?

The aim of this research project is to explore the ways in which ‘readiness’ is understood within early childhood education and the impact of these understandings on the experiences and practices of children and teachers within schools. Research shows that ‘readiness’ is understood in different ways, by different people, including teachers, parents/carers, policy makers and children themselves, and that some of these perspectives are more dominant than others in determining how children are thought of in terms of being ‘ready’ for school or for key stage 1. Through engagement with different stakeholders in early childhood education, this project aims to explore these different perspectives and how they impact upon the ways in which children are perceived in terms of ‘readiness’ at various points throughout their Reception year. I am particularly interested in developing understanding of these perspectives, values and experiences as they occur in real life across the course of the school year.

How will research data be collected?

Data will be collected throughout the course of a year as part of an ethnographic study, within which I will spend on-going time in class R3 working with children and members of staff, and where possible with the wider school community. In collecting data I will use 3 methods: observations, interviews and analysis of curriculum documents. I will record data using a combination of written notes and audio recording.

Observations: I will undertake regular observations of activities in the classroom and the wider school setting, for example observing playtimes and assemblies. The purpose of these observations will be to produce data relating to the real life experiences of children and teachers. I therefore intend to focus on events as they occur naturally within the classroom and school environment, including child initiated activities and children’s play, adult led and adult initiated activities and lunchtimes/playtimes. To record my observations I will use ‘field notes’, keeping a written record of what I observe during classroom activities and events.
Interviews: I plan to conduct interviews with staff, children and parents/carers at regular intervals throughout the year. Interviews with children will take an informal structure and will be conducted in the classroom environment. I will record interview data using a combination of written notes and audio recording. Consent will always be sought before each individual interview, for all participants.

Collection of documents and artefacts: In consultation with the class teacher and other members of staff I will collect samples of curriculum documents, such as planning sheets and policies. Within all curriculum documentation, any names or information that could identify individuals will be erased. I will also collect copies of artefacts children create, such as copies of pictures and models – with children’s permission of course! Copies of documents and artefacts will be produced using photocopies and photographs. Photographs will only be of artefacts, and will not include images of children themselves.

How will data be stored?

All data will be stored securely. Information in paper form, e.g. written observations, field notes, curriculum documentation, printed photographs etc. will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet at the researchers home. Within all written documentation, names and other information that could identify participants will be removed to ensure the identity of all participants is kept anonymous. Any digital information e.g. typed interview transcripts, scanned copies of field notes etc. will be stored in the researchers secure folder on the universities computer system and on an encrypted and password protected memory stick.

How can I give or refuse permission for my child to participate?

Attached to this overview is a consent form for general participation. If you are happy for your child to participate then simply sign and return to me. If you do not feel that you would like your child to participate and do not consent to their involvement then you need do nothing – consent will not be assumed without a signed consent form. If you are not sure and would like further information or have any questions then please feel free to contact me using the details on the consent form.

What happens if I refuse permission?

Where permission is not given, children will not be included in interviews and observations. Where observation is of a whole class situation, for example a carpet based lesson, information relating to children without permission will not be recorded. Please be assured that if you do initially give consent for your child to participate and change your mind later in the process then you may withdraw that consent at any time.

What if I have any questions, concerns or comments?

Please feel free to contact me using the contact details on the attached consent form or to come and speak to me when I am in school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I look forward to working in your school community.

Katherine Evans
Title of Research Project: Contesting dominant discourses in early childhood education: A situated study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage

To the parent/carer of

I am a PhD researcher at the University of Exeter currently conducting a study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. In particular I am interested in how ideas about ‘readiness’ and what it means to be ‘ready for school’ come into being within education policy and school environments, and how these ideas affect what teachers and children do on a day to day basis. As part of the research process I will be collecting data within class R3 across the course of the school year. I will be making observations of classroom activities including children’s play, adult led activities and other aspects of school/classroom life such as assemblies and play times. I will record my observations using written field notes. In addition to making ongoing observations, I also hope to conduct interviews with children, staff and members of the community at various points throughout the year in order to develop understanding of different perspectives of ‘readiness’ and how these relate to school and classroom practices (additional consent will be sought for these activities at the time). Interview data will be recorded using both written notes and audio recording. I would like to request permission for your child to participate in my study. Please be assured that when ‘writing up’ this research in my PhD thesis any information relating to the school and people who have taken part will be kept anonymous. Further details regarding participation are included in the attached research information sheet, including details about data collection methods, anonymity, confidentiality and storage of data.

I confirm that I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw his/her participation

within publications or academic conference/seminar presentations that arise from this project there will be no reference to identified individuals ensuring that participants will not be individually recognizable within reported data.

Data collected concerning my son/daughter will be treated as confidential

(Signature of parent/guardian)  .........................................................

(Date)

(Printed name of parent/guardian)  .........................................................

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants’ parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): .........................................................

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in an anonymised form.
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Title of Research Project: Contesting dominant discourses in early childhood education: A situated study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage

I am a PhD researcher at the University of Exeter currently conducting a study of ‘readiness’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. In particular I am interested in how ideas about ‘readiness’ and what it means to be ‘ready for school’ come into being within education policy and school environments, and how these ideas affect what teachers and children do on a day to day basis. As part of the research process I will be collecting data within class R3 across the course of the school year. I will be making observations of classroom activities including children’s play, adult led activities and other aspects of school/classroom life such as assemblies and play times. I will record my observations using written field notes. In addition to making ongoing observations, I also hope to conduct interviews with children, staff and members of the community at various points throughout the year in order to develop understanding of different perspectives of ‘readiness’ and how these relate to school and classroom practices (additional consent will be sought for these activities at the time). Interview data will be recorded using both written notes and audio recording. I would like to request permission for your child to participate in my study. Please be assured that when ‘writing up’ this research in my PhD thesis any information relating to the school and people who have taken part will be kept anonymous. Further details regarding participation are included in the attached research information sheet, including details about data collection methods, anonymity, confidentiality and storage of data.

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

within publications or academic conference/seminar presentations that arise from this project there will be no reference to identified individuals ensuring that participants will not be individually recognizable within reported data.

Data collected as part of this project will be treated as confidential.

(Signature of participant) .......................... .......................... .......................... (Date)

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): ..................................................

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

................................................................. .................................................................

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Revised March 2013
References


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Seigworth, G. J., & Gregg, M. (2010). AN INVENTORY OF SHIMMERS. In Gregg, M., & Seigworth, G. J. (Eds.), The Affect Theory Reader (pp. 1–25). London.


